

Drafting Other Materials – Basic Cover Letter

One of the most important items to develop when you begin a job search is a basic cover letter. It's a good idea to draft a basic cover letter before you start applying for work. You'll adapt the letter to each position and application, of course, but you can start with a basic template.

Your cover letter will work along with your resume to introduce you to a prospective employer. It should briefly introduce you and make a case for why you would be a strong candidate for a particular position. Don't repeat all of your qualifications – your resume will contain the details. Just include enough information to show that you are well qualified and interest the reader enough to schedule you for an interview.

To write a basic cover letter, open with a greeting and address the letter to a specific person whenever possible. If you don't know a name, address it to the title of the person you hope will see the letter, such as "Dear Hiring Manager". Use correct business punctuation.

Example

Dear Ms. Ericson:

In the first paragraph, state the title of the job to which you're applying, and why you feel you might be a good fit. It's also sometimes useful to mention where you saw the job listed or who referred you, and it can be very effective if you can express why you are enthusiastic about the company.

Example

I was excited when my colleague Janna Navarro told me your company had an opening for a Data Analyst 2. I have admired the products developed by Torotoni Software for many years, and I would be very interested in joining your team. I am a data analyst with 3 years of professional experience and skills that match your needs, and I think I would be a strong candidate.

Next, build a case for your strengths as a candidate. Cite a few examples from your experience that match the skills they mentioned in the job listing; draw parallels between the listing and your resume and portfolio. Quantify your experiences when possible. However, keep this brief and focused. Pick some best examples and keep some of your work to discuss further when you interview.

Example

In my most recent role, I maintained and extended a mission-critical database and prepared a weekly report of changes and trends for stakeholders. I also worked with the coding and management teams to improve functionality of the database by 45%, advised on compliance issues, and supervised the work of 2 interns. I know SQL and Python, have intermediate proficiency in Hadoop and Apache Spark, and have used Tableau software for visualization.

Finally, close by restating your interest, say you hope to meet with them further, and then add a polite signoff.

Example

Thank you for your consideration. I would love to bring my skills to Torotoni Software, and I'm eager to discuss the contributions I can make to your team.

Best regards,

Olivia Torvald

On a practical note, you will want to save your letter in Microsoft Word format because many companies prefer it. You will also need a plain text version so that you can easily copy and paste the text into an online application form. It can also be useful to save it as a PDF file (although you'll have to create a new version every time you modify the letter). Have a friend proofread your letter so that you're not embarrassed or even eliminated because your letter is full of errors.

Writing this letter in a modular and straightforward way will make it easier to adapt later, since you will want to change some of the text to fit each role you apply to. Like a news story or a headline, writing clearly and concisely will catch the interest of a hiring manager; making a good case for yourself as a candidate will motivate them to read your resume and, hopefully, call you for an interview.

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