

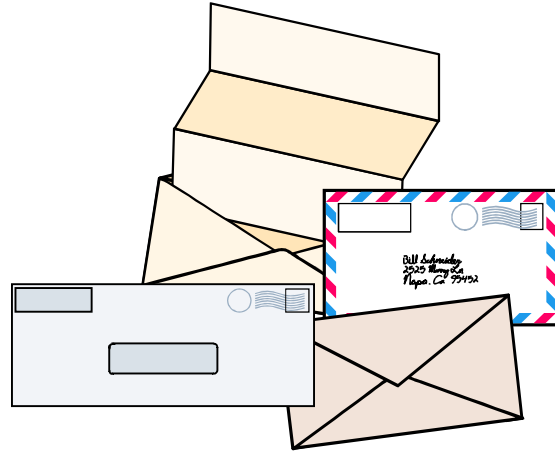
# ■ The Cover Letter

Millikin University Career Center, 1184 W. Main Street, Shilling 103, Decatur, IL 62522-2084  
217.424.6294, Fax: 217.362.6407

Whenever you send a resume, you should also send a cover letter. The letter is called a cover letter because it “covers” the resume. The purpose of the cover letter is to introduce yourself to the employer, state your interest in the organization and/or specific vacancy, draw attention to your resume and motivate the reader to interview you.

Whether you are writing to inquire about job vacancies or to apply for a specific job, your letter is **YOU** to the employer. Typically, the employer will scan the resume first then return to the cover letter to evaluate your writing style. Because it is so important, the cover letter deserves your best efforts. A neat, concise, well-written letter will improve your chances of getting the job you want.

There are basically two types of cover letters. The Letter of Application is used when applying for a specific position that is vacant. The Letter of Inquiry is used if you are interested in working for a particular organization and you are inquiring about potential employment opportunities. The two letters are very similar with just a few differences in the opening paragraph.



## ■ Guidelines For Effective Letter Writing

- **Use an Accepted Business Format**  
The most common format used today is the full-block style. The sample letters provided with this article are written in full-block style.
- **Personalize the Letter**  
Address the letter to a specific individual using his/her name, title (Dr., Ms. Mr., etc.) and position with the organization (Director of Human Resources, etc.). You may have to contact the organization to get the necessary information, but visiting the Career Center may also get you the name you need or a suggestion about where to find it.
- **Use Non-Sexist Language**  
If you are answering a blind advertisement, do not assume that the Director of Human Resources has a particular gender by opening the letter with “Dear Sir” or “Dear Madam.” “Dear Director of Human Resources” or “Dear Hiring Official” is appropriate.
- **Limit Your Letter To One Page**  
To ensure that your letter is no more than one page, write clearly and concisely, and avoid using unnecessary words and phrases. Outline your thoughts before you begin writing. You may set your margins at ½ inch (top, bottom, left and right). The smallest font size you should use is 9 point.
- **Use the “You” Attitude**  
When writing employment letters, job seekers frequently overuse “I.” Restructure sentences using the “You” attitude and eliminate over occurrences of “I” by using “my” and “me.” For example, “I have enclosed a copy of my resume” becomes “Enclosed you will find a copy of my resume.” As a rule of thumb, try not to use “I” more than twice per paragraph.
- **Vary Your Writing**  
Adding variety to your letters makes them more interesting and easy to read. Try to offset long sentences with short sentences. Using transitional words and phrases helps ideas flow together easily. Varying sentence structure also assists in creating an effective letter.
- **Use Attention Getting Action Verbs and Adjectives**  
When describing yourself and your qualifications, use adjectives and action verbs to add flavor and arouse interest.
- **Proofread for Errors**  
To proofread for spelling errors, read the letter backward--from end to beginning. To proofread for grammatical errors, proofread from beginning to end. Have someone else check your letter also.

## ■ Hints to Help You With Your Letters

---

- Attend a Career & Experiential Education Center workshop on Job Search Correspondence.
- Have a professional staff member review your letters.
- Use Access or Excel to develop an address database.
- Keep a copy of every letter you send and make notes about how and when you intend to follow-up.
- Apply labor saving tricks. Develop several basic paragraphs and modify them slightly to personalize each letter.
- Remember to sign your letters.
- Print your letters on quality bond paper. Use the same paper you used for your resume.
- Use a laser quality printer. Laser printers are preferable. Never use a dot matrix printer or send photocopied letters.
- Read the sample letters provided with this article. However, do not copy the sample letters to save time and energy. Write your letters yourself and know exactly what is in them. Make your work original.

# ■ Contents of the Cover Letter

---

Applicant's Address  
City, State Zip  
Date of Letter

Hiring Official's Name  
Title  
Organization  
Address  
City, State Zip

Salutation: (Address the letter to a specific person)

First Paragraph: State the reason for the letter. If you are writing a letter of application, state the specific position for which you are applying and indicate where you learned about the position (career center, news media, friend, employment service, newspaper). State why you are interested in the position. If you are writing a letter of inquiry, define the type of position you are seeking and explain why you are interested in working for this organization. While writing either type of letter, try to attract the employer's attention in an interesting yet professional manner.

Second Paragraph: Refer to your resume. Summarize your qualifications without detailing the information provided in your resume. If you know the requirements for the position, try to outline how your education and experience qualify you for the position.

Third Paragraph: Provide supporting evidence of your qualifications. You can do this by describing specific accomplishments or highlighting skills you have developed through work experience, course work, campus or community involvement, or other activities. Make every effort to connect your qualifications to the job requirements.

Final Paragraph: Establish a flow of action that produces a positive response. Suggest what you want the reader to do or what action you plan to take to keep the relationship alive and moving. Repeat your telephone number and offer any assistance to help in a speedy response. Remember, the most important purpose of this letter is to motivate the employer to interview you.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

Your Typewritten Name

Enclosure

# ■ Contents of the Interview Follow-up Letter

---

Applicant's Address  
City, State Zip  
Date of Letter

Interviewer's Name  
Title  
Organization  
Address  
City, State Zip

Salutation:

First Paragraph: Express appreciation and review the particulars of the interview. Tell the reader where the interview was conducted, what position you interviewed for, the day and date of the interview, and any other relevant information.

Second Paragraph: Express continued interest in the position and briefly match your qualifications to the position.

Third Paragraph: Provide support. Indicate your willingness to provide additional information to support your qualifications. End the letter with a friendly, professional close.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

Your Typewritten Name