

# COVER LETTER GUIDELINES

NDSU Career Center • 306 Ceres Hall • 701.231.7111 • www.ndsu.edu/career

*"A cover letter offers you a chance to present yourself in a way that will appeal directly to each employer"*

Source: Cover Letters! 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition by Richard Fein

*Getting Started...*

## DO:

- Send a cover letter with every application/resume- even if one is not requested
- Address your letter to a specific person- this may take research
- Indicate what position you are applying for, and how you became aware of it
- Use business letter format
- Be concise on one page
- Print letter on the same type paper as your resume, using the same font
- Tailor the letter to the job/company you are applying
- Show appreciation to the employer for reviewing your application
- Have your cover letter critiqued by the Career Center

## DON'T:

- Use clichés or slang
- Forget to check spelling and grammar
- Discuss salary requirements or history
- Include personal information such as age, gender, marital status or a picture
- Assume all females are Mrs. -**Always** use Ms. when addressing a letter to a woman.

Employers have needs to be filled. Focus your letter on what you can do for the employer, not what a great opportunity this would be for you.

Keep your document warm and conversational, but avoid being too familiar.

## THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF A COVER LETTER: Why a resume just isn't enough

Not only is a cover letter expected by an employer, it is an excellent way to bridge the gap between your skills and the job you are pursuing. A cover letter can tell an employer about your motivation, ability to communicate clearly in writing and demonstrate enthusiasm.

### CONTENT

- As with any business or professional letter, the cover letter must have a beginning, middle and end. A cover letter should be one page in length, and have 3-5 paragraphs.
  - Beginning paragraph: State the purpose of letter- include the position you are applying and how you learned of it. Do not introduce yourself- sign name at the bottom
  - Middle paragraph/s: Express interest in the company; provide relevant information that parallels job description, skills and qualifications
    - Discuss past work or internship experience and personal traits
  - Ending paragraph: Ask for an opportunity to meet for an interview, give them your contact information, or state you will contact them (then do it!)
- When beginning each sentence, avoid using "I"; phrases such as "Throughout my education" or "My current position has provided me with the opportunity to..." are examples of appropriate introductions to inform the employer of your invaluable skills
- Avoid writing a form letter to send to multiple employers; each letter should target the employer for whom it is intended, identifying specific skills that you bring to that position
- Communicate relevant skills, and avoid the tendency to list every skill that you have acquired throughout the years; prioritize and provide examples of how you have developed a specific competency
  - This will add credibility to your marketing efforts by providing evidence
- Indicate your unique interests and/or provide a statement of commitment - Examples: "My commitment to providing quality service to customers as they pursue challenging goals..." or "As a professional, I strive to develop innovative ideas aimed at increasing the efficiency of the current operating system."
- Tell the employer how you are different from other candidates and why they need to bring you in for an interview
- Indicate what you would contribute versus what you wish to gain from the position
- Observe proper spelling and grammar- seek a critique of your cover letter and resume from an objective source
- A cover letter should accompany all resumes even if the employer does not request it

### FORMAT

- Whenever possible, direct your letter to a specific person; it is generally acceptable and encouraged to contact the company to secure this information if it is not provided
- Avoid using abbreviations when referring to various items such as dates and names of organizations. While professionals in your field may be very familiar with the organization listed, it is possible that the initial interviewer (often from human resources) is not familiar with the organization's function. *Ambiguous information will not increase your chances of securing an initial interview, which is the purpose of a cover letter and resume.*
- Choose a conservative font style (example: Times New Roman or Tahoma); the typical font size for a cover letter would be between 10 and 12 points
- Left justify each component of your letter - This makes it very clear for the reader.
- You may use the same heading on your cover letter as you do on your resume and reference sheet
- Do not center text on your page; 1" margins are generally suitable

## EFFECTIVE LETTER WRITING TIPS: They don't write themselves

Effective letters are as important in the job search as an effective resume. Employers read the cover letter before they read the enclosed resume. If you are serious about finding suitable employment, you will find it absolutely necessary to develop a strong letter-writing campaign.

*\*For consistency, all documents should be created on the same paper using the same font.*

Writing a letter that commands the attention of the reader is imperative. It is important to remember to always address your letters to a specific individual. Never address a letter to the Personnel Department or Dear Sir or Madam. If you don't know the name of the contact person, call the company or operation to secure this information prior to submitting your qualifications.

### ADDITIONAL LETTERS YOU MAY WANT TO WRITE TO AN EMPLOYER:

**Cover letters are also known as:**

- Application Letters
- Letter of Application
- Letter of Interest
- Correspondence

**Networking letter:** Not to be confused with a cover letter, a networking letter is one asking for an informational interview – not job interviews. A resume generally is not sent with a networking letter (but do take a resume if granted an interview). The purpose of an information interview is to gain information on a chosen career and to network with professionals in the field.

**Thank you letter:** This letter should be brief and express your appreciation for the interview and incorporate key points that were discussed during the interview. It is also an opportunity to reiterate your continued interest in the possibility of employment, and indicate your desire that your candidacy will receive favorable consideration. This type of letter displays common business courtesy and should be mailed as soon as possible. This is the only document that can be hand written on a card- nothing busy or cute!

The second occasion for writing a thank you letter would be after you receive an offer of employment. This letter should be designed to confirm your receipt of the offer, to indicate your appreciation and interest in the offer, and to inform the employer of the date in which you expect to make your decision.

**Letter Seeking Additional Information:** This type of letter may be written anytime. Most often it is written after a job offer is received and you need more information in order to make your decision. In writing this letter, always reinforce your interest in the opportunity and express your appreciation for the offer of employment.

**Letter Inquiring About Status:** After a reasonable period of time if you have not heard from the employer, you may inquire about the status of your application. Recap the history of your application, indicating dates of correspondence and actual interview(s). Be certain to express your continued interest in employment with this employer, and express your appreciation for the employer's cooperation. If you have other offers pending, it may be advisable to bring this topic to the attention of the recruiter.

**Acceptance Letter:** An acceptance letter is the most exciting letter of all to write! The purpose is to confirm employment and should include the agreed upon salary, start date and time and benefits offered. Thank the employer for offering you the job and reinforce their decision in hiring you.

**Rejection/Withdrawal Letter:** The key to this letter is to make certain you don't burn any bridges. Sometime in the future you may want to contact this employer about employment opportunities. Therefore, always be positive in rejecting the offer. If appropriate, inform the employer where you will be going to work or, if you are going to graduate school, where you have enrolled. You need not indicate why you accepted the other position or the salary you accepted. However, always express your appreciation for the offer and the interest and confidence the employer showed in making an offer to you.

## SAMPLE NETWORKING LETTER

Street Address  
City, State Zip  
July 28, 200X

Rhonda Palmer  
Vice President of Marketing  
The Aristos Group  
1234 Street Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Ms. Palmer:

Suzie Sunshine, professor at North Dakota State University suggested I contact you. As an Alumni of North Dakota State University, she thought you would be an excellent person to visit with regarding careers in Marketing.

Currently, I am a sophomore with a Business Administration major exploring career paths. Having interests in marketing, management, graphic design and media, I want to go into this semester with a more defined career path. Your expertise and advice would help me gain a better understanding of the day to day operations of the marketing industry.

I will call you next week to see if a meeting can be arranged at your convenience. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

(signature)

Your name typed here

## SAMPLE COVER LETTER

Use the same heading as your resume, or:

Street Address  
City, State Zip  
March 14, 200X

Ms. Carolyn Johnson  
Human Resource Director  
Midwest Engineering  
1234 Street NW  
City, State, Zip

Dear Ms. Johnson:

I am applying for the position of Project Engineer that was advertised in *The Forum* on Sunday, March 13. The skills I developed on my Cooperative Education assignment and my academic work give me confidence in my qualifications for this position.

The Project Engineer position requires a Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering which I will have upon graduation this May from North Dakota State University. My coursework has given me a broad spectrum of technical theory and applications. For the past two summers I have worked as an Electrical Engineering Co-op for Beta Corporation in Alexandria, Minnesota. My work included designing and installing equipment to improve electrical generation efficiency and plant safety. Consulting with engineers and technicians when developing designs and modifications allowed me to learn new techniques, test new theories and improve my presentation skills.

The Project Engineer position requires similar skills that I have developed working as a Co-op giving me confidence in my abilities to meet and exceed your expectations. I have enclosed my resume for your consideration and I look forward to an opportunity to discuss them with you in person. I will contact you next week to see if a meeting can be arranged

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

(signature)

Your name typed here

Enclosure

## SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

Street Address  
City, State Zip  
Date

Interviewer's Name  
Interviewer's Title  
Company Name  
Street Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Dr./Mr./Ms. Interviewer's Last Name:

It was a pleasure interviewing with you on (day/date) for the internship position of (position title). Spending that time with you has made me even more interested in getting real-world experience at (name of company) while I complete my degree.

What an opportunity! The position description you provided sounds like an exciting experience. You made it sound just like the kind of challenge that I am seeking at this early stage of my career. My strong academic background and my interest in (type of work) would appear to be an excellent match for your needs.

Thank you for the interview. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

(signature)

Your Typed Name

## SAMPLE JOB ACCEPTANCE LETTER

Street Address  
City, State Zip  
Date

Interviewer's Name  
Interviewer's Title  
Company Name  
Street Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Dr./Mr./Ms. Contact's Last Name:

It was certainly wonderful news when you called this afternoon to offer me the position of (position title) for (name of company). Please consider this letter my formal acceptance.

I am pleased to accept your offer at a salary of \$\_\_\_\_\_ annually.

As we agreed, my starting date will be (exact date) to enable me to finish a summer computer class that will enhance my skills for this position.

I also understand that I will receive full company pay and benefits during the 12-week training program and that I am considered probationary during that time.

Thank you again for offering me this wonderful opportunity, and let me know if I can do anything in advance of my start date to facilitate the paperwork.

Sincerely,

(signature)

Your Typed Name