

HOW **2** guide:

Writing Cover Letters

Any time you email, fax, mail, or submit your resume online, you should include a cover letter. The purpose of a cover letter is to show the prospective employer how your qualifications fit the particular job you are applying to, as well as to communicate your interest in working for that particular organization. There are two basic types of cover letters: letters of application and letters of inquiry (or prospecting letters.)

A **letter of application** is used when applying for a position that has been posted and is currently available. The letter should clearly state how your educations, skills, and experience match the qualifications listed in the job posting. Therefore, it is imperative that you closely examine the job posting and ensure your letter addresses at least three of the main qualifications desired. Do not, however, duplicate everything that is on your resume. Just highlight your main qualifications. Also, you should never use a “generic” cover letter. Each one should be customized for a specific job and company.

A **letter of inquiry**, or prospecting letter, is sent to express interest in working for a particular employer when there is not an advertised job posting to respond to. In this type of letter, summarize your qualifications and highlight how you can make a contribution to the company. You also must communicate why this company interests you and why you want to work for them. Therefore, like a letter of application, these letters should be customized for a specific company – never use a generic letter. These types of letters are most effective when you can reference how you heard about the company, whether it is through one of your contacts or through your research. However, not all employers accept unsolicited letters and resumes.

In most cases, cover letters should not exceed one page in length. Use a professional business format, such as full block style. Below are the main sections to include when composing a cover letter.

Key Sections:

Salutation – Your letter should be addressed to a specific person. Research the most appropriate person to receive the letter. Consider calling the company receptionist for the name of the department manager.

First Paragraph – State immediately and concisely which position you are applying for and how you heard about it. Keep the first paragraph short – in most cases no more than 2 – 3 sentences.

Second Paragraph – This is your “sales pitch.” What makes you the best candidate for the position? Refer to the job posting, and correlate how your education, skills, and experience match the needs of the position. But don’t just repeat your resume. Pick 4 -5 key areas where you are a good fit.

Optional Third Paragraph – Why do you want to work for this employer? Emphasize your knowledge about the company, your familiarity with the industry, and how this position fits into your career plans. If this section is not longer than two sentences, do not create a third paragraph – just combine content into the final paragraph.

Final Paragraph – In this paragraph, thank the person for their time and consideration. Indicate the phone number where you can best be reached. (Make sure there is a professional greeting, including your name, on your voicemail message!) If you are applying to a position out of the area, indicate when you are planning to relocate to that area, or when you may be taking a trip to that area and would be available for an interview.

The Closing – Keep the closing simple-“Sincerely” suffices. If sending the letter via email, simply type your name under your closing. (You can include a script version of your name in place of a signature.) If printing your letter, sign your name in black ink above your typed name.

Sample cover letters are available at <http://studentservices.fgcu.edu/Careers/handouts.asp>.