

COVER LETTER

An often overlooked part of the job search process is the “cover letter,” yet a cover letter is more than likely the first contact you will have with a potential employer. The first impression you create may determine whether or not an organization even glances at your resume. While many job searchers spend considerable time and effort on their resume, surprisingly few dedicate a similar amount of time to the cover letter. In today’s competitive job market, numerous employers have reported that they find well-written cover letters to be more important to granting interviews and offering jobs than the resume.

There are two types of cover letters:

- ◆ **Letter of Application** - This is written when you are applying for a specific position that you know is open within an organization.
- ◆ **Letter of Inquiry** - This is written when you are contacting an organization to inquire about possible openings and you are uncertain if any exist.
 - * Either of these two types can also be a referral letter. This means that someone suggested you write a letter to an organization and include his/her name. *Remember*, make sure you have permission to use that person’s name, and make sure that that person’s name will mean something to the organization which receives your letter.

CONTENT OF A COVER LETTER

Regardless of what type of cover letter you are writing, the basic format is the same. Use the formula below as a general guideline for all cover letters.

I. Opening paragraph

- ◆ Expresses your interest in the organization and focuses on it
- ◆ Tells where you heard about the organization or position
- ◆ Demonstrates your knowledge of the organization or field

II. Body

- ◆ Highlights a few major points of your background
- ◆ Focuses on you
- ◆ Illustrates how your qualifications match their needs

III. Closing

- ◆ Summarizes how you would fit the organization
- ◆ Requests action. Asks for an interview or an application
- ◆ Suggests a date that you will call to follow up (Make sure to follow up during that period.)

GUIDELINES

- ◆ Personalize each letter. Think in terms of quality and not of quantity. Show the employer you have done research on the company and are not just doing a mass mailing. Generic or form letters have less chance of getting you an interview.
- ◆ Keep it short and to the point. Remember, an employer may have to read through hundreds of cover letters and doesn’t want to read a tremendously wordy letter.
- ◆ Make sure your letter has no grammar or spelling errors. Employers regularly mention that these errors create a poor first impression.
- ◆ Try to address your letter to a specific person, even if it means calling the organization to get that information. Avoid opening phrases, such as “To whom it may concern,” “Dear Gentlemen” or “Dear Sirs.”
- ◆ Avoid being overly humorous or pushy.
- ◆ Keep a copy of all your cover letters for future reference.

**For additional assistance with cover letters, visit the
Career Services Office, Penland Building, Room 107.
<http://www.usca.edu/careers>**

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SAMPLE LETTER OF INQUIRY

555 Pacer Drive
Aiken, SC 29803
September 21, 2008

Ms. Jody Peterson
Director of Human Resources
ABC Corporation
4321 Main Street
Buffalo, NY 14216

Dear Ms. Peterson:

This letter is an expression of my interest in an accounting position with ABC Corporation. To maintain your standing as a world leader in accounting services, it is necessary to hire individuals who pay close attention to details. I understand this need for detail and the role it plays in effective accounting management.

My academic background and job experience have given me the skills to provide quality accounting services to your organization. Along with a Bachelors Degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Accounting, I possess two years of bookkeeping and general accounting experience. As an accounting assistant with the Gourmet Bookkeeper, I was responsible for various duties including processing account receivable and account payable information, coordinating cash disbursements and sales information and preparing tax forms. Each of these areas requires attention to detail. Another strength is my proficiency with computers. I have experience with many programs, such as WordPerfect, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Quicken, and the ACCPAC Accounting Program.

Besides prior job experience, I bring a constant motivation to develop professionally. Training sessions I have attended include Stephen Covey's "Seven Basic Habits of Highly Effective People" and Tom Peter's "Toward Excellence." I also attended a regional conference for the American Accounting Association.

I believe my skills and experience make me an excellent fit for your organization. If I have not heard from you by November 7, I will call you to discuss my candidacy. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Anita Job

SAMPLE LETTER OF APPLICATION

555 Pacer Drive
Aiken, SC 29803
April 5, 2008

Dr. Barry Smart
Superintendent of Schools
Atlanta Public Schools
P.O. Box 999
Atlanta, GA 30303

Dear Dr. Smart:

I was pleased to read of your opening for a fifth grade position which appeared in the *Augusta Chronicle*. Atlanta Public Schools has a tremendous reputation in the education field due to your innovative approach to team teaching and commitment to utilizing technology in the classroom. Realizing the importance these areas play in an ever-changing academic environment, I believe I would be a strong candidate for this position.

During my four years of teacher training, I have been involved in many new and exciting educational programs. While student teaching at Lincoln County Public Schools, I utilized cooperative learning, team teaching and, whenever possible, hands-on approaches. Additionally, I supervised an after school study group to assist students with reading and writing skills. One area in which I have had a great deal of experience is computers. Along with being familiar with various types of educational software, I have attended several conferences on using computers in the classroom and have also utilized computers when tutoring summer science students.

My skills and experiences have prepared me to be a contributing member of the Atlanta Public Schools. I welcome the opportunity to be considered for a faculty position in a district which represents such high educational standards. I will contact you the week of April 21 to further discuss my candidacy. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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