

# Cover Letters 101

Stephen F. Austin State University | Center for Career and Professional Development

## Why is a cover letter important?

Every résumé that you submit to an employer should be accompanied by a cover letter! A cover letter is formal, customized correspondence officially stating your interest in a job. The cover letter is your opportunity to highlight your abilities, expand on your qualifications, and explain why you are the ideal candidate for the job. The letter should be one page in length, 3-4 paragraphs long, written in professional business format, and printed on the same paper and in the same font as your résumé.

## Who do you send the letter to?

Cover letters are more effective if addressed to a specific person, rather than "To whom it may concern" or "Dear Sir or Madam". Look on the job description for the individual to whom to address the letter. If none is listed, do some research on the organization and determine who is likely to make the hiring decision. Address females as Ms. or Miss since you are unaware of their marital status. Double check the spelling of the person's name and never assume spelling, example: John vs. Jon or Jenny vs. Ginny.

## Cover letter format

Utilize the same heading as your résumé. Copy and paste here.

Today's Date

(space down 4 spaces)  
Cosmo Spacely  
Owner  
Spacely Space Sprockets  
123 Galaxy Way  
Orbit City, Texas 77777

Dear Mr. Spacely:

**Why are you writing?** The opening paragraph should arouse the interest of the employer. Clearly identify the position for which you are applying. If you are answering an ad or job posting, state where you heard about the vacancy. If you have been told about the position from a current or former employee, mention their name. If you don't know whether the employer has an opening, indicate the type of position you are seeking and ask about the availability. Give information to show your interest in the position.

**How do your qualifications fit this job?** Explain your achievements and qualifications, especially those that meet the requirements listed on the job description. Here is where you expand on details in your résumé. Refer the reader to your general qualifications on your enclosed résumé. Also, highlight any points that will be of specific interest to this employer. Incorporate information that reflects your knowledge of the company and industry.

**Ask about the next step.** In the last paragraph, ask the employer to follow-up by contacting you or scheduling an interview. You may also state your intentions to call him/her to request a meeting or interview.

Sincerely,

*George Jetson*  
George Jetson

Enclosure (this notes you have enclosed your résumé)