Cover + Thank You Letters

Whether sent via email or written in a traditional letter format, job search correspondence such as cover letters and thank you letters are an essential part of your search for internships and jobs.

Well-written, targeted cover and thank you letters set you apart from other candidates by specifically marketing you as a candidate for the position for which you are applying.

Poorly written and/or generic letters convey the message to employers that your are not really interested. Remember, when you're competing against other qualified candidates, good writing and careful proofreading can make the difference in getting an interview!

COVER LETTERS

Good cover letters present a brief overview of your qualifications as they directly relate to the qualifications sought by the employing organization. Cover letters motivate the reader to want to learn more about you and, hopefully, invite you to interview.

Cover letters should never be (or even appear to be) generic or mass produced. Each cover letter should be tailored to the position for which you are applying.

In most instances, cover letters should NOT exceed one page!

There are three main parts to every cover letter:

Part One (the introductory paragraph)
State Your Case: Tell the reader why you are writing

In this section, provide specific information about why you are writing, including the position for which you are applying and how you learned about it. If you have been referred by someone, mention that person's name. You can also introduce your relevant qualifications, but save the detailed information for Part Two.

Part Two (the body paragraph)
Defend Your Case: Tell the reader why they should care that you are applying

Use this section to give examples/details of your education, experience, skills and other qualifications that match with the qualifications the employer is seeking (as outlined in the position description, job announcement, etc.). This section offers a preview of your qualifications and "teases" the reader to learn more about you through your resume. Not all of your accomplishments are relevant, so only present information that is relevant to the reader's decision-making regarding your application.

Part Three (the closing paragraph)
Close Your Case: Wrap up the letter and talk about next steps

Use this section to reinforce and summarize your most relevant qualifications, cite attachments (resume, writing samples, references, etc.), suggest a follow up meeting/interview; provide information about your availability; and thank the reader for her/his time.

Cover letters can be:

1. Sent directly in the body of an email (with your resume attached as a PDF document)

2. Type-written and formatted to fit cleanly on 8.5x11 inch stationery paper for postal mail delivery along with your resume, or

3. Saved as a PDF document in the same format described above and sent via email as an attachment

The Rule:

A cover letter should accompany your resume every time you apply for a position, whether the employer asks for one or not! It is a valuable marketing tool that should not be neglected.

Exceptions to the Rule:

(Yes! Just about every rule has a couple of exceptions, and this one is no different.)

- If you are applying for positions in some clearly defined technical fields where your qualifications can fully be assessed by the quantitative information in your resume, you may not need to write a cover letter. This could include some science, technology, engineering, math and computer science positions.

- If you are applying for positions in fields that require very limited written communication skills, you may not need to write a cover letter.

How can you tell whether or not you need to write a cover letter?

Ask yourself:

"If I get this position, will I have to be able to write well, persuasively, according to specific technical or industry standards, and/or in a grammatically correct manner as a part of my work?"

If the answer to that question is YES, you need to write a cover letter as part of your application.

THANK YOU LETTERS

Thank you letters should be written to everyone with whom you interview and sent within 1-2 days of your interview.

Effective thank you letters:

- Thank the interviewer for the time they invested in your interview;

- Reference some aspect of your interview or qualifications that was of particular interest or importance to that interviewer;

- Reinforce your qualifications for the position; and

- Express your continued interest in the position.

Thank you letters should NOT exceed one page.

Thank you letters can be

1. Typewritten on traditional 8.5x11 inch stationery or on 6x9 inch personal stationery (for formal relationships),
2. Handwritten on a note card and sent via postal mail (for somewhat formal relationships), or
3. Sent via email (for more familiar relationships).

The medium you use will depend upon the nature of your relationship with the person to whom you are sending it. The more formal the relationship, the more formal the thank you communication should be.

EMAIL, FAX OR POSTAL MAIL

When sending your application via email, you have three options. The right option to choose depends upon the position, the company, and the employer's preferences in receiving your information.

Your primary goal is to present your qualifications in the best possible format for the employer.

Your options are:

1. Cover letter in the body of the email with resume (in PDF) attached (RECOMMENDED);
2. Cover letter and resume (both in PDF) attached to the email as two separate documents;
3. Cover letter and resume (bundled together into one PDF) and attached to the email as one document.

In general, do not send your cover letter or resume as Word document attachments as the formatting can be lost or altered and your text can be edited.

If you are sending your cover letter and resume via postal mail, format the letter and resume for printing, print all documents on stationery paper and send via postal mail. Overnight or registered mail is usually not worth the added expense.

If you are sending your cover letter and resume via fax, format as you would to send via postal mail, but don't waste your good stationery paper. Plain white copier paper will suffice.

FORMATTING TIPS

For business correspondence via mail: Basic HTML or plain text without any formatting (as formatting can be lost or jumbled in transmission).

For traditional business correspondence: Full block letter format; that is, all dates, addresses, salutations, body paragraphs, etc. left-justified with no indentations.

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For PDF submission: Use standard fonts and check the integrity of your document after it has been converted to PDF format. Non-standard fonts are often substituted for standard fonts and documents with very narrow margins often convert into two-page documents when converted from Word to PDF.

Always check your documents after they have been converted to PDF format to make sure the formatting remained intact.