



CAREER SERVICES

<http://www.vsu.edu/career-services/careers/resumes.php>

Cover Letters

Are Cover Letters Important?

Absolutely! They communicate a level of effort beyond simply submitting a pre-developed non-personalized resume.

Purpose: To get your enclosed resume read and to generate interviews. Not including a cover letter with your resume, even when you submitted it online, is passing up a key opportunity to sell your skills. A cover letter allows you to direct the reader's attention to aspects of your resume that are most relevant, demonstrate your knowledge of the company or organization you're writing to and explain any part of your work history that needs clarification.

The following guidelines can assist you in preparing a solid cover letter:

Follow a standard business letter format. Try to address the letter to a specific individual, even if it means making several calls to determine his or her name and title. And be sure to ask for the correct spelling. A prospective employer who sees his or her name spelled incorrectly may assume you are not detail-oriented.

Use the person's surname (last) preceded by Mr. or Ms. If you are responding to a classified ad with a box number, or if you're unable to obtain the spelling of the hiring manager's name, use a greeting such as, "Dear Human Resources Director."

Anatomy of a Cover Letter. Four short paragraphs on one page is the ideal length for a cover letter. A longer letter is unlikely to be read. **Paper size:** Use standard 8 ½ inch by 11 inch paper for your cover letter. **Paper color:** Like your resume, white, ivory, or cream-colored are the only acceptable paper colors for a cover letter. Remember, your resume and cover letter should be on matching paper. **Paper quality:** As with resumes, standard, inexpensive office paper (twenty-pound bond) is generally acceptable. Executive and top-level positions may require more expensive stationery papers, such as ivory laid. Good quality paper should be between 16 and 25 lbs. in weight. **Typing and printing:** Use a word processing program on a computer and a letter-quality printer. Handwritten letters are **not** acceptable. **The envelope:** Your cover letter should always be mailed in a standard, business-size envelope (8 ½ inch x 11 inch). Always type your envelopes. Also, address your envelope by full name and title, specifically to the contact person you identified in your cover letter.

Writing the opening. The opening sentence of a cover letter should announce its purpose (even though the purpose may seem obvious) and give the reader a compelling reason to read on. If someone mentioned the job opening to you, be sure to use his or her name in the introduction:

"I am writing to you at the suggestion of Mr. John Doe, who told me you may be looking for an office manager." If you're responding to an advertisement for a job, say so in your letter; "I am applying for the

marketing manager position advertised in the Daily News and would like to tell you about my qualifications.”

Demonstrate your knowledge of the company/organization. Work a fact or observation about the company that isn’t common knowledge into your opening paragraph. Such a statement tells the reader you’ve done your homework. “I have been following with great interest the success of your company in developing and marketing of a line of satin skirts. That interest has promoted me to send you this letter, along with my resume.” You could also say, “I am writing because I was taken with your recent ad in the San Francisco Chronological. In light of the work your company is now beginning to do in gene splicing, I thought my previous research fellowship in this area would make me a valuable candidate for this position.”

Explain you current situation. Are you finishing school or in a full-time job? Can you begin work immediately or are you available upon completion of an internship? Clarify these points in your cover letter.

Explain why this job interests you. Let potential employers know what you have to offer. Do you have any special abilities or knowledge that you could build upon if hired? A part-time job in college may have been in the same industry as the firm you’re applying with now. Or you may have experience with a specific software application that will be used extensively in the position.

On a similar note, be sure to research prospective employers and demonstrate that knowledge in your cover letter. Not only does this show that you have a genuine interest in the job, but it also indicates that you have initiative—a quality that is highly sought after in entry-level candidates.

Briefly elaborate on one or two key points to draw attention to your resume. Give details about the most relevant parts of your work history for this particular position. For example, “I served two terms as president of ABC University’s student golf club, where my responsibilities ranged from overhauling the organization’s fee structure to representing our members in key meetings with faculty and other university leadership.”

Don’t rehash your resume. The cover letter should generate interest in the resume, but not reiterate the same points.

Have someone else review your cover letter. While you may have used spelling and grammar checkers on your computer, thoroughly proofread for any typos, poor grammar or spelling mistakes. Ask your career counselor, a friend or family member to review it as well. Remember, potential employers take cover letters seriously, so be sure that you do, too.

Closing the letter. End the letter with sincerely or sincerely yours. Don’t forget to sign your name (**use an ink pen**).

How about Electronic Cover Letters? You still need a cover letter if you apply for a job via the Internet. Online letters do not need to be as lengthy as traditional ones, but the elements should remain the same. Use professional salutations such as “Mr.” and “Ms.”; and always include your full name, telephone number and mailing address.

Appearances aside, what really matters in a cover letter is what it says – and that it generates enough interest to draw people to your resume. Use the guidelines above to make sure what you state in your letter delivers exactly the message you want to convey.