



Ready Reference F-2 Cover Letter Tips

What is a Cover Letter?

A cover letter is a document sent with your resume to provide additional information on your skills and experience. The letter provides detailed information on why you are qualified for the job you are applying for and shows the employer why you're a strong fit for the position.

Cover Letter Do's

- Match the paper, heading, and font style to your resume.
- Limit your cover letter to one page.
- Address the letter to a specific individual. Call to request the name and title of the person responsible for hiring college graduates in your area. Verify the spelling of the name, and the gender if necessary.
- Write from the reader's point of view. Letters that shout "Me! Me! Me!" are not effective. Minimize the use of the word "I". Focus on the needs of the employer and how hiring you will lead to higher production and greater efficiency.
- Sound positive and confident -- your cover letter should motivate the reader to want to find out more about you.
- Write an attention-getting introduction that invites, informs, and entices.
- State the position for which you are applying and point out your relevant qualifications telling why you are uniquely suited for the job.
- Focus on key qualifications you wish to emphasize. Do not repeat the contents of your resume. Select relevant experiences, and give examples that back up the information on your resume.
- Add power by using facts, examples, or evidence. The statement "can initiate and accomplish tasks with little direction", has no credibility until backed-up with an example: "independently began operation of organization's website."
- Tailor your letter to the needs of the company and the requirements of the position -- how will the employer benefit by hiring you? Use the position announcement and company literature for clues about what to stress.
- Say good things about yourself, but paint an accurate picture. This is one of those rare occasions in which modesty will hurt you. On the other hand, if you exaggerate, even once, your reader will suspect everything else you wrote is also an exaggeration, or possibly even an outright lie.
- Inform the employer of your intent to contact him/her within the next few weeks -- make the follow-up call once the resume and letter have been sent.

- Edit ruthlessly and avoid passive verbs -- using active verbs will produce a shorter sentence
- A letter written in a friendly tone, as opposed to one that is stiff and formal, enables you to say things more clearly and briefly.
- See Ready References F-3, F-4, and F-5 for examples
- Make sure your letter is perfect -- no typos, misspellings, or factual errors.
- Have CEAT Career Services proofread the letter before you send it.
- - Make your letter look attractive. Look at the completed letter from a distance and determine if it looks balanced and centered on the page.

Common Mistakes

- Using a post office box for your return address -- post office boxes seem transient.
- Abbreviating St., Cir. Ave., and others -- it looks more professional to spell out the words.
- Forgetting the date or salutation.
- Addressing your letter "To whom it may concern."
- Addressing your letter to "Dear Sir." Many readers are women. If gender is unclear, or you have been unable to determine who will receive your letter, you may use something like "Dear College Relations Manager."
- Handwriting or typing over an old resume or letterhead to make corrections.
- Using a sticky note as a cover letter. Attaching a Post-it Note to your resume says, "This isn't important. I was too busy to write a real letter."
- Handwriting letters -- Brief thank you notes can be handwritten, if legible, but all other correspondence should be typed.
- Being too "creative" -- Avoid unusual fonts and graphics. Business letters should be conservative.
- Lengthy letters - the biggest marketing mistake is trying to say too much.
- Limit sentences to seven or eight words and the paragraphs in the body of your letter to four or five sentences.
- Not saying enough, or not sending a cover letter with a resume. Your cover letter is an opportunity to sell yourself.
- Fonts that are too small. Avoid using a smaller font so you can get more information on one page. Your letter may be dismissed if the reader has to work too hard to read it.
- Spelling errors, grammar errors, typos, awkward sentences, oddball phrases. Make sure you have someone else proofread and review your correspondence.
- Forgetting to include your phone number.
- No signature. Your name should be typed below your handwritten signature.
- Forgetting to enclose your resume. If you say you are enclosing your resume, make sure you do so. Even worse -- forgetting to put the letter and resume in the envelope. Employers report sometimes receiving empty envelopes.