How to Write a Winning Cover Letter

Whenever you mail a resume or application to an employer, it should be accompanied by a cover letter. However, cover letters are not necessary when you present your resume to an employer you do not have an appointment to see, or when presenting your resume at a career fair such as CAREER EXPO.

The cover letter is often the first contact you have with a prospective employer. Its purpose is to create a favorable, professional impression while you introduce your background and interest in employment opportunities. It is called a "cover" letter because you always put it over your resume, and fold them together to go into one envelope. It is also used to "cover" the key elements of your background that you want an employer to consider. Keep the following points in mind as you prepare your cover letter:

- The cover should be typed neatly on a single page of stationery that matches the paper of your resume.
- Fold them together and mail in a matching envelope or, because employers are increasingly scanning resumes, it may be more appropriate to send your cover letter and resume unfolded in a large envelope.
- Address the letter to a specific individual. The SIRC office can help you locate contact names for various employers.
- Keep in mind that your cover letter is also a writing sample. Show the employer your best "simple and direct" writing style.
- Include the following information in your letter:
  - How you learned of the opening (or why you are writing)
  - What special elements of your education or experience would enable you to do an outstanding job
  - What attracts you to this particular opportunity
  - What action you would like the employer to take in response to your letter

Have someone read over your letter for content and style.
Sample Cover Letter Format

Your Address
Date

Employer's Address:
(Use individual's name, if possible)
Dear: ____________________

First Paragraph: State the reason you are writing, explain the type of work you are interested in, and indicate how you learned about the employer and/or the specific opening.

Second Paragraph: Be specific about why you are interested in the position. Briefly summarize some of your strongest qualifications to do the work. Remember to consider this from an employer's point of view. Show what you have to offer the employer; don't merely daydream about what the employer can offer you.

Closing paragraph(s): Refer the reader to the resume (or application form) you are enclosing. Declare your interest in an interview and offer to provide further information upon request.

Sincerely,

Signature
Your name (typed)
Enclosure
Sample Cover Letter Format

125 Oak Street
Blokefield, Kentucky
January 2, 20XX

Mr. Jake T. Matuza, Director
Voguefoods, Inc.
1725 East Canton Street
Backwater, Kentucky 48885

Dear Mr. Matuza:

Recently I spoke with your Director of Food Services, Gordon Burger. He informed me of your intention to implement a more health-conscious food program at Voguefoods, Inc., and suggested I contact you. My credentials in the food science industry would enable me to successfully promote the growth of such a program.

In the spring of next year, I will be receiving a Master's Degree in Hospitality Business from Michigan State University. Over four years of work experience in the field of food service follows me in addition to my degree. This opportunity has familiarized me with diet therapy, food chemistry, menu planning and food administration.

The American Institutions Food Service Association recently recognized me for my achievements in menu planning with the Hilton Hotels Corporation. I am health-conscious and enjoy working closely with others. I believe that I could make a significant contribution to your organization.

I have enclosed a resume for your review. I would like the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how I might be able to promote the growth of a nutritional food program at Voguefoods. I will call you on Monday, January 16, to determine your interest and, if appropriate, to arrange for a personal meeting.

I am looking forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

(Signature)
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