



Cover Letter Refresher Course

By Peter Newfield, President of resume writing service Career Resumes

Your cover letter presents your intentions, qualifications and availability to a prospective employer in a succinct and appealing format. As your first chance to make a great impression, a personalized letter indicates you are serious about your job search. Your resume can give the nitty-gritty of dates, places of employment and education, but your cover letter must entice the reader to consider you amidst hundreds, or even thousands of candidates for any one job opening.

1. Do you really need a cover letter?

You bet! Just as you would never show up unannounced at a prospective employer's door, your resume should never just appear solo on a decision maker's desk. Your cover letter is your first opportunity to introduce yourself, present your qualifications and show the search committee you are a potential candidate for the advertised position.

2. Personalize it to the company

Anyone can reproduce a "canned" cover letter and hope for the best. Instead, take a few minutes to personalize your letter to show a company you are serious about working there. State the reason for your interest in the company. Show that you have done your homework by mentioning company specifics such as a department, a new project or a recent acquisition. Address the cover letter to a specific individual whenever possible.

3. Why are you sending your resume and cover letter?

Cover letters should be clear and to the point. Include the specific job title, two to three reasons why your experience makes a good fit and a brief outline of your career highlights.

4. Highlight your strengths

You may be a great person and never call in sick, but prospective employers really want to know why they should consider you for this position. Brag a little! Give a few facts, list relevant skills and state accomplishments on recent jobs that will be impressive.

Examples:

- Increased overseas sales by 93 percent.
- Negotiated new financial leases or loans.
- Implemented new training programs that reduced staff turnover by 15%.

5. State your intentions and qualifications right up front

Don't expect a senior personnel manager or recruiter to wade through a mishmash of information on your cover letter before understanding why you are sending your resume.

6. What makes you different?

Emphasize your skills, talents and experiences to show how you would be a valuable addition to the team. If you have relevant volunteer or professional experience, mention it briefly in your cover letter. For example, if you are an accountant who serves as volunteer treasurer for a nonprofit community health organization, include that information. Or if you are an international sales rep who has lived in Europe and Asia and speaks several languages, add that to your letter.

7. No negative information

Never include personality conflicts with previous employers, pending litigation suits or sarcastic remarks in your cover letter. If you are bad-mouthing your present place of employment, interviewers may fear a repeat performance if they hire you.

8. When should you include salary and/or relocation information?

The rule of thumb is to always include salary requirements and/or salary history in the cover letter if a prospective employer requests it. For example, you could write: My salary requirements are \$60,000-\$75,000 (negotiable). Or you might write: "My current salary is \$53,000 at XYZ Corporation." Eliminating this information from your cover letter may justify your resume getting tossed out. Never include salary and relocation information on your resume – only address this information in your cover letter.

9. Take action steps

Take a proactive approach in your cover letter. State the fact that you are available for a personal interview; give your home, work, email and/or cell phone numbers where you can be reached; note that you will follow up by phone (whenever possible) to provide any additional information required.

10. Be direct!

A professionally written cover letter and resume can open the door to your next position on the corporate ladder or to a new career in a different field. A clean, error-free presentation, combined with phrasing and solid facts, will encourage the reader to review the attached resume and call you in for an interview.

General Outline of a Cover Letter

Applicant's Address

Provide address only, not name.

Date of Letter

Mr./Ms./Dr. Firstname Lastname

Contact's Job Title

Employer's Name

Employer's Address

Employer's City, ST Zip

If possible, address it to a specific person by name.

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Lastname:

Opening Paragraph: State the reason for the letter, name the specific position or type of work for which you are applying, and indicate from which resource (placement center, news medium, friend, employment service) you learned of the opening.

Make the addressee want to read your resume. Be personable and be enthusiastic.

Middle Paragraph(s): Explain why you are interested in working for this employer and specify your reasons for desiring this type of work. If you have had relevant work experience or related education, be sure to point it out, but do not reiterate your entire resume. Emphasize skills or abilities you have that relate to the job for which you are applying. Be sure to do this in a confident manner and remember that the reader will view your letter of application as an example of your writing skills. If you are a recent graduate, explain how your academic background makes you a qualified candidate for the position. Refer the reader to the enclosed resume or application form, which summarizes your qualifications, training, and experiences, or whatever medium you may be using to present yourself.

Be brief but specific; your resume contains details.

Closing Paragraph: Indicate that you would like a personal interview and are flexible to the time and place. You may refer the reader to your enclosed resume (which gives a summary of your qualifications) or whatever media you are using to illustrate your training, interests and experience. Close your letter with a statement or question which will encourage a response (i.e., Ask if the company will be recruiting in your area, or if it desires additional information or references.)

Sincerely,

Always sign letters.

Your **typed** name

Enclosure

If a resume, etc., is enclosed note in letter.

Top and bottom margins should be equal. Right and left margins should be equal. All margins between one-half and one inch.

Sample Cover Letter

1225 Hampton Boulevard
Louisville, KY 40225

January 16, 2012

Ms. Dianne C. Strand
Manager of Human Resources
ABC Industries, Inc.
400 West Main Street
Louisville, KY 40202

Dear Ms. Strand:

I am writing to express my interest in the Systems Analyst position that is currently posted online at Bellarmine University. One of your colleagues, Mark Stone, encouraged me to apply after speaking with him at a recent career fair. I am genuinely interested in the position and in working for ABC Industries, which has an excellent reputation and comes highly recommended to me.

Eager to learn more about this opportunity, I am confident that my education, experience, and career goals are well suited to your job requirements. With a major in applied information technology, I have not only learned the technical skills needed for the job, but also how to apply those skills to real world problems. Throughout my four years of study, I have completed six major hands-on projects, participated in several realistic simulations and reviewed numerous case studies. In addition, I have excelled in courses related to programming, databases, web systems and networking, and developed a working knowledge of enterprise resource planning systems. All of these things have prepared me to meet or exceed the technical requirements for this position.

My recent full-time summer internship with XYZ Insurance exposed me to the current challenges and best practices in the area of information technology security. I had an opportunity to work, both in-person and virtually, with managers, systems analysts and users around the country. I have also worked for two years as a programmer and help desk consultant in my university's computer center, which has given me valuable exposure to troubleshooting, problem solving and customer service.

The enclosed resume provides more details about my qualifications and accomplishments. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to scheduling an interview to discuss this exciting position. I will contact you next week to confirm my interest and discuss appropriate next steps.

Sincerely,

Lisa Watson

Enclosure