

# JOB SEARCH LETTERS

Tufts Career Services

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## What are the different types of job search letters?

Most job search correspondence can be categorized as follows:

1. *Cover Letter*: a letter of application written in response to a job opening or internship
2. *Letter of Inquiry*: unsolicited communication to explore possible openings
3. *Thank you Notes*: follow-up communication after an interview or networking opportunity
4. *Acceptance Letter*: confirming your acceptance or rejection of an offer
5. *Networking Email*: asking for information or a networking meeting

## What's the point of a cover letter?

- *To customize your background for a specific job.* It guides the reader by summarizing the skills and experiences relevant to a particular opportunity.
- *To demonstrate your research, writing, and analytical skills.* It allows you to communicate your knowledge of the employer, industry, and career field.
- *To convey your motivation and professionalism.* It reflects your personality, enthusiasm, and interest in the position.

## Do letters need to be customized?

Yes! Effective cover letters are marketing tools and as such, they should be written with a reader's specific needs in mind. Where your resume is concise and standardized, your cover letters are customized. You may have one or two resumes, but you'll need to tailor a letter for *each* employment opportunity. Its quality can mean the difference between an employer's quick glance or closer scrutiny. Tempted to use a generic letter? *Consider this*: Recruiters say they typically spend less than 30 seconds skimming a candidate's correspondence. Make sure you quickly catch their attention with your carefully crafted and compelling communication.

Since so much recruitment is done online today, it is acceptable to send your cover letter electronically and should be sent both as an attachment and pasted directly into the body of an email. Regardless of the method, it should still be one page or less and maintain the same formality and quality as if you were turning in an important term paper. *Warning*: don't adopt the casual stream-of-consciousness of email!

## 8 easy tips for cover letters

- **Address a specific person.** A quick telephone call to an employer can help determine the name and correct spelling of your recipient. If you can't get this information, address the letter to "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Human Resource Manager." Another suggestion is to use a subject line in place of the salutation (i.e., APPLICATION FOR THE SOCIAL SERVICES POSITION.) Avoid salutations such as "Dear Sir," "Dear Madam," or "To Whom It May Concern."

- **Keep it brief.** Limit the letter to one page. *Remember:* a cover letter is intended to complement your resume, not repeat its content. Three to four paragraphs is sufficient.
- **Match yourself to the opportunity.** Effective cover letters are accomplishment-oriented and focus on specific skills and abilities. Rather than claiming to be "competent" and "qualified," cite examples and make an effort to link them to the job requirements.
- **Demonstrate your interest.** Show what you've learned about the organization and/or industry. This is where your research and networking will pay off. Where appropriate, use the vocabulary of a specific discipline or industry.
- **Write in your own style.** You can adopt a conversational tone as long as your writing is flawless and grammatically correct. Avoid overused statements such as "Enclosed please find my resume for your review." Use the active voice and powerful verbs for lively communication.
- **Put yourself in the reader's position.** Count the number of sentences that you began with the word, "I." Then edit! Downplay "I" and "me" and focus on the reader by using the word "you" as often as possible. Communicate what you can contribute to the reader's organization, rather than what you expect to get.
- **Pay attention to detail.** Employers value effective and careful communicators, and your writing skills are displayed in your cover letter. Grammar, spelling, or typographical errors will send you to the 'discard' pile. Ask an expert to proofread your letter for content, clarity, and correctness. *Tip for emails:* write in a Word document and then paste it into your email.
- **First impressions count.** The average employer receives over 200,000 letters annually from job applicants. Get yours noticed with these tips:
  - Type your letter using the same font as your resume. Keep it simple (e.g., Times New Roman, 12 point).
  - If you're using a hard copy, print it on the same stock of paper as your resume. White or off-white color is preferable.
  - Sign a hard copy letter with blue or black ink.

### **How do I follow-up after sending a letter?**

Successful job applicants follow-up their cover letters and resumes with a phone call or email within 5-10 days of delivery to a potential employer. If you can't reach the original recipient by phone or online, send a follow-up letter about the status of your application and expressing your continued interest.