**THE PURPOSE OF A COVER LETTER**

The cover letter is a formal business letter which is often the first contact with a prospective employer. It serves as an introduction of you and your background experience. Since it is usually the first impression you make on the employer, you want it to be your best.

Many employers will not look at a resume that arrives without a cover letter. The cover letter is a marketing tool; it communicates to the employer that you are interested in their position and their company and that you have something valuable to contribute. In certain situations, a well written cover letter can be more effective than the resume itself. Therefore, do your homework! Before writing your letter, find out as much as you can about the organization and the specific position. This research enables you to better relate your skills and qualifications to the organization and the position.

Anyone who can write a grammatically correct letter can write a good cover letter. However, it takes thinking and planning in order to create a cover letter that will set the stage for the employer to accept your resume as something special.

**Step One: The Introduction**

Indicate why you are contacting the employer, the position you are applying for, and how you became aware of this position. If you are responding to an position announcement, mention where you saw it. If an individual refers you, definitely mention their name.

**Step Two: Their Need - Your Experience**

Let them know that you have know something about their organization, their services or products. Address the hiring need they have and how you specifically meet their qualifications. Here is where your research will pay off. Highlight the best evidence of your qualifications. Convince the reader that what you have is exactly what they want. Do not copy your resume.

**Step Three: Conclusion and Contact**

State that you are interested in having an interview. Include where, when, and how you can be contacted; however, the best technique is to be pro-active by telling the employer exactly when you will initiate your follow-up telephone call or email and stick to this date!

**BUSINESS FORMAT**

A business format is the most recommended form for the cover letter. The block-style format with all text beginning at the left margin is preferred. Paragraphs are not indented. Handwritten notes are only appropriate for certain thank you notes.

Address your cover letter to the individual, business function, or discipline most clearly related to the position for which you are applying. Always try to get the name and job title of the person who could hire you. It is okay to call the Human Resource Department to find out the above information. Your letter and resume are most likely to be read if you are sending them to someone specific. Cover letters that are sent to personnel departments usually do not get read. However, there will be situations where you will not be able to obtain the name of a specific person, so you may want to use a title such as Personnel Director or Selection Committee.

**WRITING STYLE GUIDE**

* Concentrate on "why" you desire to work in that particular organization or field.
* Focus on what you can offer the employer rather than what you can gain by working for their organization.
* Your letter should be original, brief (one page), business-like, and it should be a good example of your ability to write clearly and concisely!
* Keep your sentences ten to twenty words long.
* Limit paragraph length to five to seven sentences.
* Use powerful action phrases to describe accomplishments, qualities and experiences.
* Try to avoid the overuse of "I."
* Personalize; reflect your style by balancing professionalism with personal warmth and friendliness.
* Convey enthusiasm, commitment, and confidence.

**PRESENTATION**

* Send a clean original signed with black ink; do not use a ballpoint pen.
* Use the same high-quality paper as you do for your resume.
* Stay away from bright colors.
* Use a common font with a professional appearance, such as Bookman, New York,

Times New Roman.

* Keep a copy of your letter on file for future reference.
* Proofread each letter carefully for proper spelling, syntax, grammar and typographical errors.
* Have someone else critique your letter to offer constructive feedback.

 **THANK YOU LETTERS USED IN JOB SEARCH**

A thank you, or follow-up letter, may be one of the most important letters of your job search. It is a way of offering your appreciation for being given an interview and, in some cases, accepting or declining an offer. Most importantly, the it is another way of further marketing yourself and impressing potential employers.

Thank you letters are usually personal and express your sincere interest in the position and the organization. They expand upon your qualifications, illustrate examples of your work, and further develop issues discussed in the interview. Customize your letter to meet each individual situation. Few individuals remember to send letters, so this will set you apart!

Some suggestions:

* Address the letter to key person(s) with whom you interviewed.
* Send the letter within one or two days following the interview.
* Be personal, specific, and sincere in your thanks.
* Provide any additional information that might have been requested during the interview.
* Confirm the employer's or your follow-up action (if any).
* As always, proofread for errors.

**TYPES OF THANK YOU LETTERS**

**Following the Job Interview**

Indicate your appreciation for the opportunity to interview and your interest in working with the organization. Reiterate your qualifications; highlight strengths that may or may not have been mentioned in the interview. Keep it short and to the point.

**Following an Informational Interview**

Thank the individual for taking the time to speak with you regarding his/her field. Mention how the interview was informative and helpful to you. Note that you are following up on any referrals the individual may have made and indicate that you will keep him/her appraised of your progress. A thank you should be sent for telephone interviews as well as personal interviews.

**Accepting a Job Offer**

Your job search is a success! More than likely, the employer will request a letter of acceptance. It should be brief. The letter should refer to the offer letter or telephone conversation stating that you accept the offer at a specified salary and starting date. You may express your eagerness to join the organization and confirm any instructions for travel, where to report, etc.

**Declining a Job Offer**

Should you decide not to accept a job offer, a thank you letter is mandatory and should be sent as soon as possible. Indicate your appreciation of the offer and the time invested in your interview. State that you are removing yourself as a candidate for consideration and explain your reason. Even when declining a position, a thank you letter keeps the lines of communication open should you need to contact that organization in the future.

**Letter of Application**

This type of letter serves as an alternative to a resume and cover letter, particularly if your background and reasons for interest in a specific job cannot be effectively and/or appropriately expressed in the resume. Though not frequently used, the letter of application combines the content of the resume and cover letter in a narrative summary of your background and experience.

**Request for Additional Information**

On occasion you may need additional information about a position or organization before considering or accepting employment. A position should not be accepted until you are aware of all aspects of employment. Either a telephone call or a letter would be appropriate for obtaining the needed information. The letter should make reference to the last communication and/or the job offer. Questions should be specific.

**Referecences:** Career Development Center, Occidental College