

## WRITING A COVER LETTER

A cover letter is an important component of the job application “package,” along with a resume. The letter tells a prospective employer what job you are applying for. A well-written letter creates interest in your resume. A resume can only list your accomplishments, but a cover letter provides you with a chance to point out your strengths and to make a strong case for your qualifications.

The term “cover letter” refers to the email message you send with your resume attached to it, as well as to a job application made by regular mail. Email cover letters differ only in not needing the internal external and internal addresses and date that it is customary to include in hard copy business letters.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF A COVER LETTER:

It should **interpret or supplement information** on the resume, not repeat information that the resume contains. For example, a cover letter can

- describe how much responsibility you were given at a particular job
- explain how your undergraduate coursework prepared you for the job (perhaps because it included a great deal of fieldwork or hands-on experience)
- comment on relevant personal characteristics (such as an ability to multitask, to work under pressure, to work as part of a team) or life experience (paying your way through college, caring for dependent family members)

It should be **persuasive**: it should make a strong case to an employer to want to hire you.

It should have a **“you” attitude**, explaining how your background, experience, and personal qualities can make you an asset to the employer.

Writers often feel uncomfortable using “I” in a cover letter. Since the letter is about you, this is unavoidable. You will not sound egotistical or boastful if you are careful to show how you can benefit the company you are applying to.

### ORGANIZATION OF A COVER LETTER:

- ¶ 1: Mention the specific position you are applying for. Explain how you heard about the opening (where did you see an ad? who was your contact person?). Briefly express interest in the job.
- ¶ 2: Stress your most significant qualifications, supplementing or adding to what is on your resume.
- ¶ 3: Describe your relevant personality traits and people skills.
- ¶ 4: Conclude by affirming your interest in the job. Indicate your availability to come for an interview. Include your contact information here (even though it will also appear on your resume).

### SOME ADDITIONAL HINTS:

Be sure the tone of your letter is professional.

There are many acceptable letter formats (block, indented, etc.). Choose one and use it consistently.

Proofread very carefully.

