

# **COVER LETTER & JOB-SEARCH LETTERS GUIDE**



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# Getting started

Before you begin to create your cover letter, it's important to know what a cover letter is, why you need one, and how you can create a document that is best for you.

## What is a cover letter?

A letter that introduces you to a prospective employer, the cover letter is submitted along with your resume to further illustrate your particular strengths and qualifications for the position you are applying for. It gives you an additional chance to emphasize your fit for the position and/or employer and to get the employer excited about you as a potential employee. Remember, employer interest = interview!

## Do I always need a cover letter?

You should submit a cover letter whenever possible when you are applying for a specific position. Some employers will ask for one, while others will list it as an optional document. If you have the option of submitting a cover letter, we suggest you do. You do **not** need to bring cover letters to career fairs, interviews or networking events.

## How long should it be?

This isn't a complete autobiography of your life, so keep it brief. Your cover letter should never be more than one typed page. The body of your letter, which is detailed further on page 3 of this guide, is usually three to four paragraphs. Although your letter should be succinct and reader-friendly, it shouldn't be too brief. You will want your letter to nicely fill most of a page.

## Can I write one cover letter and use it for all jobs?

No! The best cover letters are customized for specific positions and employers. The purpose of the cover letter isn't simply to restate what's on your resume, but to give additional insight, further details, and more information. Your goal is to convince that particular employer that you are the right person for that particular job. What you say about yourself as an applicant for one job may be very different than what you say about yourself as an applicant for a different job. Taking the time to customize your cover letters is another way to present your best self for consideration.



**TIP:** Proofread, proofread, proofread! Your cover letter is a writing sample, so it's crucial that it is well-written and error-free. Although a good cover letter will increase your chances of getting an interview, a bad one will almost certainly ruin your chances!

# Preparing to write your cover letter

The best cover letters start with preparation. Before a single word is typed, you should analyze your fit for the position.

## Qualifications Analysis

You should begin by carefully reading the job posting, paying particular attention to the job description, qualifications, and requirements. As you read, identify the specific skills, education, training, experience, and traits the employer is seeking for this position.

Next, compare yourself to that list of qualifications. Which of the skills do you possess? Do you have the preferred education and years of experience? Do you have related experience(s)? Is there something else you bring to the table that the employer is seeking?

You should then reflect on your strongest qualifications for the position. If you could only tell this employer three things about you as a candidate, which would they be? These will become the focus of your cover letter.

Lastly, develop a specific example to illustrate your knowledge/skills/abilities/etc. in the areas you have chosen. For example, if you want to demonstrate your excellent customer service, don't just say that you have customer service experience; instead, elaborate on one specific example that truly demonstrates your abilities in customer service.

See the *Cover Letter Worksheet* at the end of this guide for structured assistance with your qualifications analysis.

## Special Considerations

Some other things to consider when preparing to write your cover letter:

1. Do you now or have you ever worked for this employer? Be upfront about this.
2. Did someone refer you for this position? You can mention the person by name.
3. Do you have a particular interest in, passion for, or connection to this job and/or employer that may not be apparent from reviewing your resume? Feel free to include information that is not on your resume, if it is pertinent.
4. Do you need to explain anything? This can cover a wide range of topics, including but not limited to: work authorization, intent to relocate, low GPA, career changes, and gaps in employment.



**TIPS:** The best cover letters are addressed to specific individuals involved in the hiring process. If there is no contact person listed in the job posting, try to research the organization to identify an appropriate contact person. You can call the organization and ask, look for information on their website, and explore LinkedIn for employees. You can also search for the organization in Handshake to see if they have a contact person listed (they often do!).

# Writing your cover letter

What you say in your cover letter is very important. Below we will examine the three main components of your cover letter: the introduction, body, and conclusion, and what to say in each.

## Introduction

Let the reader know what you are seeking and a little bit about yourself. Address these points:

1. Mention the specific position you are applying for and where you found it.
2. If someone referred you for this position, you can mention the person by name.
3. Give a brief overview about who you are and why you are applying.

## Body

Here's your chance to help the employer see that you are an outstanding candidate for this position who has a lot to offer! Refer to the qualifications analysis you did during your preparation, or to the *Cover Letter Worksheet* you completed. Address these points:

1. How do you meet the employer's needs? Be specific!
2. How is your education and past experience in alignment with this position/employer/industry/etc.?
3. Why should you be interviewed for this position?

## Conclusion

Wrap up your letter by showing your appreciation and by indicating an interest in further discussion. Address these points:

1. Reiterate your enthusiasm/interest in the position and your desire to further discuss your qualifications (in other words, an interview!).
2. Include your contact information (phone and email).
3. Always thank the employer for their time and consideration.



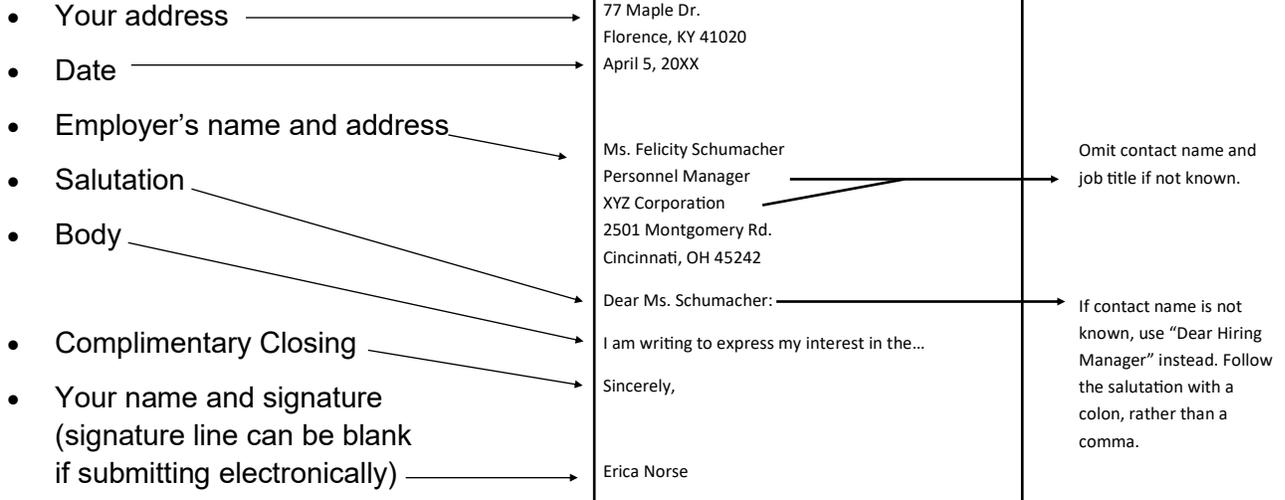
**TIPS:** Setting the right tone in your cover letter is important. You should freely express excitement and enthusiasm, without going over the top. Your tone should be professional and respectful, but not stuffy and overly serious. You also want to write about yourself and your qualifications with confidence, but not arrogance.

Think about your audience when writing your cover letter. What is the company culture? What is the typical style of the industry? An appropriate tone and message will help your letter resonate with the reader and increase your chances of success!

# Layout and formatting

## If attaching or uploading your cover letter:

Your cover letter, and other job search letters, will usually follow a classic business letter format and will include the following components:



## If using cover letter in the body of an email:

You should omit your address and date, and the employer's name and address. Begin your letter with the salutation. There is no need to leave room for your signature since this is electronic. Include your phone number and email following your name at the end of the letter, if that information has not already been provided.

## Layout and use of space

Keep your cover letter to one typed page. The margins of your cover letter should be between .5" and 1". Spacing should be single spaced throughout, with a space between paragraphs. Do not indent paragraphs. See the samples later in this guide to see examples of proper formatting and spacing.

## Fonts

There is no perfect font to use for your cover letter, but choose something that is standard and easy to read. As is true with your resume, the font size should be between 10- and 12-point.



**TIPS:** Use the same font style and size that you used for your resume to create a unified look.

The heading of your resume (name, address, phone, email, etc.) can be used at the top of your cover letter in place of your address. This heading style can further unify your job search documents, creating a polished and professional look.

# Additional job-search letters

There are many other types of letters that you may need to use in your job search. A summary of these additional letters is below, with samples provided at the end of this guide.

## **Prospecting/Broadcasting Letters**

These letters are used when you are trying to cultivate an employer's interest in you as a candidate and are spreading the word about your qualifications throughout your industry or field of interest. You might use these letters when you are very interested in working for a particular organization but they do not currently have an appropriate position posted. These letters may also be helpful in a long-distance job search.

## **Networking/Informational Meeting Letters**

Often sent as emails, these letters help you arrange opportunities to speak to or meet with professionals who can give you information, advice, and feedback about working and job searching in a particular industry or field.

## **Salary History/Salary Requirements Letters**

Some employers will request information regarding your salary expectations. These letters give an employer an idea of the salary you are used to making and how much you would expect to earn as their employee. *Remember to only include salary information when the employer requests it.*

## **Follow-up and Thank-you Letters**

These letters are usually sent following an interview or other interaction with a prospective employer. Follow-up letters can allow you to check on your status in the hiring process or to provide further clarification on your qualifications. Thank-you letters (the only job-search letters that can be handwritten) are usually sent within 24 hours of a job interview.

## **Negotiation Letters**

You may receive a job offer but wish to negotiate on the terms of your employment before accepting the position. This letter is used to politely and respectfully request adjustments be made to your offer.

## **Job Offer Acceptance and Rejection Letters**

These letters help you formally accept or reject an offer of employment. When accepting an offer, restate the terms of employment as you understand them, ask for clarification if needed, and confirm details such as starting date. If you have decided to decline a job offer, it is a common professional courtesy to send a polite rejection letter in a timely manner.

77 Maple Dr.  
Florence, KY 41020  
April 5, 20XX

Ms. Constance Meagle  
Advising Director  
XYZ University  
100 College Blvd.  
Columbus, OH 43701

Dear Ms. Meagle:

I am excited to submit my credentials for the open Academic Advisor position at XYZ College that I learned about on your website. I am enthusiastic about this position because it allows me to combine my educational background with my passion for helping others achieve academic success.

In my current role as Academic Chair for my sorority, I work to ensure that each member is striving to reach her full academic potential. This role has helped me hone my communication and goal setting skills, both critical to the Academic Advising position. On one occasion, I worked with a member who was struggling in each of her classes and was concerned about being on academic probation. I helped this student identify her motivation for achieving her college degree and to see how success in these classes was a vital part of this dream. By helping her clarify her goals, her desire to succeed was renewed. I then worked with her to create an action plan to bring up her grades and offered to hold her accountable to this plan. She earned a 3.5 GPA at the end of the semester. As an Academic Advisor, I would commit to helping my students not only understand class requirements for their areas of study, but would also work to ensure they are prepared to achieve at their highest levels.

I look forward to further discussing the Academic Advising position at XYZ with you. Should you need additional information or wish to set up a time for an interview, please contact me by phone (123) 456-7890 or by e-mail at landrume1@nku.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Emily Landrum

COVER LETTER

## Erica Norse

85 Nunn Dr. | Highland Heights, KY 41099 | 859-555-1212 | norsee1@nku.edu

February 21, 20XX

Golden Enterprises, Inc.  
P.O. Box 675  
Florence, KY 41020

Dear Hiring Manager:

I am writing to express my interest in the Sales Trainee position you posted recently in the Northern Kentucky University (NKU) Career Services online employment database. I will be graduating from NKU in a few months, and I am actively seeking a position that will combine my sales, leadership, and communication skills in a meaningful way.

As you will note in my resume, I have had sales experience with Dillard's in Crestview Hills, Kentucky, where I consistently exceeded sales goals and was recognized as associate of the month twice during my time there. My major in Psychology at NKU has given me the opportunity to take classes related to consumer behavior and human resource management. During my two years as a Resident Assistant, I have developed strong communication and listening skills working with students in my hall and have learned how to be a leader and mentor to my peers. I believe the combination of my academic background, residence hall experience, and sales experience will help me to contribute to the ongoing success of Golden Enterprises, Inc.

Based on my education and experience, my salary requirements are in the range of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to \$ \_\_\_\_\_, with appropriate benefits.

I would love to explore the Sales Trainee position with you further. Should you need additional information or wish to set up a time for an interview, please contact me by telephone at (859) 555-1212 or by e-mail at norsee1@nku.edu. I am excited about the prospect of continuing to grow and learn in your organization. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Erica Norse

*(NOTE: Only include salary requirements when employer requests it.)*

COVER LETTER + SALARY REQUIREMENTS

82 Nunn Drive  
Highland Heights, KY 41099  
January 19, 20XX

Mr. Timothy T. Mellon  
Director of College Recruiting  
XYZ Corporation  
4500 Randolph Drive  
Louisville, KY 41213

Dear Mr. Mellon:

I have been reading about XYZ Corporation in information provided by Northern Kentucky University Career Services and would like to inquire about employment opportunities in marketing research with your company. I wish to work in marketing research and would like to relocate to the Louisville area.

I will receive my bachelor's degree in marketing this May. My interest in business began in Junior Achievement while in high school and developed further through a variety of sales and retail positions during college. A marketing research class project with a local mall convinced me to pursue a career in marketing research. When I reviewed the top market research firms in Louisville, XYZ emerged as having a strong market position, an excellent training program, and a reputation for excellence in the field. In short, you provide the kind of professional environment I seek.

My resume is enclosed for your consideration. My education and experience match the qualifications required of your entry-level Marketing Research Analyst positions, but they do not tell the whole story. I know from supervisor feedback that I have the analytical skills and motivation needed to build a successful career in marketing research. Also, my practical experience gives me confidence in my career direction and in my ability to perform.

I am very interested in talking with you further about possible employment opportunities with XYZ Corporation. I will plan to call you in the next two weeks to see if we can arrange a meeting time that is convenient to your schedule. Thank you very much for considering my request. I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

William Haile

PROSPECTING LETTER

From: Pamela Booth [pamela.r.booth@gmail.com]

To: briggs@wkrptv.com

Subject: Enthusiastic journalism student seeking internship

Attachment: PamelaBoothResume.doc

Dear Mr. Briggs:

Edward R. Murrow said, "We cannot make good news out of bad practice." It is with a strong desire to hone my craft as a journalist that I am seeking summer internship opportunities with regional media outlets. I believe in the importance of credible journalistic work and am committed to seeking and sharing the truth with my fellow citizens.

I am currently a junior at Northern Kentucky University majoring in Journalism with a minor in Electronic Media and Broadcasting. I am beginning my second year as a Feature Writer for *The Northerner*, where I conduct interviews with faculty, staff, students, administrators, and community partners, and have covered important campus issues including budget constraints and sexual misconduct allegations. Classes in my minor have made me comfortable in front of and behind the camera. I believe my versatility and strong writing skills will make me an asset to any investigative news team.

My resume, with additional details of my education and relevant experiences, is attached to this email. I am eager to discuss internship possibilities at WKRP-TV with you. I can be reached anytime at the number/address listed below. Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Pamela Booth  
859.555.1212  
pamela.r.booth@gmail.com

PROSPECTING EMAIL

From: Skyler North [norths9@nku.edu]

To: Abigail Smith [abigail.smith@forwardmarketing.com]

Subject: NKU student seeking career information

Dear Ms. Smith,

I am currently a junior at Northern Kentucky University and am seeking information and guidance about careers in marketing. A career advisor from NKU's Career Services recommended that I conduct some informational interviews to learn more about career options in this field and how best to reach my career goals.

I chose to major in marketing because I am intrigued by the psychology behind consumer behavior, and I also look forward to the creative aspects of the profession. I have been researching the various positions and tasks in this occupation and would like to talk with someone who is actually working in this field to learn more about career paths and internship opportunities.

I understand your organization may not be hiring right now, but I would certainly appreciate any information and insights you could provide. Getting firsthand information from an experienced person such as you would help me make wise and knowledgeable decisions about my career path.

I look forward to the possibility of a brief meeting with you over the phone or in person to discuss career advice you may have for me as I pursue a career in marketing. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Skyler North  
859-555-9875

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW EMAIL

From: Erica Norse [norse1@nku.edu]

To: pricejb@goldenenterprises.com

Subject: Thank you

Dear Mr. Price,

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the Sales Trainee position at Golden Enterprises, Inc. I enjoyed our interview very much.

This opportunity sounds exciting and challenging for someone with my energy level and commitment to sales and marketing. The Sales Trainee position offers an experience ideally suited for someone with my skills and abilities.

I would be happy to provide any additional information you may need regarding my candidacy.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Regards,

Erica Norse

POST-INTERVIEW THANK-YOU EMAIL

From: Erica Norse [norse1@nku.edu]

To: pricejb@goldenenterprises.com

Subject: Hiring status inquiry

Dear Mr. Price,

Following our interview on March 14, you indicated that you expected to make a hiring selection within two weeks. Since two weeks have now passed, I was hoping to inquire about my status in the hiring process.

I want to reiterate my strong interest in the Sales Trainee position with Golden Enterprises and my enthusiasm at the prospect of working with your company. I truly believe I am a great fit for this role and organization.

If I can answer any additional questions, please let me know. I hope to hear from you soon.

Kind regards,

Erica Norse

85 Nunn Drive  
Highland Heights, KY 41099  
April 23, 20XX

Mr. J. B. Price  
Personnel Manager  
Golden Enterprises, Inc.  
P.O. Box 675  
Columbus, OH 43701

Dear Mr. Price:

I want to thank you for extending an offer to work with Golden Enterprises, Inc. Before I can formally accept this position as a Sales Trainee with your company, however, I need some clarification on the following two points.

First, I would appreciate it if you could let me know where I will be initially assigned. While I am aware that the majority of your sales trainees begin in the Columbus and Cleveland offices of Golden Enterprises, I am unclear about my potential placement.

A second consideration is that of salary. You offered an annual salary of \$31,500; however, my research indicates that the average salary range for someone in this position in the Columbus area is between \$33,700 and \$37,900. I believe we are both excited about my joining your sales team, and I would be happy to do so at a starting salary of \$35,000, along with the generous benefits you have already outlined in your offer.

This position requires exactly the kind of work I want to do. I trust that clarification of these two points will make your offer all the more attractive. I look forward to hearing from you before May 10.

Sincerely,

Erica Norse

FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

JOB OFFER NEGOTIATION LETTER

85 Nunn Drive  
Highland Heights, KY 41099  
April 23, 20XX

Mr. J. B. Price  
Personnel Manager  
Golden Enterprises, Inc.  
P.O. Box 675  
Columbus, OH 43701

Dear Mr. Price:

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to work with Golden Enterprises, Inc. I am very pleased to accept the position as a Sales Trainee with your Columbus office. The position requires exactly the kind of work I want to do, and I know I will do a good job for you.

As we discussed, I will begin work on July 1, 20XX. In the meantime, I will complete all the necessary employment forms, obtain the required physical examination, and locate housing. I plan to be in Columbus within the next two weeks and would like to deliver the paperwork to you personally. At that time, we can handle any remaining items pertaining to my employment. I'll call next week to schedule an appointment with you.

I enjoyed my interviews with you and look forward to beginning my career with your sales team.

Sincerely,

Erica Norse

JOB OFFER ACCEPTANCE LETTER

485 College Grove Drive  
Florence, KY 41020  
April 1, 20XX

Ms. Alice R. Temple  
Employee Relations Manager  
All Avenues Market Research  
412 Grandview Boulevard  
Louisville, KY 41214

Dear Ms. Temple:

It was a pleasure meeting with you and your market research team last week to discuss your needs for a Product Marketing Analyst I. I was flattered to be offered this position; however, I am unable to accept your offer of employment at this time.

Although I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about All Avenues Market Research, this particular position is not a good fit for me right now. After careful consideration, I have realized that your emphasis on international market research would conflict with my family responsibilities.

Should a domestic marketing research position within your organization become available, I would be pleased to be among those considered for the opening. You have a fine operation, and I would enjoy being a part of it.

Best wishes in your search.

Sincerely,

William Haile

JOB OFFER REJECTION LETTER

# Cover Letter Worksheet

1. What position are you applying for? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Employer (Organization) name \_\_\_\_\_
3. How did you learn about the position? (Handshake, employer's website, Monster.com, professor, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

4. Develop a list of desired skills for the position (see job description).  
*The employer may list more or fewer than 8 skills. Use another sheet of paper if needed. If they do not list specific skills, look up the position on [www.onetonline.org](http://www.onetonline.org) to learn about skills needed for the position.*

1.	5.
2.	6.
3.	7.
4.	8.

5. Review the above list; circle each of the skills in which you excel. Next, write these skills in column one below.
6. For each of the skills in column one, identify one or more specific ways you have demonstrated your ability at these skills. See example below.

Column One: Skill	Column Two: Way you have demonstrated this skill
EX: Goal Setting Skills	As the Academic Chair for my sorority, I held members accountable for their grades. I met with students to make action plans. Helped a student create an action plan to bring her grades up and she received a 3.5 GPA.

7. Look at the chart above and identify the skills and examples that are most applicable to the position. Use these in your letter.