

# Career Services Center

## Cover Letters

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## Purpose and strategies

Your cover letter is more than likely **the first contact you will have with a potential employer**. If it is well-written, your letter will lead the reader to your résumé. If your letter is poorly written or produced, the employer may not even take time to review your resume and your application has a good chance of ending in the circular file.

When you prepare the cover letter **put yourself in the shoes of the hiring manager**. If you were doing the hiring, what attributes would the ideal candidate for this job possess? You probably would prefer that the person has work experience similar to, or at least applicable to, the position he or she is applying for. You would want the ideal candidate to be ambitious and eager to contribute his or her energy and skills to the success of your organization. The perfect candidate would demonstrate interest in, and knowledge of, your particular organization. In short, you would want to hire an energetic, dedicated, and skilled candidate.

The cover letter allows you to **present yourself as the perfect candidate**. Imagine your cover letter as a marketing tool, much like a television commercial. Effective commercials catch your attention by highlighting only the most attractive features of a product.

**Highlight your most attractive features as a potential employee**. Remember, employers typically receive tens, if not hundreds, of applications for each job opening. No one is going to waste time reading through a long letter crammed with text. **Be brief**. You should avoid detailing your entire work history. The best way to distinguish yourself is to highlight one or two of your accomplishments or abilities that show you are an above-average candidate for the position. Stressing only a few unique attributes increases your chances of being remembered by the recruiter and getting to the interview stage, where you can elaborate on the rest of your accomplishments.

Taking time to research each employer promises to be much more effective than sending out hundreds of form letters. In effect, you are saying to employers, "This is where I want to work. I have done my research and I am confident in my decision."

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*The pages that follow provide additional guidelines and samples for you. Once you have a draft cover letter written, call to set up an appointment with a Career Services counselor to have it critiqued.*

# Guidelines

Your address  
Your phone  
Your email

Date

Contact person's name  
Title  
Address

Dear Mr. (Ms., Dr.)\_\_\_\_\_:

## ***Paragraph 1***

State the position you are applying for and how you heard about the opening. Explain why your background makes you the best candidate for the position you are applying for. Keep the first paragraph short and hard-hitting.

## ***Paragraph 2***

Detail what you could do to contribute to this company, organization, or school system. Show how your qualifications will benefit the employer. Point out your unique background and how your experiences make you a qualified candidate for the position. Remember to keep this letter short; few, if any, employers will read a cover letter that exceeds one page.

## ***Paragraph 3***

Describe your interest in the organization. Subtly emphasize your knowledge about the employer (from the results of your research) and your familiarity with the industry as a whole. You should present yourself as eager to work for this employer.

## ***Paragraph 4***

In the closing paragraph, you should specifically request an interview. We encourage you to indicate that you will follow up with a telephone call to discuss "next steps" in the hiring process. Alternatively, you may include your telephone number and the hours you can be reached, so the recruiter may contact you to schedule an interview.

Sincerely,

*Your signature*

Your full name (typed)

Enclosure: Résumé (for multiple enclosures - Enclosures: (3)

## Cover letter tips

- ✓ Never send out a résumé without a cover letter - unless the employer clearly requests a résumé ONLY.
- ✓ Address your cover letter specifically to the person by name and title who will most likely be interviewing for the job you have in mind.
  - Call the employer's primary telephone number to ask for this information.
  - If you are answering a blind newspaper advertisement - one in which the employer is not specified - you can address your letter "Dear Hiring Manager."
- ✓ The cover letter should be neat, contain no typos, misspellings, or errors in grammar. Employers judge you on your ability to communicate and your ability to manage the presentation of information. A cover letter demonstrates both.
- ✓ Use 8 1/2 x 11 paper allowing a border of at least 1 inch. This allows space for the reader to make notes.
- ✓ Use the same quality paper as your résumé. Match your envelope, as well.
- ✓ Use a clear type face large enough to allow easy reading. Avoid script and other exotic typefaces. Ideally, utilize the same font as you use in your résumé.
- ✓ Individualize your cover letter. Each cover letter you write will have a somewhat different slant, depending on what skills are important to the needs of the particular employer.
  - Read the job description/advertisement closely for clues as to what the employer is looking for.
  - Research the organization before you write your cover letter by visiting their web site, reviewing annual reports, or contacting people in the organization.
- ✓ Keep your letter to three or four paragraphs and no longer than one page.
- ✓ Always close your cover letter with a request for an interview.
  - "I would welcome the opportunity for an interview."
  - Be assertive. "I will call you next week to discuss next steps in the hiring process." Be sure to do what you say you will do! If you say you will call next week, be sure to do so!
- ✓ Keep a copy of each letter and resume you send.

## What the experts say...

"you need to make it easy for the employer to buy. You need to clearly state when you will be available to talk to the employer. Be specific: give telephone numbers where you can be reached both at work and off work. You could have a tremendous background and present yourself very well, but if the employer can't reach you, everything could be lost."

-Lola M. Coxford, from *Resume Writing Made Easy for High-Tech*

"Because you can use your cover letter to highlight certain aspects of your resume, the same resume can be used to pursue different job opportunities. The beauty of the cover letter is that you can gear it to each particular company that is the recipient of your resume by stressing your most important qualification(s)."

-Adele Lewis, from *The Best Resumes for Scientists and Engineers*

"Poor grammar, bad punctuation and misspelled words suggest that the applicant is either poorly educated or simply doesn't care about the impression created... The chances are unusually high that the employer is going to forgo reading the accompanying resume and quickly move on to the next job applicant."

-Richard H. Beatty, from *The Perfect Cover Letter*

"Mention projects under development, recent awards, or favorable comments recently published about the company. You can find such information in the business press, including the business section of local newspapers and the many magazines that are devoted to particular industries."

-Neale Baxter, from *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*

"No cover letter should carry the salutation, 'To whom it may concern.' It will concern no one if you don't personalize it. The surest way to get the information is to find the name in trade journals or in *The Standard & Poor's Register*, *The Dun & Badstreet Directory*, or other directories. Failing all that, call the company and ask for the name of the appropriate person."

-Kenneth and Sheryl Dawson, *Job Search, The Total System*

"If there is a catch-22 situation in job hunting it involves the cover letter. Even in situations where it is not requested, you should attach a cover letter to your resume. However, a review of the cover letter is one of the most common methods by which candidates are eliminated from the process. The cover letter is rarely anything but a liability, but you must include it because its absence is worse."

-Jeff B. Speck, from *Hot Tips, Sneaky Tricks & Last Ditch Tactics*

# Sample letter for Social Service

California State University, Stanislaus  
Residence Village #243  
Turlock, CA

2726 Lindenshire  
Apartment 231  
Dallas, TX 75275-3853

June 27, 2003

Ms. Melissa Stephenson  
Change Management Services  
602 Main Street, Suite 212  
Dallas, TX 75202

Dear Ms. Stephenson:

Your advertised position of Case Worker, which I learned through the Career Services Center at California State University, Stanislaus, intrigued me, and I am enclosing a resume for your consideration. I graduated in May with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology with Departmental Distinction and a double minor in English and Gender Studies.

Working with Change Management Services would provide me an opportunity to combine my education, skills, interests, and experience in a career where I would serve others. As my resume reveals, several of my qualities meet your needs as I understand them:

Consistent teamwork and leadership ability demonstrated through positions held in numerous co-curricular activities. For example, I served as a peer counselor for the CCA program which provides educational programs around substance abuse issues.

Advanced critical thinking and effective writing skills obtained through extensive course work and psychological research, including an honors thesis. I also analyzed data collected at the Juvenile Detention Center at Stanislaus County Prison concerning family variables of violent juveniles.

Creative planning and efficient delegation skills demonstrated by coordinating and participating in successful programming, including serving as Program Coordinator and Talent Show Director for California State University, Stanislaus Welcome Back Week. I planned two successful events attended by over 2,500 incoming freshmen.

I would welcome the opportunity for a personal interview and can be reached on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings via phone at (209) 522-2000. Additionally, I will contact you next week to discuss next steps in the hiring process. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*Elena Martinez*

Elena Martinez

Enclosure: Resume

# Sample letter for Business

717 Williamsburg Terrace  
Stockton, CA 95326  
(209) 234-6632  
tfrench@hotmail.com

March 31, 2003

Ms. Colleen Gramacki  
Human Resources  
McKeith & Company, Inc.  
One Preston Park Plaza, Suite 2000  
Los Angeles, CA 90213

Dear Ms. Gramacki:

Recently, I attended a presentation on your company's Business Analyst Program at California State University, Stanislaus, I was very impressed with the program and McKeith & Company as a whole and would like to be considered for the position of Account Representative. Particularly appealing is the range of industries and clients served and your firm's ability to forge lasting partnerships. Equally impressive is the strong team structure and cooperation within the firm. It is clear that McKeith & Company is making a difference in the business world.

I believe my skills can make a difference to the McKeith team. Throughout my academic career at California State University, Stanislaus, I have demonstrated superior achievement and developed strong quantitative and analytic skills. However, my skills extend far beyond the classroom. My co-curricular activities include positions of leadership as well as work on teams and committees. Through campus organizations and volunteer work, I have also made an effort to contribute both to the college and to the surrounding community. I can offer McKeith these abilities as well as my dedication, energy, and willingness to learn new skills.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to explain more fully my qualifications and the ways in which I can contribute to the McKeith team. I will call you at the end of the next week to confirm appropriate next steps. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*Timothy E. French*

Timothy E. French

# Sample letter for Education

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14 Greenwich Street, Modesto, CA 95355  
(209) 522-1213 cgirard@csustan.edu

July 1, 2003

Mr. Francis J. Smith, Superintendent  
Oakdale School Department  
124 Washington Street  
Oakdale, CA 95345

Dear Mr. Smith:

In response to last week's advertisement in the *Modesto Bee* for a Grade Two teacher, I have enclosed my resume for your consideration.

A recent graduate from California State University, Stanislaus, both my academic and experiential learning experiences have well prepared me for this opportunity. I am confident that this rigorous preparation, in particular, my student teaching experiences, will make me an excellent addition to your teaching staff. While at Central Elementary School, I developed a thematic unit on butterflies and another on Native Americans, teaching a class diverse in ethnic backgrounds and levels of ability. Additionally, I had full responsibility of the class for a two week period during the teacher's absence.

One of the highlights of my student teaching experience was my involvement in the afterschool program. As a committee member, I offered creative ideas for activities for this state-funded pilot program. As a volunteer, I assisted students with their homework assignments when the program was launched in November. It was very rewarding for me to take such an active part in this much needed program.

I am intrigued to learn more about your school's interest in addressing the issue of afternoon child care, and I would welcome the opportunity to discuss how my qualifications would benefit the Oakdale School District. I will call you in two weeks to discuss the interviewing process and the timetable for hiring. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*Claudia A. Girard*

Claudia A. Girard