

CHAPTER TWO

The Cover Letter

The Cover Letter is a professional business letter which serves as your introduction to a prospective employer. The purpose of the cover letter is to communicate to the employer in a personalized message your potential value to that organization. A good cover letter will attract the interest of the employer, relate your specific qualifications and skills to the position you seek, and motivate the employer to learn more about you by inviting you in for an interview. A letter of application is in response to an advertised opening, whereas a letter of inquiry presents a job seeker's interests and qualifications as they relate to the employer's needs and potential job openings.

Introduction: Attract positive attention with your opening sentence. Use a compliment if possible, indicating your knowledge of their company. State why you are writing and name the position or type of work for which you are applying. Where applicable, indicate how you became aware of the job vacancy and mention the mutual acquaintance or referring party by name.

Middle Paragraph(s): Sell yourself. You should state reasons for wanting to work for this particular organization. (Researching potential employers thoroughly is essential for writing this section.) Summarize what you have to offer by stating qualifications you know would interest this specific employer. Don't merely restate information already on your resume, but highlight or specify elements of your background matched to the job. Emphasize your interest and enthusiasm.

Closing: Close by informing the reader of your next action. You may request an interview appointment or tell the reader that you will contact them for an interview after they have had the opportunity to review your résumé. (If applying from a great distance, a request for a telephone interview or a referral to a local representative is appropriate.) Taking the initiative will be appreciated and makes a specific action from the reader unnecessary. Be sure to express appreciation for consideration given to your application.

RULES TO FOLLOW

- **Target your message.** A cover letter is the job searcher's opportunity to help the potential employer see that the applicant's skills and experience match what the employer seeks. This is more effective than a generic "all-purpose" cover letter.
- **Spotlight your accomplishments and measurable results.** Show how your credentials match the requirements of the job. Incorporate information that reflects your knowledge of the company, its industry and relevant issues. This is the perfect place to "editorialize" about the accomplishments cited in your résumé.
- **Focus on what you have to offer.** Be sure to emphasize the main point that you want the cover letter to convey. Too often candidates stress what they're looking for (salary, geography, advancement) and not how their skills, expertise, and past accomplishments can benefit the employer. It is important that you translate your past accomplishments to what you can provide for this employer.
- **Follow standard business protocol.** Write clearly and concisely, and check your letter for spelling and grammar. Choose white or off-white colored paper (preferably personalized letterhead stationery) that matches your résumé and envelope.
- **Send your letter to a specific individual.** It may take some resourcefulness on your part to identify the person who is likely to make employment decisions, and you may have to make a dozen phone calls to learn the contact name, correct spelling, and title. But it's important; a form letter will not stimulate readership and a favorable response.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- Cover letter is poorly organized, confusing, unclear and choppy.
- Cover letter focuses on what the candidate is looking for (i.e., salary, geographic preference, advancement, etc.) and not on how the candidate can benefit the employer.
- Cover letter states unrelated career goals.
- Cover letter includes information that calls attention to candidate's weaknesses. Avoid using statements such as 'Although I have no related experience,...'
- Cover letter is a general form letter sent to a large number of employers.
- Cover letter includes erroneous information about the organization, i.e., misquotes about recent events or information about wrong products. Be sure to verify the accuracy of any company information that you mention in your letter.
- Cover letter includes personal photographs or personal information such as age, weight, height, marital status, race or religion. Cover letter lists personal interests and hobbies. Include personal information only if it directly relates to the type of job you are seeking.

- Cover letter uses words which may indicate a lack of self-confidence, like believe, hope, feel, and should.

August 8, 2010

Mr. Dave Wilson
Director of Customer Service
ABC Printing Company
P.O Box 1234
Santa Barbara, CA 98488

Mr. Wilson,

If you are looking for a marketing services coordinator who is willing to work hard, is a team player, and who will flourish in a high-powered, high energy company, please consider me for that position. I became informed of your need for a Marketing Services Coordinator through your ad posted on Monster.com. Due to my educational and customer service experience, I feel I would be an excellent candidate for this position.

Having a major in Managerial and Organizational Communication, I have acquired the skills of teamwork, financial analysis, management and accounting. Having worked in various group settings, I have become skilled in research, data collection, writing formal business reports, public relations, and marketing plans. These skills would all be beneficial in such a position as a Marketing Services Coordinator.

Furthermore, customer service is one of the most important functions in a company. Ensuring good customer service means having the ability to communicate with customers and to coordinate the efforts of outside salespeople and printing-plant personnel to deliver what the customer wants. I have acquired this experience, having previously worked for both Nordstrom's and Kinko's, which allowed me to work and interact with a variety of people. I worked to not only provide customer satisfaction, but also to meet or exceed the goals of each store.

Due to my education and customer service experience, I believe you will find I am well qualified for this position. You can quickly evaluate my computer and verbal skills in an interview. You may reach me at 619-849-5555 or johnstanford@pointloma.edu.

Sincerely,

John Stanford