

# WRITING YOUR COVER LETTER

**BUSINESS LETTERS IN GENERAL** Because business letters come under the general heading of formal writing, there are a few rules to follow in determining their construction and content. The general letter format shown on the next page is a simple block format that is appropriate for most business letters. Follow the spacing shown, and indent paragraphs or not as you wish.

The writing style should be formal, so contractions are rarely used, but don't make it so formal that it sounds stilted or unnatural. Resist the temptation to shift into "business-ese" with phrases like "I appreciate your kind attention to this matter." Keep it simple, clear and concise.

Know what you want to happen as a result of your letter, and be sure that your point is clearly made. Do you want an interview? Ask for it. Are you going to do something (make a phone call, for example) to make it happen? Say what you'll do and when you'll do it. Be sure that both you and the reader know what is to happen next.

**COVER LETTERS** Cover letters are used to catch a prospective employer's attention, to set the reader up for the enclosed resume. They usually convey three basic points:

- What you want
- What you have to offer in return
- What you're going to do about it

**In the first paragraph**, state the position or kind of work you're interested in, either by job title or in descriptive functional terms. Examples: market research and analysis; applications programming; student activities and development. Present yourself as an interested, motivated applicant.

**In the second paragraph**, summarize the benefits and abilities you have to offer. Here you'll rely on your research and knowledge of the organization and the work for which you're applying, and present a persuasive body of information which shows you to be a well-qualified applicant. Think in terms of the employer's needs, and show that you have the education, experience and/or skills to help meet those needs. Refer to your enclosed resume, and point out that it shows more than one kind of preparation or qualification: "In addition to my studies in mathematics and statistics, I have taken courses in business and marketing, and have completed an internship in market research in a pharmaceutical firm.

In some cases, this section of the letter may be two paragraphs, presenting for example your technical preparation on one hand, and your motivation or philosophical position on the other hand. Teacher candidates often use this format. You may also want to include a bulleted list of three or four outstanding qualities or features of your qualifications.

**In the third paragraph** (or third section), state the appropriate action that you will take to move your application along. Example: You would welcome the opportunity to talk with the employer about a career position in \_\_\_\_\_, and will telephone his or her office early next week to request an interview. If possible, specify the area of the firm or its operations that you're particularly interested in. If you're applying for a position in a distant city, you might say when you'll be in the area, and that you'll telephone at that time to request an interview. This is not the time to be comfortably passive, as in "You may telephone me at the number on my resume to arrange an interview." Even though it may be uncomfortable to do, bring the action to the employer by making the first contact. If you can't get past the secretary, at least be sure that the recipient of the letter knows that you've called, as you said you would.

Because cover letters are tailored to the needs of the employer, they must be written individually rather than mass-produced. Be sure that each letter is addressed to the person with whom you want an interview; call and get the correct name and title if you're not sure.

First impressions last; make yours a good one. Because your letter will likely be the first example of your work that the employer sees, be sure to proofread your letter carefully, or better yet have someone else read it. If you use a computer printer, be sure it's letter quality (laser or ink jet if at all possible). Use good bond paper, the same paper for both letter and resume (is the watermark right side up when it's printed?), and see that the envelope matches as well.

## General Letter Format

Your street address  
City ST Zip  
Date

(Four spaces down)

Name  
Title  
Organization  
Address  
City ST Zip

Dear Mr. or Ms. Whoever:

**WHAT YOU WANT:** Come to the point . . .if you're asking for something, here's the place to do it . . . be direct . . .try to avoid starting paragraphs with "I."

**WHAT YOU HAVE TO OFFER:** Provide information . . . support your request . . . be clear and concise . . .you have about 30 seconds of the reader's attention . . . make it count.

**WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN NEXT:** Be clear about what is to happen next and who will do it . . . avoid flowery phrasing . . . keep it simple.

Sincerely,

*(your signature)*

Your name (typed) (four spaces down)

Note: this is the simplest format: blocked, with your address block and the signature block on the center line. You may prefer to place them on the left margin, and to indent paragraphs.

## General Letter of Application

711 Easton Road  
Glenside, Pennsylvania 19038  
February 27, 2001

Ms. Jane Newman  
Coordinator of College Relations  
Allied Marketing Services  
1115 Market Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19210

Dear Ms. Newman:

In May I will graduate from Beaver College with a major in marketing, and plan to begin a career in market research. I would like to be considered for a position with Allied Marketing Services.

My resume is enclosed. In addition to my studies in marketing at Beaver College, where I maintained a 3.4 average, I have taken additional courses in computer science, mathematics and statistics. During my junior year, I completed an internship with Philadelphia Electric Company, where I developed a database for customer service records.

I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you about a career position with Allied Marketing Services, particularly in the Client Services department, and I will call your office early next week to request an interview.

Sincerely,

Mary J. Smith

## Letter of Inquiry (Step 1)

711 Easton Road  
Glenside, Pennsylvania 19038  
November 11, 2000

Mr. Philip R. Jones  
Coordinator of College Relations  
Allied Marketing Services, Incorporated  
1115 Market Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19210

Dear Mr. Jones:

In May I will graduate from Beaver College with a major in marketing, and plan to begin a career in market research. I am interested in Allied Marketing Services, and would like to learn about career opportunities in the area of market support services.

Would you please send me information about career opportunities with your firm?

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mary J. Smith

Note: First step in a two-step approach. Send this letter to a wide range of employers, review their responses, and write a follow-up letter (see example on next page) to those in whom you have continued interest. Begin this process six months before your employment target date.

**Follow-Up to Letter of Inquiry (Step 2)**

711 Easton Road  
Glenside, Pennsylvania 19038  
November 27, 2000

Mr. Philip R. Jones  
Coordinator of College Relations  
Allied Marketing Services, Incorporated  
1115 Market Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19210

Dear Mr. Jones:

Thank you for the information you sent in response to my letter of November 11.

After reviewing the descriptions of career opportunities with Allied Marketing Services, I am very interested in the position of marketing assistant. As my enclosed resume indicates, I have maintained a 3.4 average in my marketing major at Beaver College, and through summer work and internships have gained experience in sales and market research.

I am eager to talk with you about the possibility of a position as marketing assistant, and I will call your office early next week to request an interview.

Sincerely,

Mary J. Smith

Enc.

## Thank-You Letter

456 Wrightstown Road  
Granby CT 06035  
March 18, 2001

Mr. Harry P. Smith  
Manager of Human Resources  
Whitney Tool Company  
11 Forrest Avenue  
Hartford CT 06115

Dear Mr. Smith:

Thank you very much for granting me an interview yesterday. I enjoyed meeting you and the members of the Catalog Sales Division staff, and learning more about Whitney Tool and its products and operations.

I want you to know of my strong interest in a position with Whitney Tool Company. After speaking with Ms. Hardin about the goals of the Catalog Sales Division, I feel that my educational background in communications and my internship experience with The Budd Company have prepared me to make a significant contribution to the operations of the division.

The position we discussed would be an excellent opportunity for me, and I appreciate your giving my application careful consideration. Please call me at 203/653-3989 if you need further information in evaluating my qualifications.

Sincerely,

Beth A. Filler

Note: Write this letter within 24 hours after an interview.