



Cornell College

CAREER ENGAGEMENT CENTER

COVER LETTER BASICS

Cover Letters

The purpose of a cover letter is to grab the reader's attention and to generate interest in you as an applicant. It should point the reader to your resume. A resume briefly tells a potential employer what you have done in the past, and cites each experience or activity individually. A cover letter, however, can elaborate on those experiences and give the employer a better idea of why you pursued them. You can also relate how your experiences compliment one another. Some cover letters are used to apply for a particular position, while others are sent as letters of inquiry. Other correspondence that you might send to employers include thank you letters, withdrawal letters and an acceptance letter. Remember, every letter you send offers an employer a sample of your writing and organizational skills. Spend adequate time on them and critique them carefully.

Before You Start Writing Your Cover Letter

A little analysis of yourself and your purpose for writing is important before you attempt to write a cover letter.

What do you hope to accomplish by writing? This will help you determine what type of letter to send and how to write it.

Do you know what this particular organization needs? Doing research about the specific organization or the industry will help you to determine what their current hiring needs might be.

What do you have to offer the employer? Your education, relevant skills and experience should be determined and communicated to the employer in your letter.

Types of Correspondence

The Letter of Inquiry is sent to an employer to inquire as to the possibility of available positions, or to ask for information about an organization.

The Letter of Application (Cover Letter) Sent to apply for an open position.

The Letter of Transmittal accompanies any materials being sent to an employer such as transcripts, an application form or references.

The Thank You Letter is sent to express thanks to an employer, usually following an interview, or to others who assist you in your job search such as references or people in your network.

The Withdrawal Letter is sent to an employer when you no longer want to be considered for a position for which you have already been interviewed.

The Acceptance Letter is sent to accept and acknowledge an offer of employment, this letter should restate the terms of employment such as starting date and salary offer.

Tips for Letter Writing

- Type and address each letter individually. Don't use fill-in-the-blank letters or mail merge.
- Address each employer by his/her name and title. Take the time to find out the name of the person inside the organization with hiring authority and address your letter to him/her. Dear Sir/Madam letters are not appropriate.

- Open your letter with a statement that will be of interest to the reader. Demonstrating your knowledge of the organization or mentioning the name of the person who referred you to that organization are good openers.
- Focus the letter on the needs of the employer. What can you do for them? How can you make a positive contribution? What specific skills and experiences do you bring?
- Avoid simply restating information found on your resume. The cover letter is your chance to elaborate. If you have qualifications not included in your resume, this is the time to discuss them.
- Be proactive – state that you will be in contact with the employer to provide additional information or to schedule a meeting
- Keep your letter to one page. Be concise.
- Sign your letters as neatly as possible.
- After proofreading your letter carefully, give to someone else to read. If they are unclear about what you are trying to accomplish, an employer most likely will be too.
- Use high quality paper that matches your resume.
- Avoid starting every sentence with the word “I”.