

COVER LETTERS

and other career correspondence

In this tipsheet, you'll learn about key components and strategies that make the biggest difference when writing a cover letter for an employer. Some examples are provided, as well as descriptions of other common career correspondences.

Your cover letter is your introduction

—it continues or starts a conversation about work or education

Just as you start a conversation by introducing yourself, a résumé should always be sent with an accompanying letter. Picture yourself sitting face-to-face with a person doing work that is interesting. What would you say? What do you want to ensure they know about you before you leave the room? Your letter is a chance to make a great first impression or continue a conversation that has already been started.

Your cover letter is something employers expect

—it shows your professionalism and helps them get to know you

Every time you submit a résumé, you should attach an accompanying letter. Even if they don't specifically request it, employers expect documentation from you that shows your professionalism and potential contributions. What better way to start than by using a cover letter?

Tailor your cover letter and use keywords

—it illustrates the connections between you and the work

Writing a unique cover letter for a specific role is known as tailoring your cover letter. Taking time to research the role and organization before writing your cover letter (and resume) can help you describe why you are a strong candidate for the position. To increase your chances of being invited to an interview, ensure that both documents clearly show the match between what the employer needs and what you can contribute. Word recognition software (such as ATS) may screen your cover letter before a hiring manager does. This software looks for words and phrases used in the role description that also appear in your cover letter. While it may be fun to vary your vocabulary, it is important to use the keywords and/or phrases from the role description to communicate your skills and experience.

Craft and review any correspondence with care

—that includes cover letters, prospecting letters, thank-you letters, and emails

Any correspondence you have with a potential colleague or employer will be evaluated. Use the same careful writing, editing and reviewing techniques with all the letters and emails you send. A great cover letter that is followed by an unprofessional, poorly-punctuated email can change your opportunities quickly—and not necessarily in a positive way.

COVER LETTER BASICS

Letters should be:

- Maximum one page (generally)
- Double-spaced between paragraphs and sections
- Body of text spaced well on the page
- Same typeface as in résumé

Your Name

Your name and contact information should appear at the top of your cover letter. Your address is optional. This header should be the same on both your cover letter and resume.

Date of writing

Name of recipient
Recipient's job title
Organization

A person's name is preferable. Avoid using gendered titles (Mr. or Ms.), unless you know their preferred pronouns.

"Full Block" format - justified on the left with no indents

Salutation (e.g. "Dear Vanita Gupta" or "Dear Hiring Committee"),

THE INTRODUCTION: In the first paragraph, tell the reader why you are writing. Essentially, give an indication of who you are (in context—not your name), what you want, and how you came to know about them. If you know it, include the position title for which you are applying. Note attachments/enclosures.

THE RESEARCH PIECE: Paragraph two distinguishes your letter from all the rest by telling the employer why you want to work for them. Let them know that you know what they do and why it matters to you. Show that you have investigated the organization and the work.

THE MATCH: In the next paragraph (or two), let them know why they should hire you. Highlight the major skills, personality traits and areas of knowledge and expertise that you have to offer, and indicate how you perceive your attributes match their needs. Include evidence of positive contributions and perhaps tell a brief story of when you have used some of the skills they require. Express yourself sincerely, and in a way that they can't wait to turn the page and read your résumé.

THE CALL TO ACTION: Emphasize your interest in speaking with them and suggest possibilities for follow up.

Sincerely,
Your Typed Name

For hard copies, remember to sign the letter after you proofread it. For digital copies, just type your name.

For hard copies, a minimum 1-inch margin on sides, top and bottom.

EXAMPLES

Here are some examples of each section of a cover letter. Although the initial example in each pair is fine, try the techniques suggested in the tip section and applied in the better part of the examples. By using specifics and evidence from your own experiences, you make your letter distinctive and may motivate the employer to contact you.

THE INTRODUCTION:

Initial: I am a third year Biology student at Queen's University and I am applying for the position of Summer Camp Coordinator at Camp XYZ that was advertised through Career Services.

Tip: Highlight skills in context of an example or story.

Better: As I worked my 23rd hour last week to help put the finishing touches on the Science Formal, a friend remarked that I must really love to organize. I realized that she was right. Whether it's working on a lab report during a Biology lab or arranging a canoe trip as a camp counselor, helping things run smoothly has been one of my consistent contributions. I hope this characteristic and experience will be helpful to the role of Summer Camp Coordinator, advertised through Career Services at Queen's.

THE RESEARCH PIECE:

Initial: Company XYZ is world-renowned and known for producing high quality aerospace products. With all the opportunities and exciting projects that exist, Company XYZ would be a great place for me to start my career.

Tip: Tell them why what they do matters to you.

Better: As a graduating engineer who has very strong interests in aeronautical engineering and a long-term reader of aerospace publications, I find Company XYZ to be very intriguing. I am very enthusiastic about military aviation with sound knowledge of aerospace concepts, including the new Joint Strike Fighter being developed by XYZ and the continuing evolution of the F/A-18 Hornet. I have particular interest in the development thrust vectoring technology after seeing several programs covering this field of propulsion. I hope to one day be a part of future XYZ aerospace advances.

THE MATCH:

Initial: I have a great deal of experience that would benefit Walk Home including work as the Assistant Director at Toronto Parks and as a volunteer with the Queen's Sexual Health Resource Centre. I also worked as a Queen's Gael during orientation last year. All these positions required sensitivity, tact, and the ability to deal with people from a variety of differing backgrounds.

Tip: Create a visual so the employer can see you doing the work.

Better: During the ASUS Orientation Week, I witnessed a student hit by a car. I drew on my safety training as a Gael and a longtime lifeguard and ran to the nearest blue light to call for help. Once the ambulance had arrived, I rushed to the Nerve Centre and alerted the Orientation Week Executive. This ability to work calmly in high-pressure situations is essential for a Walk Home staff person.

THE CALL TO ACTION:

Initial: Thank you for reviewing my qualifications. I hope to hear from you soon.

Tip: Make it easy for them to contact you.

Better: Thank you for reviewing my qualifications. During the week of February 18-22 I will be in the Toronto area and would be happy to answer any questions you have in person. You can also reach me any time via the email address above.

Career correspondence - More ways to make a connection

Networking Message

You might want to connect with people who work within fields that particularly interest you. Start with people you know personally and professionally then expand your search to include people you would like to meet. The purpose of these visits is NOT job search, but to learn about the day-to-day work. A networking letter is used to introduce yourself and request an opportunity to meet.

Prospecting Letter

Since 80% of work may not be currently advertised, an effective work search includes approaching organizations that are of interest to you. To do this, you will write "prospecting" letters. Although these letters are not targeting an advertised job, it is still important to be specific about your match with the organization and the work.

Statements of Interest

Statements of interest often form a part of a larger application package. You may be asked to write your statement in a form or as an essay with a word limit. Whatever format is requested, the key is to follow any specified guidelines carefully while capturing the reader's interest.

Thank-you Letter

Although the use of thank-you letters is advocated very strongly, most people still do not remember to use them. As a result, those who do, make a big impact. Thank-you letters can be very effective when in contact with prospective education programs or employers, interviewers/recruiters and people you have spoken to through networking.

For more information and examples of these types of letters, please refer to the [Queen's Best Cover Letter Magazine](#) and enroll in the "Cover Letter" module (check out the Career Prep Modules on our website).

In addition to cover letters, there are many other types of letters that you will find useful in your correspondence with prospective employers and education programs.

Be professional when using email

If sending an email, avoid the temptation to simply dash off a quick note. Have someone check all your correspondence to ensure that the grammar is polished and the text is error-free. Avoid the overly casual tone and lack of punctuation that pervades many emails. Use the same care that you would if you were writing an application or résumé. Leave a professional, lasting impression.

A clear and personal writing style is the natural complement to an effective set of interviewing skills.

-Howard Figler, The Complete Job-Search Handbook, (available in the Resource Area at Career Services)