

A cover letter is not a form letter.

**Each cover letter is specifically crafted
for a particular employer and
for a particular job.**

A cover letter provides employers with a quick overview of your qualifications, abilities, and personality. It is therefore important to spark an employer's interest by writing a superb cover letter to accompany your resume. The first couple sentences must capture attention. Work and rework your cover letter until superfluous words are eliminated. Every word must do a job, every word must count. A good rule of thumb: Do not exceed one page.

**Employers often make their first cut
based on the cover letter.**

Tips on Writing a Cover Letter

1. Personalize each cover letter.
2. Demonstrate that you know about the company or organization offering the position you are applying for.
3. Make note of any previous contact with the employer.
4. If you know a person who is also known to employees at your would-be employer, identify this person.
5. Identify the job you are applying for.

6. If you are responding to an advertisement, link your experiences and skills to the job qualifications listed in the ad.

7. Sell yourself.

8. Include a sentence stating your follow-up plan. Express your willingness to meet with appropriate employees. State when you will follow up by telephone. Be sure to provide your phone number and e-mail under your signature.

We look for evidence that the candidate likes to think radically and broadly and can follow through in depth. The applicant should show evidence of excitement for the research work done and for other areas of his/her education. Much of this is elicited from interviews; however, the candidate should strive to give indications of this in the resume.

David Biegelsen, Xerox

Sample Cover Letters

Earlier, you were advised to take steps that would attract attention to you as a job applicant. If you followed that advice, here is where it pays off.

Following are some example cover letters. Tom was a very good student with a GPA of just under 4.0; however, he apparently spent all his time studying. He took no electives of consequence. Nicole was also a good student, but as her cover letter shows, she did much more than get good grades. Compare the cover letters of Tom and Nicole:

- Tom does not know whether he is writing to a man or a woman; Nicole knows she is writing to Mr. Patterson because she has met him.

- Note typo (typographical error) in Tom's letter!
- While grades are important, they are rarely the deciding factor. Many job applicants have commendable grades. Tom says nothing in his first paragraph except to announce his GPA. Nicole links her academic experience with a particular division of the company and identifies a part of the work they do.
- Nicole has had experience in industry and she connects her experiences, both as a student and as an intern, directly with Bingo's interests; Nicole demonstrates her recognition that communication of technical subject matter is a challenge and that she has taken steps to communicate effectively.

**Don't go around saying
the world owes you a living;
it owes you nothing;
it was here first.**

Mark Twain

**Some see the glass as half-empty,
some see the glass as half-full.
I see the glass as too big.**

George Carlin

Tom's Cover Letter - Not good

Thomas Whipple
1281 Conway Road
Chesterfield, MO 63141

May 24, 2002

Human Resources
Bingo Technologies
462 Front Street
Kansas City, MO 64108

Dear Madam/Sir:

I am interested in the job opportunities at Bingo Technologies. I recently graduated with a major in physics from Washington University in St. Louis. I have had the full complement of courses required of a physics major and have a 3.94 GPA.

In my laboratory courses I have used various instruments to measure physical parameters. Often the output of the laboratory instruments went through an A/D converter so I have had some experience with computers. Through my experience I became interested in instrumentation and would like direct my knowledge and skills to the design and improvement of physical instruments.

I enclose my resume. I believe my knowledge and experience equip me to make a contribution to Bingo. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Thomas Whipple

Enclosure

Nicole's Cover Letter - Good

Nicole Jackson
125 Pearl Street
Laguna Beach, CA 92651
May 24, 2002

Mr. Marvin Patterson
Section Manager, Electric Measurement Division
Bingo Technologies
462 Front Street
Kansas City, MO 64108

Dear Mr. Patterson:

I enjoyed talking with you earlier this month about the work in your section. The problems you described concerning the design and development of test instruments in the Electrical Measurement Division were intriguing. I have used several Hewlett-Packard (now Agilent) instruments very similar to those you described. I would like to work in your group and I believe I could make a contribution.

I have just graduated from the University of Colorado with a Bachelors of Science in physics. In addition to the requirements of my major, I have taken two writing courses: scientific writing and creative writing. I enjoy the challenge of communicating technical topics to non-technical audiences.

As an undergraduate I worked as an intern at a small high-tech company, TLCC, Inc., for two summers where I worked closely with product engineers developing rf detectors. My responsibilities included testing and calibrating the detectors. I enjoyed my internship and I see parallels between my experiences at TLCC and the activities of your division. I believe my education, my work experiences, and my interests in instrumentation have prepared me to make a contribution to the Electric Measurement Division and to Bingo.

My resume is enclosed in which my internship is described in a little more detail. I would like to meet with you again to discuss the overlap between my background and your needs. I will contact you by phone later next week to discuss the possibility of an interview.

Sincerely,

Nicole Jackson
(440) 354 3285
njackson@bnl.com

Enclosure