

Conquering the Cover Letter



It's all about starting conversations

Your letter is your introduction - it continues or starts a conversation about work or education

Purpose of Cover Letters?

1. Making the match
2. Shows you are unique
3. Focuses on your qualifications
4. Provides an example of your writing
5. Conveys interest in the position

The Format of Your Cover Letter

- Introduction – why you are writing
- The Research Piece - shows you know what they do and that it matters to you
- The Match - indicate how your skills and attributes match their needs
- The Call to Action – Next Steps

Cover Letter Basics

Your Name
Street or PO Box
City, Province, Postal Code
Telephone
Email

Date of Writing
Name of recipient
Recipient's job title
Organization
Complete Address

Salutation (eg. "Dear Ms. Gupta" or "Dear Sir or Madam")

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, 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 an way that they can't wait to turn the page and read your resume.

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

Sincerely

Signature

Your typed name

An actual person's name is preferable. Check for accuracy and spelling

Letters should be: Maximum one page

Double-spaced between paragraphs and sections

Body of text spaced well on the page

Remember to sign the letter after you proofread carefully

"Full Block" format – justified on the left with no indentations and minimum 1 inch margins on sides, top and bottom.

Researching the Job Posting or Job Description

1. Analyze the job posting: What are the desired qualifications and skills required?
2. Company info from website: Type of company/organization (products, services, goals, mission, structure?)
3. Purpose and role of this position in the organization: Talk to company employees if possible
4. What additional criteria might be necessary to do that job well?
5. Contact Associations: Canadian Association Directory
6. Investigate job descriptions for your desired work: Career Information Area books; Career Cruising

EXERCISE 1: RESEARCH

What do you know about your job posting or job description?

Think of your target job postings and find key points about the role/position.

.....

My Research into the work

Qualifications/Skills Required:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____

Company Information/Values:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

Additional Criteria that might be helpful:

EXERCISE 2: MAKE THE MATCH

Give specific examples of how you make the match, where you acquired the skill and what accomplishments you have that would make you a good fit for the work.

Examples can be from summer jobs, course work, volunteer work, internships, extracurricular activities, research projects, sports, etc.

.....

My evidence of the Qualifications/Skills Required:

- 1) _____

- 2) _____

- 3) _____

- 4) _____

How can I contribute to what the Company Values:

Additional criteria I have that matches what the company is looking for:

Assessing your Story

- How do the actions in the story portray skills/qualities/values?
- How do your skills/qualities/values in your story relate to the prospective job opportunity?
- What aspects of your story make it memorable/unique?
- Are there any specific details from your story that were missing which would reflect positively on you?

Next Steps:

Borrow a book such as Best Canadian Resumes; Best Canadian Cover Letters; Vault Guide to Resumes, Cover Letters and Interviewing (browse the Career Information Area "Job Search" section for additional resources)

Tipsheets: <http://careers.queensu.ca/students/tipsheets-career-resources/tipsheets>

Accomplishments: Check http://www.quintcareers.com/job-hunting_success.html

Resume workshop: check the career services events calendar for dates, times and sign-up information

Resource: Queen's Best Cover Letters