Cover letters

any time you send a resume or application to an employer, you should include a cover letter. Whenever you’re not face-to-face with an employer, your cover letter is your introduction.

the overview

- Write a separate cover letter for every position. **The best letters are customized** for the employer receiving them.
- Since your resume talks about you, use your cover letter to demonstrate you’ve done your research and show an employer how you’re the best candidate for them. This means talking about them and how you’re a fit for what they need.
- Demonstrate a **professional, clear, and direct writing style** while also expressing your interest and excitement.
- As with your resume, your cover letter is a writing sample. Proofreading for grammatical and spelling errors, typos, and content/style is just as important. **Mistakes can wreck your chances** of moving forward.
- Think of your cover letter like a response to a personal ad—you’re connecting your interests and experiences with the other person—**being genuine, conveying interest, showing that you understand what’s important to them, and sharing their values.** You don’t have to tell them your life story—you’re telling them enough to convince them to invite you to an interview to learn more.

the details

- **Your resume and cover letter should match** in both style and appearance.
- Fold them together and mail in a matching envelope or, because employers are scanning resumes, send your cover letter and resume unfolded in a large envelope.
- If you’re emailing your resume as an attachment, it’s not necessary to also attach a cover letter. The email message itself serves as a cover letter. Write it accordingly.
- If you’re applying online, don’t forget to include a cover letter, even if it’s optional.
- Address the letter to a specific individual. You may need to do some extra research, but it makes a big difference.

a helpful tip

If you are having difficulty getting the tone of your cover letter right, you’re not alone. Many job seekers struggle with cover letters that sound artificial or too impersonal. If you find yourself in that situation, try this:

- Write a letter to someone you know well—a parent, friend, advisor, professor, former teacher. Tell them about the position you are applying for, how you found it, why you are interested/excited, why you think you would be a good candidate, what parts of the job you would especially enjoy, and what you know and like about the employer.
- Now that you have a letter that sounds like you, put it into cover letter format, fill in any pieces that are missing, and edit the language to make it a little more professional/formal if needed. It’s much easier to make something informal sound more formal than the other way around.
I am writing regarding the Take Steps Walk Manager position located in Detroit, MI. As a psychology major, I am attracted to a career where I can use my strong communication skills to directly help people. This position would allow me to coordinate with many people in order to plan successful Walks, supporting the CCFA’s goal of improving Crohn’s & Colitis patients’ lives through research. Being very familiar with your organization personally and in networking with the Gastrointestinal Student Group that I lead at Michigan State University, I was excited to see the listing for this position on idealist.org.

This opportunity would be an excellent fit for both my personality and skills. As reflected on my resume, in my recent internship at NorthWest Initiative, I had the opportunity to plan a neighborhood conference from the ground up, which involved honing many important event-planning skills such as those you are seeking in a Walk Manager: developing a promotional plan to publicize the event, working within budgets and timelines, mobilizing local business leaders and residents to volunteer their time and money, and maintaining current databases to track and record the progress of the event. I learned first-hand many challenges that nonprofits face, and how vital meaningful relationships with individuals and other groups are to making an organization sustainable.

Of particular relevance to CCFA, I also currently serve as Social Chair of MSU GISI (Gastrointestinal Student Initiative) where I plan regular social and educational meetings for students with Crohn’s and Colitis. As with the Walk Manager position, this role requires heavy reliance on networking among and outside of the group. When we participated in the Take Steps Walk at Camp Dewborn last year, I was Team Captain for MSU GISI, and I am looking forward to the event again this year.

Thank you for your time and attention to my application. I look forward to scheduling an interview with you to discuss the position, as well as my qualifications and commitment to your cause. An opportunity to contribute to an organization whose mission I already support would be an excellent next step in my career path.

Sincerely,

Avery Black

Avery Black

Enclosure

Dalia Levine

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February 24, 2015

Yakov Shiri
Yad Vashem Internship Coordinator
Yad Vashem
Har HaNikra P.O.B. 3477
Jerusalem 91034 Israel

Dear Mr. Shiri,

I would like to be considered for the Yad Vashem Museum Internship. I am attracted to a career in museums and art collections with emphasis on archives and preservation, and educating the public about these resources. My professor at Michigan State University recommended your organization, and I learned of this position through the Yad Vashem Museum website.

A position in the Central Database for Shoah Victims’ Names would be a great fit for me. I enjoy researching articles of historical relevance, educating people about history and its value, and organizing material in an efficient and easily accessible manner. I would love to assist the Database staff in expanding Yad Vashem’s archives by entering and editing data.

I’m especially enthusiastic about being a part of an organization that is devoted to the many histories intertwined within the Holocaust. Currently pursuing a specialization in Jewish Studies, I have taken upper-level and honors courses in Jewish History, Literature, and Culture. One class in particular stressed the importance of having readily available and reliable information to help individuals understand Judaism and Jewish history. While learning about many worldwide misunderstandings regarding the Jewish faith, I have realized how important it is to have organizations such as Yad Vashem provide accurate information to visitors.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to scheduling an interview with your organization via phone or Skype to further discuss the position and my background. I am confident that my experiences in administrative roles, as a volunteer in Israel, and as a student will enable me to make a valuable contribution to your program.

Sincerely,

Dalia Levine

Dalia Levine

Enclosure
Communication essentials

Every time you communicate with an employer, be as professional as possible. Always use correct grammar when speaking or writing. Professional email is different from a text message or writing a friend.

Even if email is your preferred way of communicating, check with your contacts to see what their preferred contact method is so you can communicate with them most effectively.
**using the phone**

- **Taking a cell phone call when with another person can be rude.** This is especially true during an interview, site visit, career fair, or other professional event!

- **In fact, be prepared to silence your phone and put it away.** Texting, checking your phone for email, and otherwise being constantly distracted by your phone is likely to make you seem uninterested. It’s not going to make a good impression.

- **When leaving a voice mail or message, speak slowly and clearly so your message is clear.** Keep your message short. Leave your name and phone number to ensure the employer can call you back.

- **Return calls the day they’re received.** If for some reason you can’t call back the same day, call within 24 hours.

- **Make sure that the greeting for your voice mail is professional.** Employers often complain about greetings that include loud music, background noise, or are just generally unprofessional.

**thank-you letters**

- **Always send a thank-you letter** after an interview or other personal interaction. Show the people you met that you appreciate their time and attention. Thank-you letters can be sent via email, a hand-written note, or formal letter.

- **Wondering whether or not email is the best way to send a thank-you note?** As with most things, it depends on the organization. More conservative employers will likely prefer a formal letter. Employers who have a high-touch approach to customer service or a high level of relationship development with clients are more likely to prefer a handwritten note or card. But any employer with a quick turnaround time between interview and offer (you interview on Thursday and they tell you they plan to make a decision on Monday) should get an emailed thank-you letter.

- **Be sure to send the thank-you promptly** — it’s best to send it within 24 hours of your meeting or exchange.

- **The bottom line is that you want the letter to reach them before they’ve made their decision.** If they haven’t told you what their timeline is, that’s one of the things you should ask before leaving the interview!

- **To avoid burning bridges that might be useful later on, you should even send a thank-you letter to an employer with whom you’ve decided not to accept a position.**

- **For more information on thank-you letters, see the resources available at CareerNetwork.msu.edu.**

**effective email**

- **Don’t use an unprofessional email address (e.g., sexykitten@hotmail.com).** The recipient could delete the message thinking it’s spam or porn. In fact, employers tell us hotmail addresses almost always end up in their junk folders! Your MSU email or a Gmail account are the best bet.

- **Include a meaningful subject line** that makes it clear what will be covered in the message, such as “Jose Vega—Confirming Friday Interview Time” or “MSU Food Science Junior Seeking Information.”

- **Be sure to include your full name and contact information** in each email.

- **Remember that there is no guarantee that an email is private.**

- **When replying to a message, include the previous message in your response.** Keeping the thread of the discussion together will help both you and your contact to follow the course of your email discussion.

- **Re-read and spell-check every email before you hit “Send!”** Sadly, employers say they’ve received emails from students (or recent grads) that are so casual or full of grammatical and spelling errors that they just hit “delete.” Sadder still, employers who are alumni have said these unprofessional messages hurt their Spartan pride!