

HOW TO WRITE A COVER LETTER

Lesson Objective

In this lesson, you will learn how to write an effective cover letter in English. A cover letter introduces you to a potential employer and helps them decide whether or not to review your resume and contact you for an interview. Your cover letter is the first impression a recruiter has of you, so let's make it shine!

Did you know...

Recruiters are like book buyers. They judge a resume by its cover letter. Use a 10–12 point font in a simple typeface such as Arial or Times New Roman.

Note: In British English, the term “covering letter” is used.

Warm-Up

A. Writing

Think of a cover letter as a sales letter. What skills and accomplishments do you have that employers will want to buy? Write a **FOR HIRE** ad for yourself in your notebook.

Example:

Cheerful, self-motivated, licenced hairstylist with expertise in updos, modern cuts, and highlights. Available part-time for weddings and formal occasions.

B. Vocabulary Preview

Match these words to their correct definitions.

- | | | | |
|-------|---------------------|----|---|
| _____ | 1. first impression | a) | to build relationships or contacts with people in the same industry |
| _____ | 2. hire | b) | the person who receives a letter or other object |
| _____ | 3. apply | c) | to contact again about the same issue or subject |
| _____ | 4. inquire | d) | the immediate feeling after meeting or seeing someone/something new |
| _____ | 5. network | e) | to make something for a specific reason or person |
| _____ | 6. customize | f) | to officially give a person a new job |
| _____ | 7. recipient | g) | to say or write again in a similar way |
| _____ | 8. accomplishment | h) | a memorable or personal detail about an experience |
| _____ | 9. rehash | i) | to ask a question(s) about something of interest |
| _____ | 10. follow up | j) | a goal or task achieved successfully |
| _____ | 11. anecdote | k) | to make a formal request for consideration (e.g., as a job candidate) |
| _____ | 12. position | l) | a specific role in a company or business (e.g., sales manager) |

3 Reasons to Use a Cover Letter

Here are the three main reasons to use a cover letter.

A. To Apply

The main use of a cover letter is to apply for an advertised job. Submit your cover letter to a potential employer along with your resume. The letter and resume should be customized to the specific job that is advertised.

Task 1

In your opinion, what are the three most important items to include on a cover letter when you are applying for a specific job? Write them in the space below, and then discuss your answers with your classmates.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B. To Inquire

A cover letter can also be used to ask if an employer is hiring or will be hiring in the near future. A letter of inquiry can help you get your foot in the door. It's a good idea to include a resume with this type of cover letter.

Task 2

What are three businesses companies you are interested in working for in the future? No dream is too big!

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

To Get One's Foot in the Door

This is an idiom meaning *to take the first step in a process and gain an advantage.*

C. To Network

You may not be looking for work at this time, but you can never have too many connections. A cover letter can also be used to introduce yourself to those who work in your industry. It is not always necessary to include a resume with this type of cover letter.

Task 3

Think about your answers in Task 2. Who could you network with in order to have a better chance of getting your foot in the door one day? Identify one reason for each person. If you don't know the person's name, identify a role (e.g., director, marketing manager, administrator).

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Note:

If you have a website, blog, or LinkedIn address, you could add this to a networking letter.

4 Parts of a Cover Letter

A cover letter has a set format that is simple to follow. Like any business letter, a cover letter should be typed, proofread, and customized with a specific recipient in mind.

A. Header

The header of your cover letter includes your mailing address followed by the recipient's mailing address. Make sure to spell the recipient's name properly.

Jesse Blackwell

101-88 Market Place | Chicago, IL | (334) 457-8890 | jessb@techmail.com

June 1, 2016

Ellen Rodriguez
Human Resources Manager
Feather Books
22-356 Ash Street
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Ms. Rodriguez,

Note:

Your own name and address can be centred or left-justified. You may also want to include a social media profile such as LinkedIn or Twitter. Look up cover letters online to see how your name and contact information can be formatted.

- Date**
- Double Space**
- Recipient:** Name
- Job Title
- Company
- Unit #, Street
- City, State/Province
- Double Space**
- Begin Salutation**

B. Salutation

Use the full name of a specific recipient in the greeting.

- Dear Alanna Waters,
- Dear Ms. Jackson:
- Dear Mrs. Jones:
- Dear Mr. McDonald,

If you cannot find the full name of a suitable recipient, the following can be used, but are not recommended:

- Dear Sir, *(if you are 100% sure the recipient is male)*
- Dear Madam, *(if you are 100% sure the recipient is female)*
- Dear Recruiting Manager, *(if you are unable to get a contact name)*

Punctuation

A comma or colon can be used after the salutation. A colon is more formal. Do not use a semicolon.

4 Parts of a Cover Letter cont.

C. Body

The body of your cover letter should be no more than two or three short paragraphs. Try to keep each paragraph to about three sentences. Decide which type of cover letter you are writing (page 2) before you begin.

TO APPLY

Paragraph 1

- Open with an attention-grabbing sentence.
- Introduce yourself and identify the specific advertised position you are interested in.

Paragraph 2/3

- Describe what makes you a good fit for the company. Highlight your best accomplishments and skills.
- State your main goal for sending the letter.

TO INQUIRE

Paragraph 1

- Introduce yourself.
- Identify why you are interested in the company.

Paragraph 2/3

- Describe what makes you a good fit for the company. Highlight your best accomplishments and skills.
- State your main goal for sending the letter.

TO NETWORK

Paragraph 1

- Introduce yourself and identify your current position (e.g., student).
- Identify any person you may know or background you are aware of about the company.

Paragraph 2/3

- Explain why it will benefit both of you to make a connection.
- Make any special requests.

Task 4

Choose one of the three types of cover letters that is most applicable to your current situation. Use the back of your paper to write an outline of the body of a cover letter.

4 Parts of a Cover Letter cont.

D. Closing


The closing of every cover letter should offer the following:

- a simple thank-you message
- a plan to follow up
- your phone number and/or email address
- a formal sign-off (with your full name and position if applicable)
- a handwritten signature (not necessary for email)

Examples

Thank you for your time and consideration.


Best,



Frankie Mason Jr.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,



Raya J. Allan

Thank you, and I look forward to meeting you soon.

Warm regards,
Lindsay Edwards

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,
Eduardo Romez

Task 5

Use a blank piece of paper or the space below and practise writing closings using some of the styles above.

Cover Letter Dos and Don'ts

A. Cover Letter Don'ts

Do not...

- ✗ use *To Whom It May Concern:* as your salutation
- ✗ write a two-page cover letter
- ✗ rehash your resume
- ✗ tell your life story
- ✗ submit a letter with smudges, creases, or low ink
- ✗ use coloured text or a fancy font
- ✗ state your salary expectations
- ✗ send the letter to the wrong recipient
(do your research and double-check the spelling)
- ✗ staple your cover letter to your resume (some HR departments recommend a paper clip or folder)

Cover Letter Clichés

Here are a few overused words and phrases to avoid using in a cover letter.

- I am a *team player*.
- I am *detail-oriented*.
- I am *uniquely qualified*.
- I hope to *meet in person*.

B. Cover Letter Dos

- ✓ address your letter to a specific person
- ✓ double-check that this person is still an employee in the correct position
- ✓ put your potential employer's needs first (use *You* more than *I*)
- ✓ use keywords from the job posting
- ✓ customize your letter for a specific job
- ✓ highlight your accomplishments
- ✓ sign the letter with a pen (or use an email signature)
- ✓ find a way to make your letter stand out
(use a personal anecdote or detail)
- ✓ print your cover letter (and resume) on high-quality paper

Task 6

Below are some examples of what NOT to do in a cover letter. Identify the problem with each example.

1. I expect to be paid no less than \$40,000/year.
2. As a child, I always loved to draw pictures.
3. Dear Sir or Madam,
4. **Dear Anne Dalmer,**
5. To Who It May Concern:
6. In 2008, I worked for a pancake house. In 2009, I worked in a bar. In 2010, I worked at a seafood restaurant.

Tip

Will you be emailing your cover letter? An email cover letter should be even shorter than a hard copy. Write your cover letter in the body of an email. Do not attach your resume unless you are specifically asked to do so. Consider sharing a link to an online resume or career profile instead (e.g., a LinkedIn profile).

Sample Cover Letter

<p style="text-align: center;">Maria Montague</p> <p>2-191 51st Street New York, NY 10021 (646) 555-9098 eslmaria@teachermail.com</p> <p>March 4, 2016</p> <p>Gary Spicer Manager The English Language School 73 51st Street New York, NY 10022</p> <p>Dear Mr. Spicer,</p> <p>As a long-term resident of midtown Manhattan, I have always enjoyed watching international students come and go from <i>The English Language School</i>. Your students are always smiling and laughing and appear eager to learn English. After teaching English abroad for several years, I was thrilled to see that you are looking for a few more experienced English language teachers.</p> <p>You will see from my resume that I am highly qualified to join your team. Here are a few of my credentials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• BA in English literature• CELTA certificate• 5 years of teaching experience in Japan, Thailand, and Russia• Experienced tutor of TOEIC, TOEFL, and IELTS• 2014 Teacher of the Year, Moscow ELL Inc. <p>I would love the opportunity to work as a full-time English language teacher in your school. Your students will benefit from my extensive teaching experience abroad. I'm also excited to introduce you to my methods of making grammar learning fun through music.</p> <p>I will follow up next Friday to arrange a meeting to discuss your teaching needs. If you would like to reach me before then, please call me at 646-555-9098 or email me at eslmaria@teachermail.com.</p> <p>Thank you for your time and consideration.</p> <p>Warm regards,</p> <p><i>Maria Montague</i></p> <p>Maria Montague a.k.a. the Singing ESL Teacher</p> <p>Enclosure</p>	<p>Your Information Name, address, phone number, email, social media account</p> <p>Date</p> <p>Recipient's Information Name (spelled correctly) Job title Company name Address</p> <p>Salutation</p> <p>Body Paragraph 1 Attention-grabbing opening, interest in the company</p> <p>Body Paragraph 2 Accomplishments (may be in bullets)</p> <p>Body Paragraph 3 Main goal</p> <p>Closing Follow-up plan, thank-you note</p> <p>Formal Sign-Off</p> <p>Attachment(s)</p>
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Discussion

1. What type of cover letter is on page 6?
2. Why do you think Maria chose this type of cover letter?
3. What would Maria have to do to change it into another type that you learned on page 2?

Comprehension Questions

What have you learned so far?

Answer and discuss these questions in pairs or as a class.

1. What is the first thing that appears on a cover letter?
2. How might a cover letter submitted by email differ from a hard copy?
3. What is the most important part of a greeting?
4. What are two things you should NOT do in a cover letter?
5. What did you learn about keywords and cover letters?

Vocabulary Review

Complete each sentence in the chart with a word or phrase from page 1.

In the last column, indicate the part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, etc.).

#	Sentence	Part of Speech
1	If you are looking to _____ a dependable, experienced salesperson, please take a moment to review my resume.	
2	I will _____ with a phone call midweek to see if we can arrange an interview.	
3	If the _____ for administrative assistant is still available, please contact me at your earliest convenience.	
4	I am writing to _____ about your need for summer interns.	
5	I've met many vendors because I _____ at trade shows.	

Write Your Own Cover Letter

A. Writing

Find a job ad that interests you and write a cover letter with this job in mind. Use keywords from the job ad in your cover letter, and customize the letter for this job. Do some research to find out who your letter should be addressed to. Refer to the sample on page 7 as well as other samples that you can find online.

B. Proofreading

After you write your cover letter, save it as a draft. Don't print it yet. Come back a few days later and read the letter out loud to yourself. Fix any mistakes you see and run a spell-check program through it.

Review the cover letter checklist and make any necessary changes. Then ask a classmate or teacher to proofread your letter.

Cover Letter Checklist

- Did I type my letter?
- Did I include a header with necessary contact information, and is it correct?
- Did I add a greeting with a specific name beneath my header?
- Did I identify a reason for writing a cover letter (to apply/inquire/network)?
- Did I highlight my most important skills, work experience, education, and achievements without rehashing my resume?
- Is there something that stands out about me?
- Did I add a formal closing and sign-off?
- Did I use a simple, clean format?
- Did I proofread, check spelling, and double-check contact information?
- Did I ask a friend or teacher to proofread my cover letter?

Are you ready to start applying for jobs?

Add your cover letter to your resume along with a page of references. Good luck!

Don't forget to customize each cover letter and resume.

If you haven't written a resume, check out ESL Library's *How to Write a Resume* lesson.