

THE COVER LETTER

Each time you submit your résumé to an employer, you should enclose a cover letter. The cover letter serves several important functions:

- Explains why you are submitting the résumé.
- Introduces you to the employer.
- Serves as a vehicle for you to “sell yourself” more effectively to the employer and is the key to creating interest in your candidacy.

The cover letter gives you the opportunity to draw an employer’s attention to the skills and experience outlined in your résumé. You can also expand upon information which particularly matches the position for which you wish to be considered. The cover letter can highlight special achievements which might otherwise go overlooked.

In summarizing your qualifications, highlight your most appropriate skills or background in relation to a particular position without simply reiterating the information on your résumé. Refer the reader to your enclosed résumé for further details of your past accomplishments.

There are two types of cover letters:

1. The “**letter of inquiry**” is written when you are asking an employer for information about possible job openings in a particular area. If you have previously obtained information about the organization, be sure to mention this in your letter as it indicates you are sincerely interested and have done your research.
2. The “**letter of application**” is written when you are applying for a specific opening. It provides the opportunity for you to call attention to your education or experience which is appropriate to the open position.

Remember: Similar to the Career Objective on your résumé, the focus of the cover letter is what you can do for the organization—not what you want from the organization!

You must personalize your cover letter by **preparing each letter individually** and addressing it to an **individual** rather than a title or department. There are many ways to find contact names and information. The directories in the Career Resource Center, employer literature, and personal inquiry to the organization are several ways of obtaining contact names. CareerSearch, the net-based employer research system, is another avenue for researching organizations and obtaining contact information. VAULT Online Career Library includes information and contact data about organizations. CareerSearch and VAULT are both accessible through the Career Services’ web site.

As with the résumé, use a **letter quality printer**. Duplicated or obvious form letters are inappropriate and unprofessional. The cover letter should be **no more than one page long** and should be produced on the same paper as your résumé and reference sheet.

The following checklist may be helpful in avoiding some of the mistakes people make in preparing their cover letters.

COVER LETTER CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to evaluate your cover letter and avoid common mistakes.

- _____ Is it addressed to a particular person (unless it is a response to a blind ad)? Do not use the person's first name in the salutation (ex. Write "Dear Mr. Robinson:" rather than "Dear David Robinson:").
- _____ Is the salutation followed by a colon rather than a comma?
- _____ Have you told the employer exactly what position you are applying for and how you found out about it?
- _____ Have you stated why you are interested in the position and the organization?
- _____ Have you told the employer what you can do for the organization rather than what it can do for you?
- _____ Did you use specific examples to sell your skills?
- _____ Have you avoided rewriting your résumé in your cover letter?
- _____ Is the sentence structure varied? Have you limited the use of the words "I" and "My" at the beginning of each sentence? Do too many sentences begin with prepositional phrases?
- _____ Did you express appreciation for the employer considering your application?
- _____ Is it an original letter rather than an obviously mass-produced copy?
- _____ Is it neat and attractive?
- _____ Is the letter centered on the page with equal top and bottom margins?
- _____ Is every word spelled correctly? Grammar, punctuation, and capitalization correct? Is it free of typographical errors?
- _____ Does the whole letter fit on one page?
- _____ Have you signed your name in black or blue ink?
- _____ Is it printed on high-quality paper that matches your résumé? Is it printed on a high-quality printer? Does the watermark go the correct direction?

COVER LETTER FORMAT

(Make top and bottom margins approximately equal)

7650 College Drive
Athens, Ohio 45701
November 14, 2002

Ms. Jennifer Wheaton
Director of Personnel
United Greeting Card Company
P.O. Box 459
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 43201

Dear Ms. Wheaton:

Opening Paragraph: State why you are writing, the position for which you are applying/type of work you are seeking. Mention how you heard of the opening or the organization.

Middle Paragraph: This is the main body of what you want to communicate: the skills, experience, education, etc. that may be of interest to this particular employer. You may want to refer to the enclosed résumé but do not re-hash the entire résumé; mention only the highlights that will make them want to read the résumé. Be sure to address the key points described in the want ad or job posting. You may also want to discuss what attracts you to this position/organization.

Closing Paragraph: Mention your sincere interest in an interview opportunity, and thank them for the consideration.

Sincerely,

James P. Brewster

James P. Brewster

Enclosure

(If a résumé or other information is enclosed, be sure to refer to it in the letter)