

Cover Letters and Business Correspondence

Contents:

- First Impressions: The Importance of the Cover Letter
- The Purposes of the Cover Letter
- Basic Guidelines for Writing Your Cover Letter
- The Elements of the Cover Letter
- Individualizing Your Cover Letter
- Three Types of Cover Letters
- Other Types of Employment Letters
- Self-Descriptive Words
- Sample Letters

*Compliments of
The Weston Career Resources Center*

First Impressions: The Importance of the Cover Letter

The cover letter you send with your résumé initiates contact with the person who holds the power to hire you. The hiring manager who receives hundreds of letters and résumés often must make snap decisions based on an instant's evaluation: Does this applicant potentially have the background we're looking for? As your opening communication, your cover letter creates the first impression about who you are. A vague and ineffective letter conveys a negative impression—and stacks the deck against you. The letter that communicates clearly and well makes a positive impression—and works in your favor to get you where you want to go. As you seek to market yourself, your ability to articulate your value to the employer's organization may spell the difference between a door slammed shut—or an interview that potentially launches a satisfying career.

The cover letter, then, may be one of the most important letters you ever write. Think of the total income you will receive, if you're hired, over the course of your employment with this organization. Isn't it worth taking time to craft the best letter you can, if it stands a chance of increasing your prospects of landing the position? Many people invest substantial time in developing their résumés, but skimp on the cover letter. Don't be eliminated from consideration by a hastily prepared letter, poor letter design, typographical and grammatical errors, and misspelled words that make you look sloppy—or a letter that fails to communicate your value from the employer's perspective.

Sending a Résumé without a Cover Letter: A Shot in the Dark

A résumé without a cover letter fires a shot in the dark. Without a cover letter, you appear to be sending résumés randomly and mechanically. Boilerplate, broadcasted form letters create much the same impression: Is a mass mailing likely to communicate your *particular* interest in that specific employer's organization? Sending a résumé without a cover letter tells the employer that you are unaware of accepted business etiquette. Further, doing so is a missed opportunity to convey important information that doesn't fit easily into the résumé: It's your chance to let the employer know what position you are seeking and why you're specifically interested in working for them.

The Purposes of the Cover Letter

Before you sit down to begin working on your cover letter, it's important that you understand its functions. A well-written cover letter achieves several purposes usually not accomplished by the résumé alone. Keeping the following points in mind will help you craft the most effective letter. The cover letter:

- *Introduces you and your credentials to the prospective employer*
- *Articulates reasons for your interest in the company and the position*
- *Lets the employer know exactly which position you are interested in*
- *Functions as a sales letter that tells why you are particularly qualified for that specific job*
- *Establishes a more personal connection with a prospective employer in a way that the résumé cannot*
- *Provides a glimpse of your unique personality and other information that makes you stand out from other candidates*
- *Stimulates interest in meeting you for a personal interview*

Basic Guidelines For Writing Your Cover Letter

- Follow accepted business correspondence format (see examples we've included).
- Format your letter on one page, typed, and single-spaced. Your letter should be an original—not a copy—printed on the same paper as your résumé. Personalized letterhead and good quality bond paper make a good impression.
- Be sure there are no spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors. Proofread your letter several times and, if possible, have someone else proofread it before you put it in the mail.
- Address the letter to a specific person, rather than to the attention of the personnel or human resources department. Double-check the spelling of the person's name and the name of the company. Include a job title, and be sure that it, too, is correct. You may have to do some research to get this information correct, but it is well worth the effort to do so.
- If you cannot address your letter to a specific person—for example, in response to a blind ad in the newspaper—omit the salutation. Instead, use, “Re: Market Analyst Position,” “Subject: Event Planning Coordinator Position,” or, “Attention: District Sales Manager.” Avoid using, “To Whom It May Concern,” or “Dear Sir or Madam.”
- Don't guess at gender. If you're not sure, use the person's entire name, for example, “Dear Kelly Jones” instead of Mr. or Ms.
- Be original. Read sample letters but do not simply copy someone else's letter.
- Create a natural, conversational tone. Avoid slang, wordiness, and stilted or over-used language. Be brief, concise, and specific.
- Compose the introductory paragraph in a way that compels the reader to continue reading. Heighten interest by indicating any personal knowledge or contact you may have had with the organization. Compliment the organization; demonstrate that you know something about the company and the industry. If at all possible, tailor the opening paragraph to the specific reader.
- Communicate the specific position in which you are interested in the opening paragraph.
- Emphasize what *you* can contribute to the organization, not what they can do for you. Refrain from discussing why you need the job or why this will be a good opportunity for you. The more carefully you have researched the organization—and the issues and challenges that organization faces—the better job you can do of presenting yourself as someone who can solve problems and add value to the organization.

- Keep paragraphs short. Vary sentence structure and length but avoid long, complex, rambling sentences.
- Express enthusiasm and self-confidence.
- Don't request that an employer respond to you at their earliest convenience.
- Ads may ask for salary expectation or history. While ignoring the request may potentially eliminate you, it is probably worth the risk. Instead of a specific figure, you may respond with a broad range, indicate that compensation is negotiable, or state that you expect to be able to fit into the company's salary structure.
- End on a positive note, with a statement about what comes next. Let them know you'll follow up (usually within three days of the letter's arrival). When you state that you plan to follow up, be sure to do so.
- If you are emailing your cover letter and résumé, the cover letter should be the body of the email and the résumé should be included as an attachment.
- Be patient, polite, and persistent in your follow-up.

The Elements of the Cover Letter

In writing your cover letter, know your audience and structure your letter accordingly. Avoid creative, attention-grabbing gimmicks. Adopt a conservative format and focus on content that communicates your qualifications and interest.

The letter should be centered on the page. Block style, as suggested in the table below (the most formal style) or other standard business styles may be used. The letter and résumé should be mailed in a No. 10 business envelope with return address typed in the upper left corner, recipient's address typed in the center of the envelope. Consider using a larger envelope that allows you to mail the résumé without being folded.

The following outline provides the essential elements of a cover letter:

The Elements of the Cover Letter	
Return Address:	Your Address City, State, Zip Date of Letter
Inside Address:	Contact's Name Contact's Title Company Name Street Address City, State, Zip
Salutation:	Dear Mr./Ms. (Contact's Last Name):
Opening Paragraph:	Capture attention; establish match: Statement of where you are now, what job you are interested in and why you are interested in this particular company.
Body Paragraph:	Explain qualifications; create interest; encourage attentive review: An overview of your competencies (knowledge, attitudes, skills, habits) and unique strengths, stated in terms of the unique value you bring to teams and organizations. Discuss the positive results you achieved in previous or educational contexts.
Closing Paragraph:	Ask for the interview; outline action: Thank the reader of your letter, state how you may be contacted, and (if appropriate) note when you will follow up with a phone call.
Closing:	Sincerely, (3-4 lines for signature) Type Full Name
Enclosure(s):	Résumé (always); other supporting documents (occasionally)

Individualizing Your Cover Letter

Cover letters should not be mass-produced. You can, however, develop a core document that showcases your strengths, abilities, competencies, and market value. Beyond that, each letter should be personalized. Each new letter should contain at least one paragraph that specifically communicates your interest in the company, knowledge of the company's needs, and how you can meet those needs. Make adjustments in your sales pitch as necessary to align your qualifications and interests with the employer's specifications.

Three Types of Cover Letters

Solicited or Invited Letters

This would include cover letters responding to classified ads in newspapers, journals, and online postings. This would also include letters in response to jobs posted by employers in the Weston Career Resources Center's job postings and by companies in eRecruiting interviewing on campus that pre-select students they want to interview. Solicited or invited letters should always be tailored to the specific requirements of the job for which you are applying.

Unsolicited/Targeted Letters

This is a broader marketing approach designed to tap the hidden job market. This strategy requires research to develop targeted recipients. Letters are sent to contacts at your targeted list of companies from WCRC and WU contacts, commercial databases, books, directories, newspaper and trade journals, and company literature, etc.

Referral Letters

This approach uses names of people you know or names of people you've met or obtained through networking. If your contact is someone the employer knows, mention the name of the contact to get the employer's attention. Always—whether the contact is a close friend or a distant connection—be sure to get the person's permission for you to use his or her name.

Other Types of Employment Letters

Thank You Letters

A thank you letter should be sent soon after every interview as a professional courtesy. It should express your appreciation for the employer's time and reaffirm your interest in the position. Your thank you letter can also be used to clarify information discussed in the interview, or add something you didn't have a chance to mention. Use the thank you letter as an opportunity to confirm your understanding of the next step in the hiring process. If appropriate, include your expense statement or other details of your visit. Some companies are accustomed to receiving thank you messages via email. Consider emailing your thank you if that is the company's preferred method of communication. When doing so, however, avoid the common tendency to be informal in email correspondence; compose your thank you email with the same standards of quality, formality, and tone that you would use in a regular letter.

Requesting Invitation to Interview Letters

Recommended for companies interviewing on campus that will be selecting candidates by reviewing résumés.

Accepting Invitation Letters

When writing a letter to accept an invitation for an interview, express appreciation for the opportunity to visit their facilities. Reiterate your enthusiasm. If necessary, advise of or confirm any arrangements (travel plans, accommodations, timeline, etc.). If arrangements were made by the company and communicated via telephone, this will be unnecessary.

Staying in Touch Letters

This type of letter may be appropriate when you have interviewed with a company, you've been told you're still being considered, but hiring decisions have not yet been made. A staying-in-touch letter could also be appropriate if you've been turned down—if the company is still of strong interest to you. Such a letter could help to keep you on the list of possible candidates if offers are declined or other opportunities arise. Send stay-in-touch letters to companies you've contacted that you are strongly interested in, but which initially had nothing available that matched your qualifications.

Send an updated résumé, an article or news item of mutual interest, mention some significant achievement or accomplishment that enhances your compatibility with their organizational environment, or simply communicate your continuing interest in working for them.

Acknowledging Offer Letters

Acknowledge receipt of a written or verbal offer. Communicate your understanding of the details of the offer (*i.e.*, job responsibilities, salary, start location, terms, etc.). Indicate whether or not the acceptance date is reasonable or if an extension is required.

Declining Offer or Invitation

Tactfully but clearly decline the offer. Express your appreciation for the company's interest. Demonstrate your knowledge of business etiquette; leave the employer with a positive impression of you. The business world is smaller than you might think. You never know when your paths might cross again in another context. If you like, you can discuss your reasons for declining the offer, but this is optional.

Further resources about how to write cover letters, including sample letters, are available in the Career Resources Library.

Self-Descriptive Words

Identify the words in the following list that best describe your personality; these may be words you will want to use in your cover letter.

Active	Independent
Adaptable	Logical
Aggressive	Loyal
Alert	Mature
Ambitious	Methodical
Analytical	Objective
Attentive	Optimistic
Broad-minded	Perceptive
Conscientious	Personable
Constructive	Pleasant
Creative	Positive
Dependable	Practical
Determined	Productive
Diplomatic	Realistic
Disciplined	Resourceful
Discrete	Respective
Economical	Self-Reliant
Efficient	Sense of Humor
Energetic	Sincere
Enterprising	Sophisticated
Enthusiastic	Systematic
Extroverted	Tactful
Fair	Talented
Forceful	Traveler
Imaginative	

Courtesy of *Career Planning Today* by C. Randall Powell, p. 136.

Sample Letters

On the following pages we have included several cover letters to help you get started in writing your letter. Please adhere to the Olin Honor Code at all times when using this section. These are merely examples and should not be plagiarized. Professors and recruiters are familiar with these examples and will be able to recognize when any material from these letters has been used.

Custom Cover Letter # 1

(Block Style)

My Home Address
City, State, Zip
Date

Mr. Brian R. Enos
Manager of College Recruitment
Standard Oil Company of Ohio
1422 Midland Building
Cleveland, Ohio 44115

Dear Mr. Enos:

As a May 20XX MBA candidate, I have been actively researching career paths that offer substantial growth opportunities in industries with significant impact. In my opinion, Standard Oil of Ohio is unsurpassed in meeting these objectives. As a native Clevelander, I have followed your development from a strong regional marketer and refiner to a fully domestic oil and energy corporation. The financial risks assumed with the British Petroleum merger and the subsequent capital outlays for the development of North Slope production were great. The rapid growth of income and the necessity of reinvestment (at profitable returns on investment) are critical to the future success of the corporation. It is in this area that I can make a substantial contribution. Specifically, I am interested in being a member of your Financial Planning and Analysis Department.

I offer the following qualifications:

- Developed analytical skills and working knowledge of three computer languages.
- Three years of working experience (one and one-half years full time) with a contractor at production fields, pipelines, refineries, and gasoline service stations.
- A strong desire to distinguish myself through hard work and creativity.

I am confident that my strong background and knowledge of the oil industry will enable me to be a productive member of your Financial Planning and Analysis Department. The enclosed résumé summarizes my accomplishments.

I have planned a trip to Cleveland during the week of March 10th, and hope to arrange an interview with you sometime during that period. I will call you within a week to schedule an appointment.

Sincerely,

My Name
Enclosure: Résumé

Custom Cover Letter # 2

(Block Style)

My Home Address
City, State, Zip
Date

Ms. Emily Standard
Vice President
Consolidated Bank
123 Main Street
St. Louis, MO 63130

Dear Ms. Standard:

Consolidated Bank has prepared strategically for the future by integrating the best of commercial and investment banking. By offering your clients a depth and breadth of financial opportunities, you are poised for even further success at the shareholder, customer, and corporate levels. Like your organization, I am carefully considering the best strategies and tactics to make tomorrow a successful reality. I am a senior in the Olin School of Business, and I am interested in the position of analyst.

Previously, I was an intern with Citibank, where I practiced a wide array of financial and economic disciplines. I successfully contributed to relationships with clients, suppliers, and colleagues, consistently meeting both timelines and budgets while exceeding client expectations. For this work, I earned two *Excellence in Customer Service Awards* during my tenure.

I share with Consolidated (which has won numerous awards for its dedication to minorities, women, the arts, and quality education for children) a firm commitment to bettering the communities in which we reside. I serve as a volunteer with Habitat for Humanity, and I am an active member with the March of Dimes. I would highly value working for your organization.

Consolidated Bank has a proven track record of success, and your decisions in selecting quality people have much to do with this outcome. I would be delighted to contribute my talents and experience to the future of your company, and so I enclose my résumé for your consideration. You may contact me at 314.000.000 or via email at myname@_____. I will contact you within the next two weeks, and I thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

My Name

Enclosure: Résumé

Custom Cover Letter # 3

(Block Style)

My Home Address
City, State, Zip
Date

Dr. Erwin Smythe
Vice President
Consolidated Utilities
123 Main Street
St. Louis, MO 63130

Dear Dr. Smythe:

Because Consolidated Utilities has the unique privilege of being run by some of the most successful business leaders of our time, you know firsthand how important it is to have a strong team of leaders at all levels. Performance appraisal systems, mentoring, and training all form a strong leadership pipeline—essential to meeting your company’s goals. As a first-year MBA at the Olin School of Business at Washington University, I possess the traits that can strengthen that pipeline as you seek a Leadership Development Program Summer Intern.

As an employee of Statewide Utilities, I achieved results on numerous initiatives: implementing 360-degree feedback for all managers, creating a leadership development model that outlined desired behaviors, and designing succession/progression plans. The skills I gained through these accomplishments would be useful in your Leadership Development Program and are further outlined in the attached résumé.

To give you a better sense of my professional performance, please consider these major strengths in my last performance review:

- High orientation to customers and team relations
- Proactive sense of urgency
- Effective problem solving

I would value the opportunity to help Consolidated Utilities pursue its commitment to quality leadership, and I welcome the opportunity to speak with you. I may be reached at 314.000.000 or via email at myname@_____. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

My Name

Enclosure: Résumé

Custom Cover Letter # 4

(Block Style)

My Home Address
City, State, Zip
Date

Mr. Samuel Shue, Vice President
Human Resources
Consolidated Express
123 Main Street
St. Louis, MO 63130

Dear Mr. Shue:

As Amit Davis suggested, I am forwarding you my résumé to be considered for the strategic planning internship. As you know from our conversation, I am a first-year MBA student at the Olin School of Business at Washington University in St. Louis. What attracts me most to Consolidated Express is your commitment to making globalization a reality, not simply a word of the moment. Because I have traveled and worked abroad to prepare for a career in international business, I believe your corporate culture would be especially beneficial and practical; and in turn, I believe I would complement it.

My professional and personal experiences demonstrate my strong sense of innovation and motivation. As the co-founder of KSP's online marketing division, I was responsible for daily operating decisions for the division, for strategic planning, and for creating service enhancements that kept us ahead of the competition. One highly successful proposal I implemented was a cross-functional initiative on all company accounts. Through a team-based approach and open lines of communication, we offered our clientele an expansive service portfolio and a seamless work environment.

Through my travels and international work experience, I have gained powerful insight into what lies beyond our traditional ways of life. From the peaks of the Patagonian Andes to the tea fields of Bangladesh to the financial markets on Wall Street, I have followed my passion to experience the unknown. With this unique and varied background, I am confident that I will make a positive contribution to your company's global ventures. I trust that my credentials will lead us to a fruitful interview session. Please call me at 314.000.0000 or e-mail me at myname@__. I will contact you within the next few days in the hopes of exploring opportunities. Thank you.

Sincerely,

My Name
Enclosure: Résumé

Thank You for Interview

(Block Style)

My Home Address
City, State, Zip
Date

Mr. Thomas F. Harris
Director, Personnel Department
Coastal Products Incorporated
7229 Lakewood Drive
Denver, CO 82170

Dear Mr. Harris:

Thank you again for the opportunity to interview for the marketing position with your firm. I appreciated your hospitality and enjoyed meeting you and your associates.

The interview convinced me of how compatible my background, interests, and skills are with the goals of Coastal Products Incorporated. My prior marketing experience with the Department of Commerce has prepared me to take a major role in developing both domestic and international marketing strategies. I am confident my work could result in increased market shares for Coastal Products Incorporated in the rapidly expanding Pacific Rim market.

For more information on the new product promotion program we discussed, call David Garrett at the Department of Commerce; his number is 202-000-0000. I talked to Dave this morning and mentioned your interest in this program.

I look forward to meeting you and your staff again.

Sincerely,

My Name

Visit Follow-Up Letter

(Block Style)

My Home Address
City, State, Zip
Date

Mr. Bert C. Mulling
President, Operations
Delcon Industries
1236 Shearn Street
St. Louis, MO 63110

Dear Mr. Mulling:

The opportunity to visit with you and to become acquainted with the training and development program at Delcon Industries has strengthened my interest in the position now available. I would be eager to develop the proposal we discussed for a quick intervention system, and I feel that my background and experience would enable me to make a strong contribution to this effort.

Thank you for your time and for the consideration shown to me during my visit. I especially appreciated the extensive tour of your facilities and the chance to meet the managers of various divisions.

As you mentioned at the conclusion of our interview, I will anticipate hearing from you regarding your decision within the next two weeks.

Sincerely,

My Name

Acknowledging Offer

(Block Style)

My Home Address
City, State, Zip
Date

Mr. Paul Torrance
Kahn Enterprises
1931 W. Willow Drive
Chicago, IL 00178

Dear Mr. Torrance:

Thank you for your telephone call offering me a position as a [title] in your [name] department at an annual salary of [\$xx,xxx]. After visiting your office, I knew I would like to begin my career with an organization such as yours. I was impressed with all of the people I met and felt very comfortable with the environment.

You have requested a decision within three weeks, and I will honor your deadline. Though this is a very attractive offer and a good match for the type of challenge and opportunity I am seeking, I want to give careful consideration to this very important decision about my career.

I appreciate the confidence in me that your offer expresses. I will be in touch with you soon, but please let me know if there is any additional information you need in the interim.

Very truly yours,

My Name

Letter of Acceptance

(Block Style)

My Home Address
City, State, Zip
Date

Ms. Judith Greene
Vice President
West Coast Airlines
2400 Van Ness
San Francisco, CA 94829

Dear Ms. Greene:

I am pleased to accept your offer, and I am looking forward to joining you and your staff next month.

The Financial Analyst position is ideally suited to my background and interests. I assure you I will put forth my best effort in making this an effective position within your company.

I understand I will begin work on July 1 in the San Francisco office. By way of confirmation, I agreed to a starting salary of (state offer, terms, etc.). If, in the meantime, I need to complete any paperwork or take care of any other matters, please contact me at 415-000-0000.

I enjoyed meeting with you and your staff and appreciate the professional manner in which the hiring was conducted.

Sincerely,

My Name

Enclosures

Letter of Rejection

(Block Style)

My Home Address

City, State, Zip

Date

Inside Address

(If possible, use individual's name)

Dear -----:

After considerable thought, I have decided not to accept your offer of employment as outlined in your (date) letter. This has been a very difficult decision for me. However, I feel I have made the correct one for this point in my career.

Thank you for your time, effort, and consideration. Your confidence in me is sincerely appreciated.

Sincerely,

My Name

Staying in Touch Letter

(Block Style)

My Home Address
City, State, Zip
Date

Mr. William J. Smith
Director of Finance
Superior Bank Corporation
9200 Merchant Street
Chicago, IL 00178

Dear Mr. Smith:

Though your recent letter informing me that you have hired someone else for the Financial Analyst position was not welcome news, I do want to thank you once again for your time and consideration during the interviewing process.

My interest in your bank remains strong. The conversations I had with you and other employees at Superior Bank Corporation convinced me it's the kind of environment in which I would thrive. Based on my skills and quantitative abilities, as well as the positive feedback I received while visiting your offices, I am confident we're a good fit. When new opportunities occur in your organization I hope you will dust off my résumé and consider me a strong candidate.

Graduation is still a few months ahead, and I will continue to actively pursue challenging and interesting opportunities. I promise not to be a nuisance, but I will touch base with you occasionally to make sure I don't miss an opportunity to once again be considered for a position in your firm.

Sincerely,

My Name

Extending Response Deadline

(Block Style)

My Home Address
City, State, Zip
Date

Ms. Michelle Fisher
Marketing Director
Fanfare Publishing Company
1426 Corporation Square
St. Louis, MO 63110

Dear Ms. Fisher:

I think you know how serious I am about the [title] position you have offered and how pleased I am to have received the offer. I do have some other personal commitments that I am rapidly trying to bring to closure. These obligations will influence my decision, and I find that I will need some additional time to respond to your offer.

The opportunity with Fanfare Publishing is outstanding. I am still active in the interviewing process that I began several months ago, however, and want to see those opportunities through to conclusion to ensure making the best decision for me and for my future employer.

I anticipate being able to give you a firm answer by April 20xx. Please let me know if this is acceptable. Again, I am delighted with the offer and appreciate your understanding.

Sincerely,

My Name