

# WRITING A COVER LETTER

La Salle University Writing Handouts



Employers view cover letters differently – some say they are the most important part of your application, while others barely look at them. Regardless, don't neglect your cover letter, as it may make or break your chances at the job.

## BEFORE YOU WRITE YOUR COVER LETTER

- Research the employer. Find out what they do and what they're looking for in employees. If you're replying to an advertisement, use the requirements it lists as a guide.
- Figure out how you fit the company's needs – this will comprise the bulk of your cover letter. Look at how your education, work, and volunteer experience have prepared you for the position and make you a unique and qualified candidate.
- Find out the name and title of the person in charge of hiring at the company, and address your cover letter to that person. Often all this requires is a short phone call to the company. If at all possible, avoid "To Whom It May Concern."

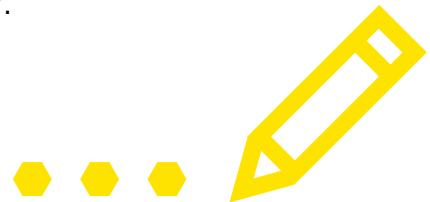
## WHEN YOU WRITE YOUR COVE LETTER:

### DO:

- Keep it one page maximum.
- Try to balance your tone: be professional yet natural.
- Remember that employers are looking for knowledge and enthusiasm.
- Write the cover letter one day, then look at it again the next day with fresh eyes.
- Have someone else look over your cover letter before you send it.
- Check carefully for grammar and punctuation errors. Spell check WILL NOT catch everything, and these mistakes look extremely unprofessional.
- Use block style: line breaks between paragraphs and no indentions.
- Remember that cover letters are a chance to show yourself to an employer in a way the résumé cannot capture. Use this opportunity wisely!
- See a writing tutor for help with your cover letter.

### DON'T:

- Be self-deprecating or negative about your abilities. Instead, be confident and self-assured.
- Talk about your salary requirements. That comes later, in the interview(s).
- Use idioms, casual speech, or passive voice.
- Use grandiose or pretentious language. Do keep it simple yet elegant.
- Simply rehash your résumé. Instead, highlight and expand on certain aspects of your résumé that you want the employer to notice; these will show how you will benefit the company.
- Use generic cover letters. An employer can spot them a mile away and will throw them in the trash. You must write a new cover letter for each position; tailor it specifically to your potential employer.



# FORMATTING

[Upper left-hand corner]

Your Return Address

City, State, Zip

Your E-mail Address [three returns]

Date [three returns]

Mr./Ms./Dr./etc. Employer's Name

Employer's Title

Company Name

Address

City, State, Zip [two returns]

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms./Dr./etc. Employer's Name: [two returns]

First paragraph:

- Get the employer's attention. Tell what position you're applying for and how you learned about it. If appropriate, mention the name of the person who referred you.

Middle section:

- This section can be multiple paragraphs.
- Show that you understand the company and its needs.
- Using pertinent specifics from your experience, show how you suit the position and the company's needs.
- Make use of keywords. The advertisement is a good place to look for keywords.
- Focus on how your unique qualifications will help the company, not how the company will help you.

Last paragraph:

- Request an interview and tell when and how you will follow-up your application. Indicate how you can be reached.
- Thank the person for considering you, looking at your application, etc.

Sincerely, [four returns]

[Signature]

Your name

## **Further Resources:**

- *The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Perfect Cover Letter* by Susan Ireland
- *Cover Letters that Knock 'Em Dead* by Martin Yate