

WHAT IS A COVER LETTER?

A personalized, 1-page, 3-4 paragraph letter that should accompany each resume.

Its purpose:

- To clarify for the employer your reason for contacting them.
- To make the connection between your skills, interests, academic background, and the needs of the employer (as stated in the advertisement and/or determined through your research on the company).
- To serve as your “sales pitch” to the employer, clarifying through specific examples what you can contribute to the company/organization.

PREPARING TO WRITE A COVER LETTER

1. **Research the employer.** See how your skills and background meet the organization’s needs, and how well your values match those promoted by the organization. Visit their website, perform a Google search, and/or talk with professors or other professionals in the field who may have information about the organization.
2. **Analyze the job description.** Identify the job responsibilities and qualifications required. If there is no description, or if it is vague or unclear, research similar jobs to infer what skills and background would be required.
3. **Review and analyze your background.** Think about your background in relation to the job responsibilities and qualifications. Consider courses taken, academic projects, past work and internship experiences, summer jobs, volunteer experiences and extracurricular involvement.

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR COVER LETTER

1. **State why you are writing.** Indicate what position you are interested in, the source and date of the advertisement, or what you are interested in doing in the company/organization if it is a general inquiry about possible job openings. If you have been referred by someone, name the person at the beginning of the letter.
2. **Demonstrate that you have some knowledge about the employer which** sparks your interest in that employer and leads you to believe that this would be a good fit.
3. **Focus specifically on your RELEVANT skills, work and internship experiences, interests, courses, projects, accomplishments, and personal qualities** that match up with the position. Do not merely repeat what is on your resume. Select ONLY those details that will be of greatest interest to the employer. If responding to an advertisement, incorporate words from the advertisement that refer to skills and qualifications that the employer is seeking.

TIPS:

- Every resume you send, fax, or e-mail needs its own personalized cover letter.
- Each letter should be unique and addressed to a specific individual if at all possible. (if necessary research the company online to get the proper name and title or call the company switchboard to inquire.)
- Whom it May Concern” is an acceptable alternative if the name is not available.
- Focus on the positive! Do not refer to areas where you are lacking in experience or

- All letters should be single spaced, flush left, with each paragraph followed by a blank line.
- Proofread your letter carefully to make sure that there are no typos or grammatical errors. DO NOT RELY ON SPELL CHECK!
- Keep a copy of all correspondence.

SENDING YOUR COVER LETTER VIA EMAIL

Recruiters' preferences vary on what format they prefer to receive your cover letter. Some prefer a word attachment and others prefer the letter to be the body of the email. However most seem to agree that when receiving a cover letter and resume as an attachment, they prefer it as one document.

- Maintain a professional/formal tone as if you were mailing the letter.
- Include the title of the position you are applying for in the subject line

THANK YOU LETTERS – THE BASICS

- **Always send a thank you letter** after your interview! It is an additional sales piece which serves to keep the “product”, YOU, in front of the “buyer”, THE EMPLOYER, and to reinforce your benefit to the employer.
- **Be brief.** While there is no “rule” about the length of a thank you letter, a half page is generally sufficient.
- **First paragraph:** Open with the obligatory thank you and include how and why you enjoyed the meeting (e.g. something about the staff? the philosophy of the organization?)
- **Second paragraph:** Refer to something that took place during the interview which particularly pleased and interested you. Say what it was, and tell them why (e.g. “I was particularly pleased to learn that your company/the opportunity/your management style... whatever”). Discuss a particular aspect/s of the job that you find appealing and reiterate what you could contribute to the organization.
- **Third paragraph:** (Optional) If you have several examples that you would like to refer to, you can use an additional paragraph.
- **Final paragraph:** Reiterate your interest and express your enthusiasm.
- Don't start every sentence with “I”!

CAUTION: If you are struggling with what to include in your letter, perhaps you need to do more work clarifying your career direction or articulating your value to employers! Consider arranging an appointment with a Simpson Career Counselor: 515-961-1667

GENERAL OUTLINE FOR A COVER LETTER

Your Mailing Address
City, State Zip

← *Skip 1 line*
Today's Date

← *Skip 1 or 2 lines*
Employer's Name
Title
Name of Organization
Street Address
City, State Zip

← *Skip 1 line*
Dear Mr. or Ms. last name: (use colon)

Do not indent. Single space and skip 1 line between paragraphs

OPENING PARAGRAPH: State why you are writing. Name the specific position, or type of work for which you are applying. If there is a job number or reference code, be sure to include this as well. Also mention the resource used in finding out about the opening or organization (classified ad, job listing, placement center, friend, faculty, etc.)

BODY OF LETTER: Explain why you are interested in working for this particular employer and/or specify your reasons for desiring this type of work. Point out relevant work experiences and/or education by giving specific examples. This needs to do more than reiterate information that is on your resume. Emphasize only those qualifications that are most relevant for the position or type of work for which you are applying. The job posting/description can guide you in deciding what to include. Using your own examples highlight the requirements, keywords and terminology listed in the ad.

CLOSING PARAGRAPH: Keep this short. Thank them for their time and indicate when you will follow up (unless the posting requests no calls). Also indicate your desire for an interview and list a phone number that they can use to reach you.

Sincerely,

← *Skip 4 lines and sign your name.*

Your Name Typed

SAMPLE INTERNSHIP COVER LETTER

500 Anywhere Ave., Apt. Z
Anytown, IA 00000

(Date)

Ms. (Name)
Superior Graphic Design
331 Anywhere Street, Suite 17
Anytown, IA 00000

Dear Ms. (Name):

States reason for writing and source of job posting.

Shows her knowledge of the company and passion for the field

I am writing to apply for the summer Graphic Design Internship position that I read about in the Simpson College job bulletin. I am inspired by your style and impressive work and I believe my education, successful design projects, and extensive work in layout make me an excellent fit for your agency. My capabilities to contribute to your projects and desire to learn from this experience make me an enthusiastic applicant.

Uses relevant example of a campus activity with specific details about her role.

As you can see from my enclosed resume, I am an Art major with an emphasis on graphic design. In my work with student organizations and with the Simpsonian Newspaper, I have developed the skills needed to be a valuable asset to your organization. I created flyers which were distributed across campus and developed copy for articles and advertisements.

The skills that I will bring to this position include excellent written and verbal communication skills. Working with customers to understand their needs and fulfilling them through design has been an excellent opportunity for growth. These skills combined with my coursework and past work experience make me a good fit for this opportunity.

Essential skills for the position

Thank you for your consideration. I hope to meet with you soon to learn more about the internship and to further discuss my qualifications. I will contact you to learn if I am selected for an interview during the week of September 23rd. In the meantime, I can be reached at 555-000-0000.

Demonstrates her skills with an example

Indicates how and when she will follow up

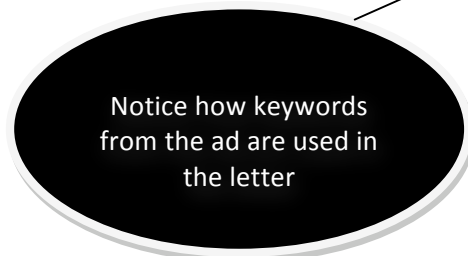
Sincerely,

Ginger GraphicDesigner

000 Anywhere Ave.
Indianola, IA 00000

September 6, 2010

Iowa Events Center
Attn: Human Resources
100 Anywhere Street, Suite 300
Des Moines, IA 00000



JOB ADVERTISEMENT:

The IA Events Center is seeking an event planner to arrange conferences and other events. The principal duties of this position are:

* Conference Planning: help coordinate education and training programs, handle **hotel contractual arrangements** and food/beverage **vendors**, issue **invitations**, handle **registration** and organize handouts.

* **Committee meeting** support: assist in planning and distributing agendas, prepare meeting folders, verify attendance and distribute minutes.

* Conference Budget: assist in **tracking budgetary** and cost effectiveness.

* General administrative: phone calls, e-mail, and customer service

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to apply for the Event Planner position that was posted on desmoinesjobs.com. This position is the perfect fit for my event planning experience and interest in promoting the state of Iowa.

As you can see from my enclosed resume, I was an active member of the Student Human Resource Association for three years. During my senior year, I chaired the Senior Soiree committee. In this role, I **planned** and led weekly **committee meetings**, selected a **hotel** to hold the event, **negotiated contractual** arrangements with **vendors**, printed **invitations** and **sold tickets**. Not only did the event stay within its **budget**, we had a record number of students attend.

At Bennigan's Restaurant, I was recognized for my friendly attitude and excellent customer service, two important qualities to uphold when you are planning events, meetings, and providing support to a busy staff. In addition, I was quickly given the added responsibility of team leader.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to having the opportunity to learn more about the Iowa Events Center and to further describe my qualifications. I will contact you the week of September 20th to see if an interview can be arranged. In the meantime, feel free to contact me at 515-000-0000.

Sincerely,

Jane Planner

SAMPLE RESPONSE TO AN ADVERTISEMENT

200 Anywhere Rd.
Anytown, US 00000

March 2, 2010

Mr. John Smith, Director
Department of Natural Resources
PO Box 0000
Des Moines, IA 00000

Uses personal story to show knowledge of company and passion for the field

Dear Mr. Smith:

During Simpson College May term, I was privileged to participate in a job shadow at Loess Hills State Park Nature Center. After this encounter, I decided to major in biology and environmental science. In May, I will graduate from Simpson with my Bachelor's degree in Environmental Science. Please accept the enclosed resume for the Field Guide position posted on your website.

States specific job for which they are applying

Important and relevant details based on job description

From my coursework, community service, and traveling, I have extensive experience in environmental and conservation work. In addition, I have taken numerous courses on prairie ecosystems of the Midwest. I also focused my studies on the flora and fauna of the American prairie, I am already fully equipped to share an extensive library of knowledge with clients. I am a natural leader and remain calm and collected in stressful situations. These are essential qualities for a field guide because, in addition to a leader's knowledge, he or she must be trustworthy, confident and enthusiastic so clients will feel completely at ease.

Explains how their academic background fits with position

Shows how their personal characteristics make them a match for the job

Thank you in advance for taking the time to review my resume. I can be reached at 515-000-0000. I hope to hear from you about an interview soon.

Indicates how they can be reached. They do not include when they will follow up, because the posting requested no calls. Also shows desire for an interview

Sincerely,

Leslie Lab

SAMPLE RESPONSE TO AN ADVERTISEMENT

265 Anywhere Place
Anywhere, US 00000

April 10, 2010

Children's Space
Program Director
1916 Anywhere Street
Anywhere, US 00000

Dear Ms. (Name):

Gives relevant details of a past experience to highlight qualifications

Please consider this letter as an application for the position of Student Advisor which was listed on Idealist.org. The mission of the Children's Space is similar to that of previous organizations where I have worked. This position appears tailor-made for my education and career interests of working with teens.

Briefly explains reason for writing & how she heard about the position. In addition, it expresses knowledge of the organization & references similar experiences

Draws a connection between major and how it is relevant to position

As my resume shows, during my internship at Youth Homes I co-led the after school program. In this position, I tutored students individually and in school groups during homework time as well as participating in recreational activities with the children. My Psychology major has helped me to better understand human behavior, social groups, and institutions. What I learned in and out of the classroom will assist me in working with teens to serve as a guide for your after school program for high school students. In addition, my volunteer experiences have shown my ability to adapt to different environments, interact with different types of people, and my commitment and hard work.

Thank you for your time. I hope you will consider me for this position. I look forward to meeting you and discussing my qualifications in more detail. I can be reached at 515-000-0000.

Indicates how she can be reached, but does not include when she will follow up, because the posting requested no calls

Sincerely,

Kitty Kangaroo

SAMPLE RESPONSE TO ADVERTISEMENT

265 Anywhere Street
Hometown, US 00000

June 2, 2010

Ms. Betty Lastname, Human Resource Director
Superior Advertisement
0000 Anywhere Street
Somewhere, IA 00005

Opens with strong knowledge of the company

Addresses letter to a specific person

Dear Ms. (Lastname:)

States and underlines job title, as well as lists reference number, source of ad, & specifics about relevant qualifications

These skills were listed directly in the ad.

It is with much enthusiasm that I read in the May 25th Des Moines Register that Superior Advertisement is expanding its business into the local restaurant industry. I feel confident that my experience in writing and restaurant service are a unique match for the Junior Copywriter position, #64537, as advertised in the Simpson job bulletin.

As an English major at Simpson College and editor for the student newspaper, I developed my creativity and writing skills in deadline-oriented environments and achieved strong working knowledge of AP style. Volunteering with the Upward Bound literacy program helped me learn to make words exciting.

Not mentioned in the ad, but important to copywriting

Takes waiting tables & turns it into a valuable business experience

Perhaps most important, as a server at several area restaurants I gained a valuable familiarity with the environments, patrons, and menus of the very businesses you seek to assist. I would appreciate the opportunity not only to write fresh ads for these restaurants, but perhaps to generate new business using my network of contacts at these locations.

Shows how she can contribute by bringing in new business

I would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you to discuss the position. I will call you the week of June 11th to follow up. In the meantime, I can be reached at 515-000-0000.

States intent to follow up on a specific week

Sincerely,

Wayne Waiter

SAMPLE LETTER OF INQUIRY

10 Anywhere St.
Anytown, US

February 17, 2010

Ms. Sally Smith
123 Associates
0000 Anywhere Street
New York, NY 10010

Dear Ms. Smith:

Shows knowledge
of company and
why it is of interest

Clearly
states
reason
for
writing

I just completed reading the article in Business Today on 123 Associates. Your innovative approach to recruiting minorities is of particular interest to me because of my background in public relations and minority recruitment.

I am interested in learning more about your company and the possibilities of joining your team of highly qualified professionals. Please note my relevant qualifications:

- Conducted research on minority recruitment
- Helped to write grants for minority projects
- Worked as an undergraduate assistant to the multi-cultural office on campus
- BA in English

Bullets allow
reader to
quickly skim
candidate's
qualifications

I will be in Anytown during the week of March 10th. Perhaps your schedule would permit us to meet briefly to discuss our mutual interests. I will call your office next week to see if such a meeting can be arranged. In the meantime, I am enclosing my resume for your review. I can be reached at 515-000-0000. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Molly Manners

Directly asks
for a meeting
during a
specific date
range and
explains what
action will be
taken next

SAMPLE LETTER OF INQUIRY

10 Anywhere Rd.
Anytown, IA 00000

March 18, 2010

Mr. Jason Jones
Human Resources
Anytown, IA 00000

Dear Mr. Jones:

States reason for writing

I will be graduating from Simpson College this May with a BA in Economics, and I am interested in exploring career opportunities with Peoples Bank in the Indianola area. I am aware that Peoples Bank is a local community bank and, therefore, is the kind of organization within which I would like to begin building my career.

Explains why they are interested in this company

Shows the student's goals

You will note from my enclosed resume that I have a strong background in banking, reinforced by several related courses at Simpson. I am currently interning at a large bank where I interact with customers on a daily basis and process a variety of loans including home equity and mortgage loans. I am seeking a position leading towards a managerial career in the lending of mortgage loans area.

Gives examples of what they are doing in their current internship which relates to the banking industry

Notice how these details are ones that will be especially relevant to a banking position

My strong math skills and attention to detail combined with my commitment to customer service will allow me to be successful in this field. I am confident that I would be an asset to Peoples Bank and I hope that you will seriously consider me as a candidate for an entry level opportunity. Since my home is in Des Moines and I attend school in Indianola, I am readily available for an interview at either location. I will contact your office within the next two weeks to determine your level of interest in arranging a meeting. In the meantime, I can be reached at 515-000-0000. Thank you for your consideration.

Indicates their next step and desire for an interview

Sincerely,

It is appropriate to thank them for their time

Gregg Money-minded

8446 Anywhere St.
Anytown, US 00000

July 26, 2010

Ms. (Name)
Director of Recruiting
Marketing Plus
001 W. Anywhere St.
Anytown, US 00000

Starts with the name of the person who referred her to the position. Also includes the position she is applying for.

Dear Ms. Lastname:

Shows her knowledge of the company

Jill Browne suggested I contact you regarding the Marketing position available at Marketing Plus. I am enthused about the prospect of pursuing my marketing interests at your company due to its reputation as an innovative, and growing marketing company in the midwest.

My diverse and rigorous academic, professional, and leadership experiences would make me a valuable asset to Marketing Plus. Currently, in a part-time professional position as a Student Admissions Representative at Simpson College I assist in promoting the college to prospective students and their parents. I participate in interviewing and recruiting students as well as leading group information sessions. Since I work with people every day in a business setting, I have developed strong interpersonal and communication skills.

Refers to specific skills that are relevant to the position and gives examples.

My leadership experience, particularly with the Simpson College Women's Center, is an example of my strong sense of responsibility and motivation. As an active member concerned with the rights of women, I have brought fresh new ideas into the agenda, such as bringing student leaders together to discuss how to create a more active community at Simpson College. As a result of this idea, our organization, along with several other student groups, has begun planning a leadership forum for next semester.

Draws from campus leadership activities that demonstrate relevant skills/personal qualities & shows positive outcome of her efforts.

I have enclosed my resume for your consideration and will contact you the week of August 6th to follow up. Thank you for your time and consideration and I look forward to the opportunity to talk with you further about my enthusiasm and qualifications for your marketing position. In the meantime, I can be reached at 515-000-0000.

Sincerely,

Indicates when she will follow up & how she can be reached.

Ida B. Goode

THANK YOU LETTERS

Sending a thank-you letter after an interview is a must.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A THANK YOU LETTER?

1. Reminding the prospective employer that you are still available and still interested in the position.
2. Showing them that you are an effective communicator.
3. Proving that you have good business etiquette.
4. Giving you a slight edge over your competition since the other applicants may not write.
5. To express ideas you forgot to include in the interview.
6. To highlight specific information about your experience.

It's always important to say thank you after a job interview, and after a second interview as well. It's also important to thank everyone you interviewed with and everyone who assisted with your job search. Here are some tips on who you should thank and the best way to thank them.

TIPS:

1. Send out your thank you letters promptly. (preferably within twenty-four hours). If time is of the essence, you may send your thank you in an email but it is best to follow up with a letter or note card.
2. If you were interviewed by more than one person, send each person you interviewed with a thank-you letter.
3. If there was something that you wish you had mentioned during the interview, here's your chance to say it by including it in your thank you letter.
4. Thank you letters can be handwritten, typed or sent via email.
5. Keep your thank you letters short and simple, but do use the letter to reiterate your interest in the job, your enthusiasm for the company, and to sell yourself as the ideal candidate.
6. Spell check and proof your thank you letter. Then ask someone else to proof it for you. That way you will be sure it's perfect.

If you are not interested in the position after going through the interview, employers appreciate it if you convey this in your thank-you letter. This will save the employer valuable time as they review their list of possible candidates.

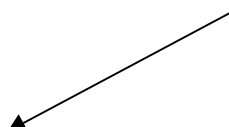
SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

1818 Shadow Lane
Des Moines, IA 50000
(515) 025-0000

May 12, 2010

Ms. (Name)
Human Resources Manager
ABC Corporation
Address 1
City, State Zip

States reason
for writing and
references the
position

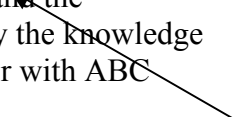


Dear Ms. (Name):


Thank you for meeting with me on Thursday to discuss the Customer Service position with ABC Corporation. The position you described sounds both interesting and challenging.

ABC Corporation appears to be a dynamic and exhilarating place to work. As I mentioned during the interview, my internship experience with IBM Corporation has given me insight into the operations of a large corporation and the interdependence of the various departments. I am eager to apply the knowledge I gained through my internship and education and begin a career with ABC Corporation.

Mentions
specific
skills &
experience,
how they
fit with the
company,
and how he
can
contribute



Shows
initiative in
following
up on
something
that was
discussed
in the
interview



I look forward to hearing from you regarding possible employment. Please feel free to contact me at 515-000-0000 if you would like more information on my portfolio. It was a pleasure visiting with you. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Terry Niceguy

ACCEPT OR DECLINE A JOB OFFER

Letter of Acceptance

This letter is an exhilarating letter to write. It means your job search was successful and you will be moving on to your new career.

- Refer to the letter, email or call you received offering you the position and accept the offer.
- Confirm and outline your understanding of the terms of your employment. Refer to any items which have not yet been determined.
- Express your appreciation and pleasure at joining the organization.
- Use standard business letter formatting. (see example)

Letter Declining the Offer

When you have decided to reject a job offer, you may want to let the employer know in writing that you are declining the offer. Your letter should be polite, brief, and to the point. You don't want to burn bridges and this employer may have a better offer for you down the road. You should include the following:

- Thanks and appreciation for the offer
- Written rejection of the job offer

Address the letter to the person who offered you the position. Include your contact information and phone number. Make sure that your letter is well written and does not contain typos or grammatical errors. Even though you are declining the job, you want to make sure all your correspondence is professional

701 N. C St.
Indianola, IA 50125

June 15, 2010

(type recipient's address)

Dear (type recipient's name):

Your letter brought wonderful news. I am delighted to accept the position of assistant advertising manager of Southern Outdoorsman.

As you suggested, I will report to the publishing building at 9 a.m. on July 21 and then proceed directly to your office. I also understand that I will be meeting with the Human Resources department to finalize the paper work.

I thoroughly enjoyed meeting you and the others on your staff, and I really look forward to joining you.

Sincerely,

Fred Fisherman

701 N. C St.
Indianola, IA 50125

August 15, 2010

(type recipient's address)

(2 returns)

Dear (type recipient's name):

I appreciate your letter offering me the position of Systems Analyst which I recently applied for.

It was a difficult decision to make but after much consideration I have accepted a position with another company. It is an excellent opportunity (which came as a complete surprise), and one that I feel I cannot pass up. Therefore, I must decline your generous offer.

Thank you for all the courtesies extended me. I enjoyed my brief visit with you.

Sincerely

Susie Bitbyte