

The Workplace

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A Fact Sheet

Highlights

The following suggestions will help ensure that your letter is neat, accurate and looks businesslike:

1. *Print the letter on white or off-white bond paper.*
2. *Allow for plenty of white space.*
3. *Keep the letter brief—three to five paragraphs that fit onto one page.*
4. *Proofread your letter carefully prior to mailing.*
5. *Follow a standard business letter format with an 11 or 12 point font.*

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Job Search 101: Formatting the Cover Letter

The purpose of the cover letter is to explain why the applicant is a perfect match for the job. The way the message or content of the cover letter is presented is equally as important. Your letter presents the prospective employer your work ethic, your ability to organize and prioritize, and to communicate effectively. After tailoring your information (i.e., letter content) to the employment opportunity, spend some time making sure that you use the letter format and writing style that is most appropriate.

The way your letter looks at the moment it is opened makes the difference of being considered or being eliminated. Let's start with the way the letter looks. Keep in mind that the hiring manager or screening clerk spends 10 to 30 seconds per letter before making a decision. Paying attention to the details of how the letter is laid out on the page is essential to making sure that your letter (and resume) are considered. Although there is no one format (i.e., the way the letter fits onto the page) for cover letters, your letter should be neat, accurate and look businesslike.

The following suggestions will help ensure that your letter makes the first cut:

1. Print the letter on white or off-white bond paper (i.e., the same quality as the resume) with no smudges.
2. Allow for plenty of white space so that the letter is easy to read. One-inch margins are adequate.
3. Keep the letter brief, not more than three to five short paragraphs, so that it fits easily onto one page.
4. Make sure all names, places, etc. are spelled correctly. Proofread your letter very carefully prior to mailing it. Do not rely on the spell checker on your word processor to catch all your errors; if possible, get a friend or two to proofread.



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5. Follow a standard business letter format for arranging the parts of the letter on the page. (See Figure 1 for an example.)
6. Use an 11 or 12 point font for best results.

The extra time and attention invested in writing a neat, well-organized cover letter will repay you with calls asking for interviews.

Figure 1. Format for a cover letter.

Place your address on the first three lines in the right hand corner. { _____

Skip one line, place date. _____

_____ } Place the addressee's address on the first three lines flush left, with one space above and below.

Dear {name of person}:

_____ } Organize thoughts into 3 to five paragraphs that clearly state your reason for writing. Sell your skills and expertise. Present the reader with a plan.

Sincerely, _____ } Closing should be followed by at least two spaces to allow room for your signature.

Jonathan J. Jenkins

Although a good resume is an essential element of the overall job search process, it will merely be considered an afterthought if the cover letter it is attached to is poorly written or filled with typographical, grammatical, and punctuation errors.

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Sources:

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