

# Creating a Professional Cover Letter

---

## What is a Cover Letter?

A cover letter serves as a tool for you to present yourself to an interviewer and make a favorable impression about your skills and personality outside of your resume. A cover letter can be more personable than a resume, and may serve to present your personality better than a resume. Often, an impressive cover letter will increase a potential employer's desire to more seriously read your resume. Conversely, a poorly written cover letter can discourage an employer from taking your resume seriously. The following information and format is essential to a good cover letter.

## Stationery

Print your cover letter and resume in black ink, on neutral colored bond paper.

## Spacing

Single space within paragraphs, double space between paragraphs. Text should not exceed four inches and three paragraphs.

## The Inside Address

Follow professional business protocol for address on left margin, just above the salutation.

## The Salutation

The cover letter should always be written and addressed to the person most likely to conduct the interview for the job. Avoid using "Dear Sir/Ma'am" or "Dear Gentleman." The salutation should be typed two spaces below the last line of the inside address. Leave two spaces between the salutation and the first line of the first paragraph.

## The Opening Paragraph

The goal of the first paragraph is to entice your reader to read further. Because employers will make quick judgments, a good opening line is essential. Try providing the name of a person you know affiliated with the company who recommended that you apply, or write something interesting about the company you are interviewing with obtained from an article, the news, etc. Showing interest in the employer instead of yourself is a good approach to take. Your opening paragraph should also state your objective regarding the position you seek.

## The Body Paragraph

This section should be devoted to telling the prospective employer why you are interested in a position with their firm. Explain briefly what contributions you can make and what qualifications, experiences, or personal qualities you possess that would make you a valuable employee. List your qualifications by using specific examples of your achievements to avoid vague generalities about your experiences or qualifications.

## The Closing Paragraph

Just as the opening paragraph is important with respect to encouraging the employer to read on, the closing paragraph must propel the potential employer to take action with respect to your application. In this paragraph, note that you are enclosing a resume and express your desire to meet in the near future the person to whom you are writing. Close the letter by thanking them for their consideration in order to express gratitude to the employer for taking time to read your letter. After the closing line, skip two lines, include a closing remark such as, "sincerely", skip four more lines, type your name and then sign the letter! Remember to list your address below your name if it isn't elsewhere on your stationery.

# Creating a Professional Résumé

---

## What is a Résumé?

A resume is a one to two page document designed to provide an overview of an individual's work experiences, extra-curricular activities, volunteer activities and other pertinent information used for presenting oneself to an employer when applying for a specific job. Resumes generally provide information in the following areas:

## Personal Information

In your personal information section include your name, address, phone number(s), e-mail address, and other information that may be required for the position you seek. Do not include any information that is not absolutely necessary such as birth date, health information, or marital status, which may, in some cases, detract from your employability.

## Education Background

Here you will provide information about your schooling and educational background. List the information in reverse chronological order, giving your most recent degree, or expected degree first. Provide the name of the institution, the location of the institution, the degree, academic emphasis, and the date of graduation or expected graduation. You may wish to include your GPA, educational honors, minors, or other distinguishing characteristics in this section.

## Work Experience

Just as with your educational information, begin with your most recent job first and recount backwards. List the name of your employer, organization or institution and provide your job title and a description of your job related activities. Describe your position using active verbs that best describe the nature of the activities of your job, using either past or present tenses for previous or current job positions. Remember, consistency is important. List any of the accomplishments or projects that provided value to your employer. Emphasize the aspects of your past jobs that may be appealing to a new employer. Try to make the most of all your experiences without sounding trite.

## Awards & Honors

This section should provide a prospective employer with an idea of contributions to your community coupled with any awards and honors resulting from your activities. Employers are often interested in the holistic view of you as a person. If you choose to provide information about serving a mission for the LDS Church, include it in this section or Community Service. Remember that your activities should be described in an unpretentious manner if possible.

## Additional Information

Prospective employers may want to know about some of your hobbies, life experiences, or specific skills not manifest by the information already provided. You could also include information on your typing proficiency, knowledge of computer programs, and foreign language proficiency. If you choose to provide information on some of your hobbies, travel experiences and personal interests, list them in a brief, specific manner.

## References

References are optional on a resume. If you do choose to list them, remember to provide all the pertinent contact information.

## Interviewing Tips

---

Many employers view the interview as the most important part of evaluating a candidate. If you are offered an interview, it means that the interview committee saw something they liked in your cover letter or resume. Everything you do and say is being evaluated so look and act your best to give yourself the best chance for getting the job. Follow these tips to increase your interviewing effectiveness:

- Be early to the appointment. 15 minutes is usually about right to make sure that you find the interview location without trouble, arriving at the office about 5 minutes early.
- Look and act professionally. For most positions, a suit and tie are appropriate for men and a dress or a blouse and dress slacks are appropriate for women.
- Bring an extra copy of your resume and cover letter. If appropriate, you can also bring examples of past work such as a portfolio.
- Be confident. Talk about your strengths and abilities with pride, but don't be cocky or conceited. Make eye contact. Let them you know you can do a good job.
- Be enthusiastic. Show that you are willing to take on the necessary job functions. If you are lacking necessary skills, show that you are willing to learn these skills to help you do the job.
- Know the position and BYU. Know the qualifications and requirements of the job and be prepared to show why you are the best match the position. Be familiar with the unique nature of BYU and know what it means to work for BYU.
- Practice. Don't be afraid to practice interviewing with friends or family on questions you think you might be asked. Think of examples of when you were at your best as it relates to the position. Practicing can help you be calm and confident during the interview.
- Be prepared with your own questions. Many interviewers will give the candidate the opportunity to ask questions at the end of the interview. Have a few good questions ready about the position responsibilities, opportunities for training or skill improvement, and other questions related to the job. Don't ask about how much you will get paid.
- Follow up. Be sure to ask about what will happen next in the hiring process. Should you call to follow up, or will the department contact you about the next step?
- Through proper preparation and conduct, you can be at your best during the interview and give yourself the best chance for success.

## Examples of Good Questions to Ask in an Interview

---

The questions below will help you to find out more about the position and if it is a good fit for you. These questions might also help you to think of other good questions.

- Can you explain how you let someone take a project and run with it?
- How (and how often) do you deliver feedback? Can you provide examples?
- Please explain your department's career development. What might I expect after, say, three years of excellent performance?
- What do you see for this company in the future - particularly as it might impact on career opportunities?
- What would I be expected to accomplish in the job we are discussing?\*
- If I were to fill this job, can you tell me what your expectations are for the incumbent in this position?\*
- What opportunities for advancement are typically available to people in this position?
- Can you tell me why this position is vacant?
- How does this position fit into the organizational structure?
- How would you describe the management philosophy of this company?
- What are this department's most important current projects?
- How much autonomy would I have in this job?
- How many subordinates would be under my direct supervision? Can you tell me something about these people?
- Will you please tell me about the person I would report to and other key people I would be dealing with?

\*Note: If you can weave these questions into an early segment of the interview, chances are you will learn what is important to the interviewer; you can then tailor your presentation accordingly.

*The Perfect Interview - How to get the job you really want* By John D. Drake