

A “cover letter” is a letter—or an email—written in order to request an interview with a person who has the power to hire you. A cover letter may also be written to obtain information from a contact who will assist you in your job search (perhaps a request for an “informational interview”). A résumé is always accompanied by a cover letter/email. The cover letter should make the potential employer interested in the résumé and should refer to but not duplicate the résumé. Like any other piece of communication, the cover letter must be only three things: clear, relevant, and interesting. If you are clear and present information relevant to the particular employer you have in mind, you will probably be interesting and then will not have to sound “businesslike” or “professional” or anything else. You will sound like yourself and be a confident and effective communicator.

You should address the cover letter to a specific individual. It is not usually difficult to simply call and obtain the name of someone in an organization (e.g., the principal, the marketing director, the editor). If you cannot find the name of a specific individual to whom to address the letter, address the letter to the organization itself, or the company (e.g., “Dear Ready-Mart Distribution:”)

A cover letter should address four main topics, not necessarily in this order:

1. **Why you are writing:** Tell if you are responding to an advertised vacancy, writing to inquire about possible openings, looking for information, or were referred by a mutual acquaintance. If you are writing in response to an ad, mention the publication and the date (e.g., “in the Sunday, February 3 edition of the Boston Globe”; “on your company website on January 5”).
2. **Why you are a good fit (your background):** In a few sentences, talk about what makes you uniquely suited for the particular position or career field. Give a few concrete examples of ways in which you have demonstrated skills or personal characteristics that the employer needs in order to get the job done. Think: what is the most important aspect of yourself that you want the employer to know? As much as possible, try to relate directly to the employer’s needs. If you are writing not for a job interview but in order to gather information, give a few examples of accomplishments of which you are proud. Let your contact know why you think you would be good in a particular field. Help them get to know you.
3. **Why you are interested:** This is important. No employer wants to feel as if you are just blindly “hitting them up” for a job. Let the employer know you care enough to have done a little research on their particular position or organization. What about the company/school/agency particularly interests you? Have you done academic work that relates to their products or services? Did you student-teach in a similar classroom? Have you heard or read some exciting innovations in their company/school/agency? Some of this may be covered while you are describing your background, but in all cases, let them know why you are interested in them.
4. **What you will do next:** The close of some letters may just indicate that you look forward to hearing from the prospective employer regarding an interview. Make sure you give them the best means of contacting you: cell phone, email, etc. Alternatively, you can close by saying that you will call in order to set up an interview. That does not guarantee that they will respond favorably. It is a good way, however, (and perfectly polite and appropriate), to make sure that you are in control of your job search.

**BEST TIP:** Based on the above four topics, make an outline of what you want to say. Take time to think about it and then simply jot down notes on the essential aspects of your background that you would like to communicate.

Email [CLP@nec.edu](mailto:CLP@nec.edu) for examples of cover letters to get you started.