

Constructing Your Cover Letter

Heading/Date/Inside Address

If you are writing a traditional (not email) letter, select a standard business-letter format such as block style. Your letter's design should match your resume (See example below).

Salutation

It's best to address your letter to a specific person (e.g., "Dear Ms. Jones:"), but use "Dear Hiring Manager," if there's no way to find that out. Use "Dear Search Committee:" if the decision will be made by committee. Avoid stale salutations such as "Dear Sir/Madam:" and "To Whom it May Concern:."

Opening Paragraph

Hiring managers are busy and do not care to wade through fluff. Your opening paragraph should clearly state the position for which you're applying. Include a reference code if requested and the referral source (e.g., recommendation from a current employee, Monster, etc.). Your opening may also include a synopsis of why you are a top candidate for the position: Your position advertised on Monster is an excellent fit with my qualifications, as the enclosed resume will attest. My background includes 10 years of success managing international sales programs, top-ranked regions and Fortune 500 accounts. I offer particular expertise in the high tech sector, with in-depth knowledge of networking technology...

Body

Your letter's body contains the sales pitch. This is your chance to outline the top reasons why you're worthy of an interview. When writing the body text, keep in mind that hiring managers are self-centered -- they want to know what you can do for them, not learn about your life story. Demonstrate how your credentials, motivation and track record would benefit their operation. Review your top five selling factors (the ones you jotted down when doing your company research) and weave them into the body, perhaps as a bulleted list. Back up achievements with specific examples of how your performance benefited current and former employers. Precede your bulleted list with a statement such as "Highlights of my credentials include:" or "Key strengths I offer include:." Keep your letter positive and upbeat. This is not the place to write a sob story about your employment situation. Put yourself in the hiring manager's shoes -- would you call yourself in for an interview?

Closing Paragraph

Your final paragraph should generate a call for action, so express your strong interest in an interview and state that you will follow up soon to confirm your resume was received and discuss the possibility of meeting face-to-face.

Complimentary Close and Your Name

End with a professional close such as "Best regards," "Sincerely" or "Respectfully yours."

Example:

Date
(space after date)

Hiring Manager's Name
Company
Address
City, State ZIP
(space after address)

Dear Name:
(space after salutation)

Opening
(space between paragraphs)

Letter Body
(space between paragraphs)

Closing
(space after closing)

Respectfully yours,
(two to three spaces to leave room for signature)

Your Name

Enclosure: Resume
(Include any enclosures that are being sent with cover letter. This could be application, resume, letters of reference, work sample...etc – this would be addressed in your cover letter)

Sample #1: Job

[Date]

Ms. Kelly Williams
Vandelay Industries
1877 W. Montana Avenue
Boston, MA 02129

Dear Ms. Williams,

I would like to apply for the position of Junior Analyst, as posted in the career bulletin at Boston University. This spring I will graduate from Boston University with a bachelor's degree in economics, and a minor in French. My goal is to pursue a career in management consulting for the telecommunications industry, with an emphasis on international development.

To this end, I have spent the past year interning for Sagitay Incorporated, a Boston-based consulting firm that specializes in the field of telecommunications. My internship has primarily focused on mergers and acquisitions; my main project has been devising viable reorganization strategies for the telecommunications arm of U.K.-based Synergy Incorporated.

Prior to my internship with Sagitay, I worked in the international services division at A.T. Kearney, where I was involved in the expansion of telecommunications giant Proteus into the European market. That internship developed my interest in telecommunications, as well as utilized my French language skills.

I read in the January 2001 issue of Fortune magazine that Vandelay is looking to broaden their base of international and telecommunications clients. I feel that my professional experience and educational background could contribute to your firm's goals of expansion and growth.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and discuss the position available. Please let me know if you have any questions or would like to see some work samples. You can reach me by phone at (444)536-1212 or by email at perickson@email.com.

Thank you for taking the time to consider me for this position.

Sincerely,

Paul Erickson

Sample #2: Internship

[Date]

Mr. Stephan Scheck
Innovation
6553 Carlisle Drive, Suite 300
Los Angeles, CA 90048

Dear Mr. Scheck,

I would like to apply for a summer internship position with Innovation. I learned of your company through the placement center at the University of Missouri. Currently, I am majoring in architecture at the University of Missouri and will receive my degree in May 2002. While I have a comprehensive architectural background, my emphasis is on rehabilitation and renovation.

Previously I held an internship at Smithers & Associates, a St. Louis-based architecture firm. While there, I used CAD technology to help design floor plans for a multi-level retail space. I also used the drafting techniques I learned on the Digital Terrain Modeler (DTM) to assist on the redesign of a movie theater in downtown St. Louis. This could be of interest to you, as I recently read on your website that Innovation will be renovating three entertainment venues in the coming year.

I would like the opportunity to meet with you to discuss any internship openings you might have. Please let me know if you have any questions or would like to see some work samples. You can reach me by phone at (444)536-1212 or by email at cwatkins@email.com.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully yours,

Chandra Watkins