

## **Crafting a Cover Letter (or Letter of Intent)**

### *What is a cover letter?*

When applying for a job, applicants usually need to submit both a cover letter (also referred to as an application letter) and a résumé. Put simply, a cover letter is a persuasive letter in which you present your skills, abilities, knowledge, and experience. According to professional sources, effective cover letters will accomplish the following four objectives for your prospective employer:

- provide your personal introduction,
- explain what specific job interests you and why,
- convince the reader(s) that you are a viable candidate by highlighting specific qualifications, and
- provide the opportunity and contact information to request an interview.

### *What's the different between a cover letter and letter of intent?*

If you are applying to graduate or professional school, then you may be asked to write a letter of intent (also known as a statement of purpose or personal statement), which is a lot like a cover letter. There are some differences, though, as your audience's expectations and the rhetorical context differ. Some letters or statements require specific information (e.g., the applicant's intended area of study), while others are much less specific. The importance of the statement varies from school to school and field to field, so be sure to pay close attention to the application's instructions, including specific questions that must be answered and the length allowed for such statements. (For more information about this writing form, please see the University Writing Center's handout for personal statements.)

### *How do you format a cover letter?*

Your cover letter should include a proper heading before addressing your reader(s) and introducing yourself. The heading should include your full address and the date; you can also include your phone number and email address if desired.

You should then leave two lines blank. After this spacing, include the contact information of the person(s) who will be reading your cover letter, being as specific and respectful as possible. Include his/her name, title/position, and address before the letter's salutation. (For more clarity on formatting, please see the provided sample.)

## *How do you write an effective cover letter?*

**Opening:** Start your letter with an appropriate greeting, such as “Dear Ms. Judith Castro.” You should then open your letter by providing context, indicating how you learned of the opportunity and the specific and accurate title of the position that you are seeking. If you have been referred by an influential and/or recognizable individual, then include this information (e.g., “Mr. John Smith, Director of Operations, informed me of the opening...”). You then want to give your reader(s) a reason to keep reading your letter by grabbing his/her attention. Demonstrate your enthusiasm when explaining why you are interested in the job, and illustrate your initiative and knowledge of the organization by relating your interest to the company in a unique and interesting way.

**Body:** In this paragraph or two, use specific examples and language to demonstrate your qualifications for the job. It is vital that your letter is focused, so limit the content by focusing on one basic point clearly stated in the topic sentence. Do not, however, just tell readers that you are qualified—*show* them by citing explicit examples and details. You also do not want to simply repeat your résumé; instead, connect your skill or experience to the company, showing how you will make valuable contributions. (For examples of focused paragraphs, please see the provided sample.)

**Closing:** In the final paragraph, be confident and take initiative because a passive closing can lead to a passive reaction on the employer’s part. Request an interview and consider mentioning that you plan on following up with the company. Your initiative will portray your sincere interest in the position and employer. Be sure to let your reader(s) know how to reach you by including your phone number or email address. Finally, end with a statement of gratitude or kindness, even if only a “thank you.”

## *Tips for Writing Effective Cover Letters*

- Resist using gimmicks; impress with knowledge and professionalism instead.
- Address your letter to a specific person as opposed to a generic salutation (e.g., “To whom it may concern,”), using some research if necessary to find this information.
- Do not volunteer salary history or requirements unless specifically instructed to do so.
- Keep it short—no more than a page.
- Carefully proofread!

For more information or assistance, refer to *The Business Writer’s Handbook* (10<sup>th</sup> ed.) and/or *Business Communication Today* (11<sup>th</sup> ed.).

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Ms. Judith Castro, Director  
Human Resources  
Natural History Museum  
1201 S. Figueuroa St.  
Los Angeles, CA 90015

Dear Ms. Castro:

A graphic designer at Dyer/Khan, Jodi Hammel, has informed me that you are recruiting a graphic designer in your marketing department. Your position interests me greatly, as it offers me an opportunity to fulfill my career goals and to promote the work of an internationally respected institution. Having participated in substantial volunteer activities at a local public museum, I am aware of the importance of your work.

I possess strong, academic and practical skills in multimedia tools and graphic arts production, as indicated in my enclosed resume. Further, I have recent project management experience at Dyer/Khan, where I was responsible for the development of client brochures, newsletters, and posters. As project manager, I coordinated the project timelines, budgets, and production with clients, staff, and vendors.

My experience in the media and entertainment community will help me make use of state-of-the-art design expertise. I have worked with the leading motion picture, television, and music companies; this experience will assist me in developing exciting marketing tools that museum patrons will find useful and effective. For example, I helped design an upgrade of the CGI logo for Paramount Pictures and was formally commended by the Director of Marketing.

Enclosed is my resume for your review. I look forward to discussing my experience and this opportunity with you in person. Please contact me by phone or email if you have any further questions. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

*Johanna S. Goodman*  
Johanna S. Goodman

Enclosed: Resume

*\*for professional letter formatting rules, see Chapter 6 of Business Communication Today.*