

# WRITING COVER LETTERS

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Cover letters are marketing tools used to create interest in you as a candidate for jobs and/or internships and are an important part of the application process. Your cover letters must be unique to each organization and will accompany every resume and/or application you submit. The goal is to motivate the recipient to review your resume and ultimately invite you for an interview. A good letter will clearly demonstrate how you fit with the particular organization and position to which you are applying.

While it may seem like a lot of work, it is imperative that each letter is tailored to the individual position to which you are applying - just ask alumna and employer **Gail Katz Dukas, BA Creative Writing, 1991 and Chief Operating Officer, Dukas Public Relations, Inc.** In a recent letter to the CDC, Ms. Katz Dukas outlines the many mistakes today's candidates tend to

make, ranging from carelessness to being too informal. "The cover letters and resumes that get my attention are those that are well-written (without typos), show that the writer knows exactly what my firm does and needs, and give me a sense that the applicant would become an asset to my firm ... attention to detail, good writing skills, enthusiasm, and a positive attitude are among the most important traits for success. I want letters/emails that demonstrate these characteristics ..."

## Main Types of Cover Letters

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**Letter of Application:** Used when submitting your resume for a specific position opening.

**Letter of Inquiry:** Used to ask about vacancies, get your resume read, and network. It is similar to an application letter, but begins with a statement such as "I am writing to inquire about employment" rather than "I am applying for a position . . ."

## General Formatting Guidelines

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- Address the letter to an individual, not "to whom it may concern." Make a phone call if necessary to get the appropriate person's name and title.
- Write in a professional, confident, and polite tone, but let your personality and enthusiasm for the employer and position come through. Avoid negative phrases such as, "Although I have never . . ." and "While I have not yet . . ."
- Proofread carefully and check for grammar, spelling and typos. Do not rely on spell check alone!
- Use the same paper you used for your resume. If you are emailing your application, you may attach the cover letter as a Word document, or (*very carefully!*) type it directly into the body of your email.
- Confine to one page, single space.
- If mailing, remember to *sign the original*.
- Use 11-12 point simple font – the same style you chose for your resume.

## Steps to Writing a Strong Cover Letter:

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1. **Learn about the organization.** What are its goals and mission? Pay attention to the language they use to describe themselves and use similar language when talking about yourself.
2. Review the position listing and **highlight important words and phrases.** Employers will tell you exactly what they are looking for. These are your clues – use them wisely!
3. **Consider skills you have relevant to the employer's needs.** These may be from a variety of experiences; it is up to you to "connect the dots" so the employer sees how and why you meet their needs.
4. **Write a draft that clearly spells out how and why you should be considered for the position.** Describe two or three experiences, accomplishments or skills that demonstrate your fit with the position. Be specific and provide examples to support claims. Avoid the temptation to copy wording from sample cover letters and don't repeat what is on your resume! Be sure to **highlight what you have to offer**, rather than what you have to gain! Also avoid beginning each sentence with "I" – it's a sign of weak writing skills!

## Additional Resources

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- Discuss your draft with a counselor during Counselor-on-Call (check CDC's website for days/times). It is best if you bring the position description along with your draft.
- *Cover Letter* presentations sponsored by CDC (check CDC's website for days/times)
- CDC's resource materials. Use [Career Library Resources](#) on the CDC website.

### Cover Letter Format

Your Local Street Address  
City, State and Zip Code  
Date

Mr./Ms. First and Last Name  
Title  
Name of Firm or Organization  
Street Address  
City, State and Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name:

**First Paragraph:** Indicate the reason for your letter and the position or field of work in which you are interested. If you are applying for a specific opening, state how you learned of the position (i.e. website, CDC's eRecruiting, referral).

**Second Paragraph:** Sell your qualifications for this position and this position only. Don't repeat verbatim from your resume. Explain how your academic background, skills and interests, work experience, and/or activities will contribute to their success. Refer to prior achievements in these areas. Communicate your enthusiasm for this type of work and that employer; show why you are interested in this particular employer by illustrating more than superficial knowledge of the particular firm or organization.

**Third Paragraph:** Occasionally it will be necessary to include another paragraph to explain unique situations not easily dealt with on your resume or to expand on your qualifications.

**Final Paragraph:** Refer the reader to the enclosed resume. Courteously indicate your interest in an interview. State if you will be in the area on a certain date and would like to schedule an interview if convenient. Offer to provide any other needed information to support your candidacy. Express appreciation for the employer's consideration.

Sincerely,

(Written signature)

Your name typed here

**LISA WATSON**

120 Lark Street  
Binghamton, NY 13902

Manager of Human Resources  
Citadel Broadcasting Company  
PO Box 414  
Binghamton NY 13902

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Lisa Watson and I am interested in the Sales/Marketing Consultant position. I have a BA in cinema and I have been very involved in my campus's Relay for Life. I feel your position is a perfect fit to help me meet my career goals.

As you can see on my resume, I have the skills necessary for this position, including science coursework and interpersonal skills. I also am a quick learner and am willing to go the extra mile to get things done.

I believe I am a good fit for your company. If you wish to schedule an interview, please call me at (607) 777-5555.

Sincerely,

Lisa

120 Lark Street  
Binghamton, NY 13902

September 10, 2010

Ms. Trisha Smith, Human Resources  
Citadel Broadcasting Company  
PO Box 414  
Binghamton NY 13902

Dear Ms. Smith:

Please consider this my application for the Sales/Marketing Consultant opportunity posted on Binghamton University's eRecruiting system. I am very interested in helping Citadel Broadcasting meet its clients' advertising needs through use of audio ads, podcasting, online contests and mobile marketing. Citadel Broadcasting's rank as third largest radio group in the United States is very impressive, and am confident I have the skills to contribute to Citadel's continued success and growth.

For the past two years I have been deeply involved in our campus Relay for Life event as part of the sponsorship committee. In this role, I solicited local businesses to educate them about the event and our cause, successfully raising over \$2000 in donations. In addition, the targeted marketing I employed for promoting the many programs I coordinated as a resident assistant led to an average student attendance 26% higher than any other resident assistant's average program attendance. These proven abilities in sales and marketing would be a great asset to Citadel Broadcasting in working with customers to achieve their marketing and advertising goals.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss my qualifications with you. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

*(signature here)*

Lisa Watson

**The Original Position Description:**

Citadel Broadcasting Company is looking for a self- starter, motivated, and goal-oriented individual to join our sales team! Outside sales experience is required.

Please send your cover letter & resume indicating where you heard of this opening and what position you are applying for.

**WEAK COVER LETTER**

This letter is clearly not written specifically for this position, is not formatted properly, and is generally BORING!

**STRONG COVER LETTER**

This targeted letter lists examples that are relevant to the position and demonstrates interest in this specific position/organization.

## Thank-you Letters

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The thank-you letter is an important part of the job search process that is frequently skipped. Omitting this step can be detrimental to your job search. Employers have on more than one occasion, eliminated candidates who neglected to thank the interviewer(s) for their time with a written thank-you. With that in mind, it is imperative that you send a thank-you within 48 hours of each of your interviews! Opinions on whether your letter should typed, hand-written, sent via snail-mail or email vary greatly, but all recruiters and career professionals agree on one thing: **THE THANK-YOU MUST BE SENT!**

Your brief letter should thank the interviewer for his or her time, briefly recap part of your conversation, and restate interest in the position for which you were interviewed.

### Sample Thank-you Letter

1256 Murray Avenue  
Johnson City, NY 13790  
November 2, 2010

Dr. Julia Edmonds, Director  
Technical Design Group  
Atlantic Engineering Systems, Inc.  
1220 Warwick Avenue  
Newport News, VA 23607

Dear Dr. Edmonds:

Thank you for taking the time to interview me for the Associate Engineer position on November 1<sup>st</sup>. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about your research and design work.

My enthusiasm for the position and my interest in working for Atlantic Engineering Systems were strengthened as a result of our conversation. I was pleased to learn how well my senior design project relates to current initiatives of AES. I am confident that I would make meaningful contributions to the position and the company.

I would like to reiterate my strong interest in the position and in working with you and your staff. Please contact me at 804-685-5555 if I can provide any additional information.

Again, thank you for the interview and continued consideration.

Sincerely,

*(signature here)*

Frederick Bryan