

The Lincoln University

Writing Cover Letters

Application letters give life to an application that would otherwise be just a collection of impersonal facts. Your cover letter is your chance to give your employers a glimpse of your personality, life experiences, and future goals. To succeed in this endeavor, you should:

- Show how you are different from other applicants
- Show seriousness and maturity
- Show a match between you and the organization you are applying to join
- Show that you can think and write clearly

The purpose of your cover letter is to make your reader interested enough to read your résumé.

During your research, find out the name, title, and department of the person you are writing to. The more you can learn about the organization, the better you'll be able to capture the reader's attention and convey your desire to join the organization.

Always try to avoid phrases such as "To whom it may concern" and "Dear Sir." Try to avoid using gender-biased phrases. Try to find out the name of the person to whom you will direct your letter and use the person's last name followed by "Dear."

If not possible, at least find out the job title of the person who will be reviewing your letter and résumé or the department to which it will be directed.

Ex. You can say, "Dear Committee Members," "Dear Sales Manager," or "Dear Head of Advertising."

The AIDA Approach

Follow the AIDA approach when writing your application letter. First, grab your readers' attention; raise their interest in knowing more about you. Then **Increase** their **Desire** by showing what you have to offer; and finally, request **Action**: the interview.

Always try to emphasize your reader's interest before showing how you can satisfy the organization's needs.

Focus on the "you" attitude and show how you can serve your employer.

The Opening Lines: Attention

Your opener is probably the most important line in your letter....it's the hook that gets your reader interested in reading on. Think about it this way: "If they don't read past the first few lines and with some degree of interest, all the work I've put in my letter and résumé will have been for nothing."

So make your opening stand out and grab your reader! Your purpose here is to set yourself apart from the bulk of applicants.

You can start with a question to demonstrate an understanding of the organization's needs. Or use a catch-phrase opening to capture attention, especially if the job sought requires ingenuity and imagination.

Ex. "Are you looking for a motivated and dedicated graphic designer whose main goal is to be innovative and hard working? Are you looking for a professional who can take your company's designs to a new level that exceeds all expectations? If you are looking for this creative professional, please consider me as a member of your designing team."

However, if you are writing a solicited application letter in response to an announced job opening, you can start by identifying the publication in which the ad ran, and then describe what you have to offer.

Interest and Increasing Desire

The middle section of an application letter should

- Summarize your relevant qualifications
- Emphasize your accomplishments
- Suggest desirable personal qualities
- Justify salary requirements (without actually stating the salary you expect)
- Refer to your résumé

When writing a solicited letter responding to a help-wanted ad, discuss each requirement specified in the ad. If you are deficient in any of these requirements, do not mention your weaknesses, just focus on stressing other solid selling points to help strengthen your overall presentation.

Also, stating that you have the necessary requirements for the job is barely enough to convince the reader, so back up assertions of your ability by presenting evidence. Cite one or two of your key qualifications; then show how you can effectively put them to use.

This section of the letter also presents evidence of a few significant job-related qualities. It should demonstrate:

- Your diligence and hard work
- Your ability to learn quickly, handle responsibility, and get along with people

Toward the end of this section, refer the reader to your résumé. You can do that by citing a specific fact or general point covered in the résumé.

Action

In your closing paragraph, ask for an interview and make it easy to arrange by stating the phone number and the best time to reach you, or, if you wish to be in control, you can mention that you will follow up with a phone call in a few days.

It is crucial that you refer to your strongest selling point and, if desired, your date of availability.

Once you have proofread and edited your application letter, have as many people as possible review it and give you feedback. This is always helpful. Then mail it out with your résumé promptly, especially if your letter has been solicited.

Here is an example:

After you have reviewed my qualifications, could we discuss the possibility of putting my marketing skills to work for your company? Because I will be on spring break the week of March 8, I would like to arrange a time to talk then. I will call in late February to schedule a convenient time when we could discuss employment opportunities at your company.



Figure 1. Cover Letter

203 Elmwood Avenue
San Jose, California 10462
910-642-7869

April 22, 2000

Sara Costanza
Personnel Director
Liberty International, Inc.
Lansdowne, Pennsylvania 24135

Dear Ms. Costanza:

Please consider my application for a junior management position at your Lake Geneva resort. I will graduate from San Jose' College on May 30 with an Associate of Arts degree in Hotel/Restaurant Management. Dr. H.V. Garlid, my nutrition professor, described his experience as a consultant for Liberty International to me and encouraged me to apply.

For two years, I worked as a part-time desk clerk, and I am now the desk manager at a 200-unit resort. This experience, combined with earlier customer relations work in a variety of situations, has given me a clear and practical understanding of customers' needs and expectations.

As an amateur chef, I know of the effort, attention, and patience required to prepare fine food. Moreover, my skiing and sailing background might be assets to your resort's recreation program.

I have confidence in my hospitality management skills. My experience and education have prepared me to work well with others and to respond creatively to changes, crises, and added responsibilities.

Should my background meet your needs, please phone me any weekdays, after 4 p.m. at 214-316-2419.

Sincerely,

James D. Purdy

Enclosure

References

Bove'e, Courtland L., John V. Thill and Barabara E. Schatzman. *Business Communications Today*. "Chapter 17: Writing Résumés and Application Letters."
7th ed. USA: Prentice Hall, 1997. Print.