



Articles of Interest

Cover Letters & Thank You Notes

Anytime a résumé is sent by mail it must be accompanied by a cover letter. The résumé is an impersonal description of your qualifications, much like a product brochure. The cover letter is your opportunity to personalize your résumé and target your skills to that specific employer. The effective job seeker will not send the same résumé for each new job opportunity. Résumés need to be tailored for each specific situation.

Likewise, the same cover letter cannot be used in every situation. It also must be customized for each opportunity. There are a variety of cover letter formats, some of which are described below. Whatever format you use, be sure the letter conforms to acceptable standards for business letters.

Invited Letter

Use the "invited" letter whenever an employer has asked for a résumé. This is often in response to a want-ad or publicized job listing. This style focuses on matching your qualifications to the advertised requirements of the position.

Uninvited or Cold Contact Letter

Use the "uninvited" letter to contact employers who have not advertised or published job openings. The focus is on matching your qualifications to the perceived needs of the employer based on labor market research. This strategy requires that a phone or personal contact with the employer either precede or follow the sending of the résumé and cover letter.

Referral Letter

Use the "referral" letter to contact employers to whom you have been referred. The effective job seeker will receive referrals to many job opportunities through networking and informational interviews. The referral may be to a specific job opening (advertised or unadvertised) or to an employer who may not be hiring. In a referral letter, the individual who provided the referral is mentioned in the letter.

The Executive Briefing Letter

This is a variation on the traditional cover letter. This letter gets right to the point and makes life easier for the recruiter. This letter is often the weapon of choice because:

1. The initial résumé screener might have little understanding of the job or its requirements.
2. Your general résumé invariably needs customizing for any specific job. Overly broad résumés are like "one-size-fits-all" clothes; one size usually fits none.
3. Your résumé is somewhat out of date and you have to send something out immediately to take advantage of the opportunity of a lifetime.

First Paragraph:

State the reason for writing. Name the specific position or type of work for which you are applying.

Second Paragraph:

Explain why you are perfect for this position. Include something unique about yourself that would "benefit" the employer.

Third Paragraph:

Mention that your résumé is enclosed. Indicate your desire to meet with the employer and that you will follow-up with a telephone call or letter. Thank the employer for their time.

Résumé screeners like people who make life a little easier for them. Using this letter format increases the odds of your résumé getting through to the right people since there is usually no question whether or not you qualify for the job. If you are not sure what the job requirements are, do not forget the employment advertisements, position descriptions, phone conversations with the employer, and informational interviews.

Cover Letter Points to Consider ([View sample](#))

Whenever possible, address the cover letter to a specific person by name and title. This requires a minimum of research that will ultimately pay off in more interviews. The only time this may not be possible is when responding to a "blind ad" where there is no way to know the name of the company to research. In this case, send the letter to the title of the appropriate hiring manager, (e.g. "Production Manager," "Maintenance Supervisor," "Office Manager," etc.) Never use the term, "To Whom it May Concern."

- Consider signing the letter in blue ink. It implies the letter is original. The only other color ink to use is black. Never use any other color on the cover letter.
- Structure the cover letter to reflect your individuality, but avoid appearing too familiar, over-bearing, humorous, or cute. Keep sentences short and to the point.
- Keep the cover letter brief, usually no more than three to five paragraphs on one page.
- The paper and style of your cover letter should compliment your résumé. You might consider using the same paper stock for both your cover letter and résumé.

Thank-You Letters and Notes ([View sample](#))

"Thank you" is a powerful statement that is heard too seldom. Every thank you is an opportunity to restate your qualifications and to leave a fresh impression in the mind of the reader. Send a thank-you letter or note to employers and employment contacts whenever they have extended themselves in any way on behalf of your job search. At the minimum, a written thank you should be sent after all interviews.

Thank-you letters and notes should be standard tools in your job search. The thank-you letter should follow a standard business letter format while the note may be a simple hand-written note or card. Which to send depends upon the situation and your personal style.

Thank-You Letter Points to Consider

- When thanking a potential employer, restate your interest in the position and/or company.
- Be brief and to the point.
- Always plan your follow-up. Make it a point to tell the person when and how they can expect to hear from you in the future.
- If there are multiple people involved, such as with a panel interview, be sure to thank each person. Send one letter to each person or send a single letter to a key person for distribution. When sending more than one thank you, it is very effective to vary each one.
- Always send a written thank you to a person by name, not job title.