

The Cover Letter

Basics

The cover letter or letter of application is a personal statement of interest in a particular position or company. A resume that is being submitted by mail should always be accompanied by such a letter. It is not necessary for on-campus interviews. It should be typed on the same quality paper as the resume and limited to one page. Optimally, it should be addressed to a specific person since this receives more attention than one merely addressed to "Personnel Director." Sources of this information are available in the Career Center and the reference sections of the university libraries. A phone call to the company is also a possibility if you cannot find a name elsewhere. Each letter must be individually tailored for the particular position or company to which you are applying.

In preparing your letters, pay careful attention to the organization of ideas, grammar and spelling. Edit it meticulously and get a second opinion. Always use a standard business-letter format and maintain a formal tone, even if you are well-acquainted with your contact within the organization.

Format

A cover letter serves three basic purposes and is divided into sections accordingly:

1. Statement of Purpose

Begin with a statement of purpose. Name the position to which you are applying and how/where you learned of the position or organization.

2. Explanation of Qualifications

Explain why you are interested in working for this employer and specify your reasons for desiring this type of work. Emphasize any qualifications you particularly want the employer to notice and refer him/her to the enclosed resume.

3. Closing

State your availability for an interview. Better yet, give a time when you will recontact the company to further discuss employment opportunities.