

COVER LETTER & REFERENCES - TIPS

A cover letter is optional most of the time, unless specifically requested. It is used to highlight qualities about yourself that you could not fit in your resume. When used appropriately, the cover letter can demonstrate your enthusiasm for a particular job, and single you out as the leading contender for the position.

Always use high quality 8.5" x 11" paper for your cover letter. If using color paper, make sure you stick to white or cream colors, as they are easier on the eyes. Do not get overly creative. Type the cover letter to make it look professional.

Always properly plan your cover letters:

What is the Purpose of the letter?

What are the needs of my audience?

What is a good opening sentence or paragraph for grabbing the attention of the audience?

How can I maintain the interest of the audience?

How can I best end the letter so that my audience will be persuaded to contact me?

How much time should I spend revising and proofreading the letter?

Will this letter represent my best professional effort?

Put your most important ideas first. Communicate your unique style. The opening paragraph should be the best.

Positive info that supports your candidacy

Information on your unique skills, abilities, strengths and accomplishments, interests, and goals.

Specific examples of productivity and performance

Benefits you can offer

A daytime contact number!

THINGS TO EXCLUDE

Extraneous unrelated information

Any negative references to former employers

Your weaknesses

Boastful statements or proposed solutions to employer's problems

CONTACT INFORMATION

The first item on your cover letter should be your contact information, followed by the Employer's contact information and a formal greeting.

YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION

YOUR EMPLOYER'S CONTACT INFORMATION

GREETING (like Dear Hiring Manager:)

BODY OF LETTER

FORMAL CLOSING, SIGNATURE

STAND OUT!

The first step to showcasing your skills and enthusiasm on paper is to do your research on the company you are applying to, and to personalize the letter to them. This demonstrates that you are interested in them and shows that you understand them. By understanding them, you can also go a step further to demonstrate how you can meet their unique needs. Use active verbs, active sentences, and proofread your cover letter many times. It helps to put your cover letter away in a drawer for a day, and proofread it again at a later date, with a new perspective. Often, that helps fine tune the tone and grammar of the letter.

Use the cover letter as an opportunity to showcase your qualities and skills, by stressing your positive traits. Refer back to the job skills listed in the job description and show that you possess them. Avoid using contractions, and give specific examples of instances when you demonstrated the skills and traits they are looking for. Before you sign off, ask for an interview. Use formal closings like “Sincerely,” “Yours truly,” or “Cordially,” and sign the letter.

Since the cover letter serves a unique purpose, do not repeat the content of your resume, do not shed a negative light on your previous employer or get too personal, and avoid being ordinary. Also, be careful not to send the wrong letter to the wrong company!

REFERENCES

References should be typed on separate paper from the resume. The references can be as simple as a person’s name, how they know you, and how long you have known each other.

Some employers will ask for this list. It is smart to have this ready, as it shows you are serious and people are ready to speak on your behalf. Naturally, you must make sure you contact your references to ensure they have good things to say about you, and are willing to speak with prospective employers. Do not list family members as references. Other options include community leaders, professors, and career advisors.