

# COVER LETTER TIPS

## COVER LETTER BASICS

A cover letter is a one page document that expands upon relevant experiences and skills, demonstrates writing skills and clarifies any issues (experience, GPA, etc.) that may need to be addressed. It answers two questions: 1) Why are you interested in this job? 2) Why are you qualified for this job?

Cover letters should be written in a standard business letter format. Here are some key tips to remember:

**Header Option.** Consider creating a “letterhead” that matches your résumé, setting margins and type to match so you present a packet of information that goes together. Please note that some people may prefer a more traditional letter format. See samples.

**Salutation.** Ideally, address the letter to a Mr./Ms/Dr. LastName (call and ask to whom to address the letter, the correct spelling and title and/or research on CareerShift in Career Services). Address to “Hiring Manager for [name of position]:” if you cannot identify a specific person.

### First paragraph should include:

- The job for which you are applying.
- How you learned about the position/company.
- Attention getting summary of your personal traits and skills that make you a fit for the position
- If a senior, include education and graduation date.
- If applicable, include the name of a person who referred you.

Consider including a company fact if it is something you have been following or mention how their mission or value statement is significant to you. However, don’t take space educating them on their organization or the position.

### Second paragraph should include:

- Three (just a suggestion) skills listed in the job description.
- Examples of how you have demonstrated selected skills in the past through previous work, volunteer or leadership positions.
- Focus on your past successes and outcomes.

This section should expand on what is listed on your résumé, so do not reiterate your résumé or direct them to your résumé. They know it’s there.

### Third paragraph should include:

- Appreciation of the reader’s their time and attention.
- What you want the next step to be: 1) How and when you will follow-up or 2) Your hopes for them to follow-up.
- If applicable, share your availability and flexibility in geographic location.

**Closing.** End the letter with Sincerely, three spaces and your name. Don’t worry about signature if you are submitting on-line.

Have someone else (family, friend, advisor, faculty member, career center staff member) review your cover letter. Computer spell/grammar checks do not catch everything. Remember, potential employers take cover letters very seriously, so be sure that you do, too.

## ATTACHING COVER LETTER/RÉSUMÉ TO EMAIL

Many of your communications with potential employers will likely be via email. To utilize email to its full potential, do the following:

- Type the position title in the subject line.
- Check to make sure attachments are attached before sending.
- Don’t include email address, date or employer’s address in the email body as that is transmitted electronically.
- Don’t leave spaces between the closing and the typed name as there will be no signature.
- Do follow-up initial email with brief email asking if attachments were transmitted and readable. Gracefully, let the employer know that you will resend attachments if there was a glitch in the transmission.

## TYPICAL COVER LETTER MISTAKES

Don’t let the following mistakes keep you from getting an interview:

- Send your résumé without a cover letter.
- Appear lazy, failing to address letter to a specific person.
- Focus on what you want from the employer instead of what you can do for them.
- Appear generic, not tailoring how your skills/experience match the specific needs of the job/company.
- Allow misspellings or incorrect grammar/punctuation.
- Rehash your résumé.
- Ramble, focusing on your whole story instead of just the relevant part. You have the interview to expand.
- Use qualifiers such as “I feel” or “I believe.” Simply and confidently state your skills and what you offer.
- Leave the ball in the employer’s court. State that you will follow-up if possible.

Use simple and straight forward sentence structure, but avoid starting every sentence with “I” or “my.” The reader should reach the end of your letter thinking, “This person fits the job!” because you used the language from the job description and confidently and succinctly told them that you are the match.



**MURRAY STATE**  
UNIVERSITY

## CAREER SERVICES

100 OAKLEY APPLIED SCIENCE BUILDING | 270.809.3735

MURRAYSTATE.EDU/CAREER



## COVER LETTER FORMAT (TO MATCH RÉSUMÉ HEADER)

<b>Current Address</b> ## Street City, ST ZIP	<b>FirstName LastName</b>  phone number email address	<b>Permanent Address</b> ## Street City, ST ZIP	Header, font(s) and margins should match format of résumé.
May 20, 20XX			Date followed by 1-2 spaces
Mr. U. R. Employer Director, Personnel Department We Have Lots of Money, Incorporated Murray, KY 42071			Address followed by 1 - 2 spaces
Dear Mr. Employer:			Salutation, addressed to specific person if possible, followed by colon and 1 space
<b>Introductory Paragraph:</b> Grab the reader's attention by sharing applicable personal traits and skills to gain the readers attention. Then, state why you are writing; name the position or type of work for which you are applying; and mention where you learned of the position or organization. Give specific dates if you have had specific conversations with a person, and include this personal reference as it may attract more attention.			Body should be single spaced, left justified and have one space between each paragraph
<b>Body:</b> The next one or two paragraphs should be your sales pitch. Explain why you are interested and how you best fit this position. "Tease" the reader enough to read your résumé. Emphasize particular skills or duties that are part of the job description. As a recent graduate, you may want to use a paragraph to address academic qualifications and another paragraph to highlight experience and skills. Illustrate in this section that you have knowledge of the company's needs and of the position to demonstrate you have done your "homework." Be confident!			
<b>Closing Paragraph:</b> Be short and to the point. Indicate what steps you would like to happen next—if you want an interview, ask for it! <i>Passive Approach:</i> Results from you saying, "I look forward to hearing from you," and places responsibility on the employer to make the next move. <i>Active Approach:</i> Puts you in the position to initiate contact with the employer. State a specific date in the near future when you will verify receipt of the letter and/or seek to arrange an appointment. If you say you will contact them, do! Finally, thank the employer for his or her time and consideration.			
Sincerely,			Closing, "Sincerely" is appropriate, followed by 3 spaces
<i>Sign name in blue or black ink</i>			Don't "sign" if emailing
FirstName LastName			Typed name, followed by 1 - 2 spaces
Enclosure			Enclosure can be typed if you are forwarding résumé, reference page, transcripts, etc.

**COVER LETTER FORMAT (TRADITIONAL BUSINESS LETTER FORMAT)**

---

FirstName LastName  
## Street  
City, ST ZIP

Your name and address  
followed by 1 space

May 20, 20XX

Date followed by  
1-2 spaces

Mr. U. R. Employer  
Director, Personnel Department  
We Have Lots of Money, Incorporated  
Auburn, AL 36830

Employer's name and address  
followed by 1 - 2 spaces

Dear Mr. Employer:

Salutation, addressed to specific  
person if possible, followed by  
colon and 1 space

**Introductory Paragraph:** Grab the reader's attention by sharing applicable personal traits and skills to gain the readers attention. Then, state why you are writing; name the position or type of work for which you are applying; and mention where you learned of the position or organization. Give specific dates if you have had specific conversations with a person, and include this personal reference as it may attract more attention.

**Body:** The next one or two paragraphs should be your sales pitch. Explain why you are interested and how you best fit this position. "Tease" the reader enough to read your résumé. Emphasize particular skills or duties that are part of the job description. As a recent graduate, you may want to use a paragraph to address academic qualifications and another paragraph to highlight experience and skills. Illustrate in this section that you have knowledge of the company's needs and of the position to demonstrate you have done your "homework." Be confident!

Body should be single spaced,  
left justified and have one space  
between each paragraph

**Closing Paragraph:** Be short and to the point. Indicate what steps you would like to happen next—if you want an interview, ask for it! *Passive Approach:* Results from you saying, "I look forward to hearing from you," and places responsibility on the employer to make the next move. *Active Approach:* Puts you in the position to initiate contact with the employer. State a specific date in the near future when you will verify receipt of the letter and/or seek to arrange an appointment. If you say you will contact them, do! Finally, thank the employer for his or her time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Closing, "Sincerely" is  
appropriate, followed by 3  
spaces

*Sign name in blue or black ink*

Don't "sign" if emailing

FirstName LastName

Typed name, followed by 1 - 2  
spaces

Enclosure

Enclosure can be typed if you  
are forwarding résumé,  
reference page, transcripts, etc.

## TRADITIONAL COVER LETTER

Ima Racer  
222 Poplar Street  
Murray, KY 42071

January 24, 20xx

Mr. U. R. Employer  
Director, Personnel Department  
We Help Others, Incorporated  
123 12th Street  
Murray, KY 42071

Dear Mr. Employer:

Passionate about utilizing my interpersonal and counseling skills to help at risk juveniles, I am excited to apply for the Assistant Director position posted in the January 13 issue of *The Really-Important News*. In addition to the Bachelor of Social Work I will complete at Murray State University in May, I have three years of experience working with juveniles as well as supervisory, management and marketing experience.

My professional and educational experiences have enabled me to develop and utilize administration, leadership and marketing skills. In my current position supervising 10 telecounselors, I assess their performance, providing ongoing training and feedback to improve services. My leadership skills were challenged and honed through leading the admissions office at Three Springs, an outdoor therapeutic program for troubled teens. It took patience and firm resolve to work with the family members, professionals and agencies in order to create a balance of satisfaction on their part as well as looking out for the interest of the organization. My marketing skills have been utilized in various venues, and I look forward to sharing my portfolio with you.

I am excited about the opportunities that We Help Others, Inc provides and feel confident that both my skills and personal traits will allow me to make an immediate and positive impact on your organization. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

*Ima Racer*

Ima Racer

Enclosure

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY STYLE COVER LETTER

### IMA RACER

222 Poplar Street | Murray, KY 42071 | H: 270.000.0000  
C: 270.000.0000 | fafunction@murraystate.edu

January 24, 20xx

Mr. U. R. Employer  
Director, Personnel Department  
We Help Others, Incorporated  
123 12th Street  
Murray, KY 42071

Dear Mr. Employer:

I am writing to apply for the Public Relations Coordinator position posted on the We Help Others job site. Not only do I hold the required degree in public relations which I completed at Murray State University, but I have two years of experience using social media for outreach purposes. In addition, I demonstrate the required and desired qualifications in the following ways:

#### Your Requirements

- Knowledge and application of public relations
- Deal creatively, confidently and professionally with diverse audience
- Take initiative, work independently and manage multiple projects
- Organizational, interpersonal and written communication skills

#### My Qualifications

- Utilized social media to increase annual event attendance by 14% from previous year
- Managed internal and external marketing for organization of over 200 members
- Created engaging presentations utilizing PowerPoint and Prezi
- Built rapport quickly with diverse audience through service activities
- Initiated development of up-to-date marketing strategies, now embraced by organization serving 24,000 students
- Organized marketing campaign for service event that raised \$9000
- Recognized for effective communication in both one-on-one and group situations

Thank you for your time and consideration. I will contact you next week to confirm receipt of my application and discuss the possibility of meeting.

Sincerely,

*Ima Racer*

Ima Racer

Enclosure

## OTHER LETTERS TO SEND

Focus your letters more on the employer than yourself. Market how your needs meet those of the employer, and entice them to want to learn more about you. Print any letters on the same résumé quality paper that you use to print your résumé and cover letter.

These letters should follow business letter format, be limited to one page, error-free, timely and honest.

**Prospecting Letters** are used to market yourself, lets the employer know you have qualities they may need in an employee and suggests an action plan such as an interview. You can use when there is not a particular job posted.

Dear Mr. Haveajob:

I read about your company on Murray State University's Racer Tracks website, and I would like to inquire about employment opportunities in your management training program. Specifically, I would like to work in retail management and live in the Nashville area after graduation.

Not only will I complete a degree in marketing in May, but I also have three years of experience working in retail establishments. My communication, organizational and problem-solving skills are complimented by a strong work ethic. Whether establishing rapport with customers or speaking to a group, my communication skills receive positive feedback. It is also a natural task for me to organize displays creatively and assess and monitor inventory. In my last position, one irate customer challenged me to use patience and problem solving skills, and I can report that she left a satisfied customer.

On your home page you communicate a strong focus on ethics and serving the community. These are values I possess and ones that make me a natural fit and asset to your company. I will call you the week of March 15 to discuss employment possibilities. In the meantime, please contact me at imaracer@murraystate.edu or 270.123.1234 to further discuss my qualifications.

Sincerely,

Ima Racer

**Networking Letters** are used to market yourself as well as make a connection between you and the reader (e.g. they are a MSU alum, have a mutual acquaintance or similar interest or background). Do not pressure the reader but let them know what kind of job you are seeking; request a meeting that is at a mutually convenient time, and indicate that you will call to make those

Dear Mr. Haveajob:

Dr. Really Awesome, professor of marketing at Murray State University, suggested that I contact you. He thought that, as an alum, you would be an excellent person to assist me with a career decision.

As a marketing major, I am exploring which career path to pursue. Retail management and wholesale sales both sound interesting to me at this point, but I want to go into my campus interviews next semester with a clear sense of direction. I would like to get your advice on the long-term career implications of each path as well as a better understanding of the day-to-day activities of a buyer.

I will call you next week to see if I can arrange a brief meeting at your convenience. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Ima Racer

arrangements.

**Thank You Letters** are used to highlight your key strengths and remind them who you are and why you should be hired. Personalize both the company information and your specific fit to that company. Make sure your letter is unique.

Any time someone spends more than ten minutes assisting you in any business situation, send a thank you letter.

**Thank You for Interview:** Indicate your appreciation for their time and the opportunity to speak with them on (date) and at (location). Stress the importance of learning the information provided and your interest in the possibility of using your background, education and experience (give specific examples based on the interview conversation) for the position discussed. Indicate that you will furnish any additional information or are including requested information. Restate personal qualities which make you uniquely qualified for the position and which may or may not have been discussed in the interview. Encourage them to let you know if further information is needed. Let them know you look forward to hearing their decision.

**Thank You for Plant/Office Visit Invitation:** Thank them for the letter/phone call of (date) offering a plant/office visit at (time) on (dates). Tell them the most convenient date for you and when you will arrive. Indicate what materials you have enclosed or the company has requested, such as résumé, transcripts and/or application form. Indicate your appreciation for the opportunity to visit and reinforce your interest in a position with the company.

**Thank You for Plant/Office Visit:** Thank them for the time and opportunity to visit their plant/office on (date). If applicable, thank individuals for their special efforts. Thank them for accommodations, meals, air fare or other expenses paid. Include

Dear Mr. Haveajob:

Thank you very much for interviewing me yesterday for the marketing position with XYZ Engineering Systems, Inc. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about your company and the Marketing Department.

Meeting with the other staff members was especially enjoyable as was seeing that their projects are in line with the type of work I have done in the past. My education, skills and experience fit nicely with the job requirements, and I am certain that I could make a significant contribution to your company over time.

You provide the kind of opportunity I am seeking, and I want to reiterate my strong interest in the position and in working with you and your staff. Please call me at 270.123.1234 if I can provide you with any additional information.

Again, thank you for the interview and your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Ima Racer

any receipts needed for reimbursement. Express your interest in the company. Re-emphasize what you can offer to fit their needs.

## OTHER LETTERS TO SEND CONTINUED

---

**Letters of Acceptance** are used to indicate your pleasure in having received the company's offer. Include your understanding of the offer: position, location, starting salary, bonus, starting date and relocation expenses. Mention any enclosures included. Tell of plans and anticipated arrival date. Indicate enthusiasm for the job and the opportunity with the company.

**Letters of Acknowledgment: Requesting More Time for Decision** are used to acknowledge receipt of the offer on (date). Express appreciation and continued interest in the company. Indicate reasons for time extension needed (if possible) and request any information you lack. Specify exactly when you expect to make your decision. This situation usually requires a prior phone conversation, but always follow up with a letter to verify.

**Response to Letter of Rejection** is used to thank them for informing you of their decision and for considering you. If you are still interested in them, tell them you look forward to being considered for future positions.

**Letters Rejecting Offer** are used to communicate that you have given considerable thought to the offer but have decided not to accept it as outlined in their letter of (date). Indicate that it has been a difficult decision for you. Thank them for their time, effort and consideration. Let them know that their confidence in you was appreciated, and mention aspects of the position or company that were appealing to you.

**Resource:** Job Choices 2006. National Association of Colleges and Employers

Dear Mr. Haveajob:

Thank you very much for offering me the marketing position with XYZ Engineering Systems, Inc. It was a difficult decision, but I have accepted a position with another company.

I sincerely appreciate you taking the time to interview me and to share information on the opportunity and your company. Again, thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ima Racer