

The Cover Letter

A good cover letter is like introducing yourself with a personal handshake. It highlights your resume in a brief, interesting and clear fashion, pointing out your most important skills. It gives you the opportunity to introduce yourself to an employer and to draw connections between the position you seek and the skills or experiences you have to offer. Remember, managers are busy people. They won't read a long letter that never gets to the point. This is an employer's first impression of you. Make sure it is professional, error-free, and well written.

! **The cover letter attracts attention.**

You will attract the reader's attention by clearly stating your reasons for writing. Here are a few ways to do that:

- § *Advertisement Openings*- "I am responding to your November 3rd advertisement in the Star Tribune that requests an individual with marketing and production experience to fill the Account Manager position."
- § *Referral Openings*- "Upon the recommendation of Susan Brown, a nursing manager at Unity Hospital, I am applying for the Emergency Room nursing position you have posted."
- § *Question Openings*- "Will extensive computer training, a proven customer service record and a knack for problem-solving qualify me for a position with XYX Company?"

! **The cover letter shows how you are the best person for the job.**

- § Determine what that particular employer is looking for and show them how you fit the bill. Talking with other people and looking at the job posting are ways you can get a picture of the employer's ideal candidate.
- § Do some research on the organization. Find out about their goals, products and services. Identify why you want to work for the organization and communicate your reasons and interest to them.
- § Use that information to introduce your skills. Describe your qualifications in terms of the job description.
- § Be specific and concrete.
- § Highlight just a few of your most important skills or accomplishments.

! **The cover letter asks for action.**

Close your cover letter in a courteous, pleasant manner. Ask for action and make the response easy. Include your phone number and other helpful information. If you are asking for information, don't expect them to respond; let them know you will be calling them some time in the following week. Then make sure you call!

! **The cover letter is personal and professional.**

- § A good letter serves as a personal introduction to your resume. To make sure it serves that function, keep these things in mind:
- § Never send a copy. Make sure each cover letter is written specifically for each job opening.
- § Make it personal. Don't send, "To Whom it May Concern". That is one sure way to show the employer you have not done your homework. Call and find out the name and title of the person who should receive your letter. If necessary begin with "Dear Human Resources Manager."
- § Use the same good quality paper stock for both your cover letter and resume.
- § Proofread your letter for typos, misspellings, and grammatical errors.
- § Keep hard copies of all letters written and correspondence received for reference purposes.

SAMPLE FORMAT FOR COVER LETTERS

(Top and bottom margins should be approximately equal)

Date

Your Street Address
City, State, Zip

Ms. Sandra Jones, Director
Marketing Division
American Industrial Corporation
1111 American Avenue
America, IL 60006

(Be sure to address the letter to the correct person, spelled correctly with their title.)

Dear Ms. Jones:

Opening Paragraph: State why you are writing, identify the position for which you would like to be considered, and indicate how you heard of the position. Mention any individuals who may have referred you to the position. If you are sending an inquiry letter, simply indicate the type of work or position you are seeking. Be specific.

Middle Paragraph(s): Your goal here is to show how you can be useful to this particular organization. Describe what strengths you have to offer this employer. Highlight particular classes, jobs, internships, achievements, and extracurricular activities as they relate to the position in which you are interested. You might want to use one of the following approaches:

- § Identify three reasons for the employer to consider you for the position.
- § Describe your previous accomplishments as they relate to the position.
- § Illustrate the relationship between your skills and experience and the position you are applying for.
- § State why you want to work for their organization.

Refer the reader to your enclosed resume for additional information.

Closing Paragraph: End your letter by clarifying what will happen next, indicating your desire for an interview, and how they can most easily reach you. If you are applying for a specific job which has been posted, you might say, "I look forward to meeting with you to discuss my qualifications in more detail. I can be reached between (time) on (days) or a message may be left at (phone #)." If you are not applying for an existing opening, indicate that you will call them on a particular date to see when it would be convenient to set up a meeting, and also indicate how they can most easily reach you.

Sincerely,
(Always sign your name.)

Type your name beneath your signature.

Enclosure *(to indicate your resume is enclosed)*

December 19, 2006

5831 Minnesota Street
Minneapolis, MN 55114

Ms. Jan Williams
Director
International Volunteer Enterprises
652 Pine Street N.E.
Minneapolis, MN 56721

Dear Ms. Williams:

I read the letter you recently sent to the Bethel University Career Services Office. I am writing to say that I would like to be considered for employment as the Coordinator of Volunteer Services. I will be graduating from Bethel in May 2004, and I believe my educational background and work experience would contribute significantly to your organization.

Through my education at Bethel University, I acquired a strong background in international affairs and developed proficiency in the Spanish language. As the coordinator of a community service project on campus, I have learned to plan and organize events, work with people from a variety of backgrounds, and become more familiar with the needs and motivations of volunteers. My employment as a student assistant in the financial planning office provided me with the opportunity to organize and evaluate data along with developing skills in customer service.

I am very interested in working for International Volunteer Enterprises because I believe the programs which it promotes make an extremely important contribution toward the attainment of international understanding. I am confident I have the skills and knowledge required to be a contributing member of the International Volunteer Enterprises team.

A letter and resume can tell you only so much about my motivation and qualifications. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my background with you in person. I will call you at the end of next week to discuss whether such a meeting would be possible and to confirm appropriate next steps.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

George T. Potter

Enclosure

March 8, 2006

Ms. Louise Kratt
Manager of College Relations
Midwest Publications
Suite 42
755 Jefferson Street
Minneapolis, MN 65332

Dear Ms. Kratt:

Your March 6th ad in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* suggests that you need someone with a background in journalism and management for the position of Assistant Director of Communications. This employment opportunity is of particular interest to me as I plan my graduation from Bethel University in May.

As a Communication major with an English minor, I would very much like to work in the public relations field. As my enclosed resume indicates, my work experiences revolve around journalism and administration. As a writer/editor for *The Clarion*, I have written more than thirty articles on various topics ranging from sports and entertainment to editorial commentary. I also developed my computer skills and was instrumental in the purchase and implementation of the newspaper's first computer-layout system. As a manager and administrator, I was able to successfully direct a fifteen-person writing staff by assigning story ideas, balancing deadlines, and giving the paper its overall editorial direction.

Through independent research, I have learned that Midwest Publications is on the leading edge of developing computer technology. I believe my experience with this area, as well as my desire to succeed, make me a strong candidate for the position. My enclosed resume will provide you with further information regarding other related work experiences.

I look forward to meeting with you to discuss my qualifications in detail. As my resume indicates, I can be reached at (651) 638-0000. If I have not heard from you by the end of next week, I will try to contact you. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Claudia Seaver

Enclosure