

# Cover Letters

## How to Write a Cover Letter

By [Alison Doyle](#), About.com Guide

Writing a cover letter often seems like a particularly daunting task. However, if you take it one step at a time, you'll soon be an expert at writing letters to send with your resume.

A cover letter typically accompanies each resume you send out. Your cover letter may make the difference between obtaining a job interview and having your resume ignored, so, it makes good sense to devote the necessary time and effort to writing effective cover letters.

A cover letter should complement, not duplicate your resume. Its purpose is to interpret the data-oriented, factual resume and add a personal touch. A cover letter is often your earliest written contact with a potential employer, creating a critical first impression.

### There are three general types of cover letters:

- The **application letter** which responds to a known job opening ([review samples](#))
- The **prospecting letter** which inquires about possible positions ([review sample](#))
- The **networking letter** which requests information and assistance in your job search ([review samples](#))

Your cover letter should be designed specifically for each purpose outlined above as well as for each position you seek. Do not design a form letter and send it to every potential employer (you know what you do with junk mail!).

Effective cover letters explain the reasons for your interest in the specific organization and identify your most relevant skills or experiences (remember, relevance is determined by the employer's self-interest). They should express a high level of interest and knowledge about the position.

To be effective, your cover letter should follow the basic format of a typical business letter and should address three general issues:

1. First Paragraph - Why you are writing
2. Middle Paragraphs - What you have to offer
3. Concluding Paragraph - How you will follow-up

### Why You Are Writing

In some cases, you may have been referred to a potential employer by a friend or acquaintance. Be sure to mention this mutual contact, by name, up front since it is likely to encourage your reader to keep reading!

If you are writing in **response to a job posting** ([review samples](#)), indicate where you learned of the position and the title of the position. More importantly, express your enthusiasm and the likely match between your credentials and the position's qualifications.

If you are **writing a prospecting letter** ([review sample](#)) a letter in which you inquire about possible job openings - state your specific job objective. Since this type of letter is unsolicited, it is even more important to capture the reader's attention.

If you are **writing a networking letter** ([review samples](#)) to approach an individual for information, make your request clear.

## **What You Have To Offer**

In responding to an advertisement, refer specifically to the qualifications listed and illustrate how your particular abilities and experiences relate to the position for which you are applying. In a prospecting letter express your potential to fulfill the employer's needs rather than focus on what the employer can offer you. You can do this by giving evidence that you have researched the organization thoroughly and that you possess skills used within that organization.

Emphasize your achievements and problem-solving skills. Show how your education and work skills are transferable, and thus relevant, to the position for which you are applying.

## **How You Will Follow Up**

Close by reiterating your interest in the job and letting the employer know how they can reach you and include your phone number and/or email address. Or bid directly for the job interview or informational interview and indicate that you will follow-up with a telephone call to set up an appointment at a mutually convenient time. Be sure to make the call within the time frame indicated.

In some instances, an employer may explicitly prohibit phone calls or you may be responding to a "blind want-ad" which precludes you from this follow-up. Unless this is the case, make your best effort to reach the organization. At the very least, you should confirm that your materials were received and that your application is complete.

If you are applying from outside the employer's geographic area you may want to indicate if you'll be in town during a certain time frame (this makes it easier for the employer to agree to meet with you).

In conclusion, you may indicate that your [references](#) are available on request. Also, if you have a portfolio or writing samples to support your qualifications, state their availability.

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**SAMPLE**

Date

Dear Mr. Gilhooley,

I am writing to apply for the programmer position advertised in the *Times Union*. As requested, I am enclosing a completed job application, my certification, my resume and three references.

The opportunity presented in this listing is very interesting, and I believe that my strong technical experience and education will make me a very competitive candidate for this position. The key strengths that I possess for success in this position include:

- I have successfully designed, developed, and supported live use applications
- I strive for continued excellence
- I provide exceptional contributions to customer service for all customers

With a BS degree in Computer Programming, I have a full understanding of the full life cycle of a software development project. I also have experience in learning and excelling at new technologies as needed.

Please see my resume for additional information on my experience.

I can be reached anytime via email at george.gillhooley@email.com or my cell phone, 909-555-5555.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to speaking with you about this employment opportunity.

Sincerely,

FirstName LastName

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