

The Cover Letter

Once your resume (c.v.) is ready to be sent to prospective employers, you will need to write a cover letter to complete your “sales presentation.” You should never send a resume without a cover letter. The cover letter is NOT intended to land you a job; that is the purpose of the interview.

A cover letter gives you the opportunity to:

- position yourself more precisely than you can in the resume alone
- write about specifics (relevant experience you have had, projects you have worked on, why you are interested in the position, etc.)
- direct the reader’s attention to your strong points
- stimulate the interest of a prospective employer
- persuade him or her to grant you an interview

The Cover Letter in English

Before you begin writing:

- Try to identify the name of the person to whom the letter should be addressed (not “To whom it may concern” or “Dear Personnel Director” if you can avoid it). Ideally you should be sending it directly to the person who has the power to hire you.
- Plan how you will tailor the letter to the particular position/employer you are contacting. Select certain experiences, achievements or abilities to highlight which are relevant to the position/company. If you are answering an ad, make sure your letter focuses on each of the requirements mentioned and how you fulfill them. **Don’t be afraid to make this information stand out by putting it in bold print!**

Format and appearance:

- always typed
- neat and well-organized
- one page in length
- use same paper as resume (good quality unlined bond paper)

Presentation Dos and Don’ts:

DO...

- be professional and concise
- focus on what’s most relevant to the potential employer
- highlight your accomplishments and direct your reader to your strong points
- suggest why you and the company would make a good match
- begin and end your letter on a positive note; indicate how interested you are at the prospect of working for the company
- proofread each letter (and have a friend proofread it too!)

DON’T...

- come across as arrogant or attempt humor
- use clichés (e.g “I like to work with people” or “I am looking for a challenge”)

Parts of a Cover Letter

First paragraph

This section should mention how you learned about the position or company (whether you are answering an ad, were referred by a specific person or resource, or are sending an unsolicited application) and which position or department you would like to be considered for. You may also indicate here that you are enclosing your resume. Two to three sentences should suffice.

Sample sentences:

I am inquiring into the possibility of a summer job at (company name). I am currently a student...

I am interested in employment opportunities in the marketing area mentioned on your website. Enclosed please find my resume for your review.

I am writing at the suggestion of Professor _____, who felt that your company may be in need of an intern. I am currently...

In response to your advertisement for an English mother tongue translator which appeared in the April 7 edition of *FUSAC*, please find enclosed a copy my resume for your consideration.

As a recent graduate in International Economics from The American University of Paris with trading experience, I feel my profile may be of interest to you.

I am interested in being considered for an internship in the YYY department of XXX (name of company). I am currently a junior at The American University of Paris majoring in _____ with a concentration in _____.

I learned about your company at a recent trade fair in Le Bourget, France. Your stand caught my eye because the products on display seemed particularly innovative, using technology in exciting new ways. I have since learned that (name of company) is expanding internationally, and would be excited at the idea of being part of your team.

Second paragraph

Indicate why you are interested in the position, the company, its products, and/or services and how your background, qualifications and motivation can be valuable to this employer. If you have had related experience or specialized training, point it out. Use action words to describe your experience and accomplishments. Highlight your skills by providing brief and specific examples of when you used them in the past or are currently doing so. (This is where some knowledge of the company is very useful: give priority to information that is relevant to its needs as you understand them.)

Sample sentences:

I have an international background and a strong interest in business. I speak four languages and am at ease in a multicultural environment, having lived in Germany, France, Lebanon, the UK and the United States (see attached resume). My career goal is to work in management consulting.

As you may observe from my attached resume, I have experience in market research, sales, and management. I have an enterprising personality and enjoy arranging business deals. I also know how to use my knowledge of various cultures in negotiating situations.

You will note on my enclosed resume that I am a (country) national and am currently studying in France at The American University of Paris. Students there come from over 90 countries, and I am used to and enjoy an international setting. I speak English, French and Italian fluently.

I have noticed on your company website that you are seeking dynamic individuals who can adapt quickly to new working environments. I believe that my background would make me well suited to a position in (name of company).

I am majoring in International Affairs at The American University of Paris. Working at (name of organization) would allow me to continue developing my business skills in a large international organization.

As my resume indicates, I have been developing my accounting skills through summer jobs in the _____ Hotel in (location), and my interpersonal skills as part-time receptionist in the Admissions office of The American University of Paris. In my recent position as assistant in (name of company) in Paris, one of my responsibilities was translating business correspondence from French and Spanish into English.

Third paragraph

In the closing paragraph, bring the focus back to the employer and why you believe there is a good fit between you and the position you are applying for. Then make reference to your availability for a personal interview and how you can be reached. For instance, you may state that on a certain date you will be in the city where the company is located and would be interested in scheduling an interview if possible. You can mention that you look forward to hearing from them.

Sample sentences:

I believe that my profile and aspirations make me a good match for a dynamic, global corporation such as XXXX. I am available for full-time work from June 1 to August 31. I can be reached by email (.....) or by phone (.....). I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your consideration.

Given my international background, experience in fashion sales, and strong language skills, I am confident that I would make an excellent addition to your marketing team. I am available to visit (location) for an interview at my own expense. I would appreciate the chance to meet with you to discuss what I could bring to your company.

XXX is of particular interest to me because of its innovative approach and strong international presence. I would very much like to schedule an interview to discuss my qualifications for the position in more detail. I can be contacted at ...

XXX's position as a global leader in enterprise search and management solutions makes it of particular appeal to me, combining my strong interest in business and information technology. I would be happy to discuss my experience and training in a meeting with you with a view towards a potential internship. If I may provide you with additional information, please contact me at ...

Sample letter

On the following page you will find a sample letter which takes a different approach, but still includes the basic parts of the letter as outlined above.

Sample letter

Joseph H. Graduate
31, ave. Bosquet
75343 Paris Cedex 07

contact person's name
company name
company address

date

Dear Mr./Ms. _____:

As part of my senior course work, I was required to study the accounting practices of a medium-sized firm. Knowing the reputation of your products, I selected (name of company) and spent many hours reviewing your accounting reports and became even more impressed with your organization and its people.

I anticipate a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Business Administration from The American University of Paris this coming May. I am particularly interested in financial accounting, but my background also includes special strengths in managerial accounting and a keen interest in international business law. My goal is to move into corporate accounting.

You will find enclosed my resume detailing my duties as intern at UAP Assurances in Paris last semester, as well as information on my current responsibilities as Treasurer of the university Student Government Association. These experiences have allowed me to develop strong teamwork skills, attention to detail and the ability to follow through on complex projects.

Because of my background and professional objectives, (name of company) is of special interest to me. I hope that an interview may be arranged during my upcoming visit to New York, April 12 to 15. I can be reached at ... if I may provide you with any additional information. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Signature

Joseph H. Graduate

The Cover Letter in French: *La lettre de motivation*

Keep in mind...

- a handwritten letter may be requested (see below)
- the letter should fit on one page in most cases
- letters in French are more formal than those written in English: make sure you use the right “polite expressions!”
- the overall tone of the letter must be one of modesty, respect, even deference, which nevertheless draws attention to your strengths and accomplishments. An aggressive or overly boastful letter will not work in your favor.
- the structure of the letter -- with the basic three paragraphs mentioned previously -- can be the same as the cover letter in English, with similar content.
- if a company is interested in you they will call or email -- and if they are not interested, or if they are putting your letter on file, you will receive a letter (or nothing).
- plain white paper is best

To type or not to type?

If you are answering a classified advertisement, it is customary to hand write your cover letter. Be aware that your letter (and the envelope!) may be analyzed by a graphologist (handwriting expert). Apparently, if you are left-handed, you should indicate this at the bottom of your letter as the handwriting analysis will be very different! If you are sending a letter “spontaneously” (i.e. an unsolicited application), you need not hand write your letter.

If you are concerned about your handwriting being used against you (as any of us who have not learned handwriting in French schools should be), you can consider sending a “fausse lettre spontanée” -- you saw the ad, you are addressing the requirements of the ad, but you are pretending you did not see it and are simply contacting that company because it interests you. You would then not need to hand write the letter. You also do not need to worry about hand writing your letter if you are requested to send your application by email, but you may be asked to hand write something at the interview stage.

Sample Sentences for a Cover Letter in French

Premier paragraphe :

Suite à une information que j’ai reçue du Service Stages et Orientation Carrières de The American University of Paris, je vous présente ma candidature pour le poste de (intitulé du poste).

Le professeur (nom du professeur) m’a conseillé de vous écrire, car je suis à la recherche d’un stage pendant la période d’été.

Votre annonce parue dans *le Figaro* a retenu toute mon attention.

Suite à l’annonce parue dans le FUSAC du (date), je me permets de poser ma candidature au poste de (intitulé du poste).

Récemment diplômé(e) en Littérature comparée de The American University of Paris, je vous adresse ma candidature pour un poste de (intitulé du poste).

A la recherche d’un premier emploi, je souhaite m’orienter dans le domaine de l’import-export.

Deuxième paragraphe :

Actuellement étudiant(e) en Communication internationale, de nationalité (votre nationalité), je pense avoir le profil qui conviendrait à ce poste.

Sur mon curriculum vitae ci-joint, vous remarquerez que mon expérience porte sur le domaine du marketing.

En plus de ma langue maternelle, le/l' (*langue*), je parle couramment français et anglais. Je suis également capable de comprendre l'allemand, le russe, l'italien et l'espagnol. J'ai utilisé toutes ces langues lors de mes emplois précédents.

Actuellement étudiant(e) en (première/deuxième/etc.) année d'Histoire de l'Art à The American University of Paris, je m'intéresse vivement au (nom de la fonction ou de l'industrie).

Parlant couramment l'anglais, le français et l'arabe, j'ai vécu dans plusieurs pays au cours de ma vie. Je poursuis actuellement mes études dans une université où plus de 90 pays sont représentés, et je me sens par conséquent parfaitement à l'aise dans une ambiance internationale.

Comme vous pourrez le constater en lisant mon CV ci-joint, je possède une bonne connaissance de l'allemand complétée par de nombreux séjours dans ce pays.

Aujourd'hui, je souhaite vous apporter mon dynamisme et mes compétences dans le cadre d'un poste en ... Vous rencontrer me permettra de vous convaincre de mes motivations et de vous démontrer, en fonction des attentes qui sont les vôtres, en quoi mon profil pourrait correspondre à vos besoins.

Ayant vécu en Espagne et en France, étudiant actuellement dans une université américaine, je m'adapte facilement à des personnes venant de cultures différentes. J'ai toujours eu la passion de l'édition, et je suis motivée et prête à m'investir dans ce poste captivant.

Mes expériences professionnelles m'ont donné l'occasion de développer ma rigueur et mon sens relationnel. J'ai par ailleurs pu développer ces qualités dans mes activités extra-scolaires.

Au cours de mon stage chez (nom de la société), j'ai réalisé une étude économique sur.....

D'après les informations que j'ai pu lire sur votre site web, vous êtes à la recherche de collaborateurs ayant une expérience internationale. Je crois avoir le profil qui correspond à vos besoins.

Troisième paragraphe :

Disponible immédiatement pour travailler à temps partiel/complet, je vous remercie de l'attention que vous voudrez bien porter à ma candidature et vous prie d'agréer, Madame, Monsieur, mes sincères salutations.

Dans l'attente de votre réponse, je vous prie d'agréer, Madame (Monsieur), l'expression de ma considération distinguée.

Je serais heureux/heureuse de vous parler plus longuement de mes compétences à l'occasion d'un entretien. Dans cette attente et avec mes remerciements, je vous prie de recevoir, Madame, Monsieur, mes sincères salutations.

Dans l'attente de vous rencontrer, je vous prie de croire, Monsieur, à l'expression de mes salutations distinguées.

Je reste à votre entière disposition pour vous rencontrer afin de vous permettre de mieux évaluer ma candidature, et je vous prie de croire, Madame, Monsieur, à l'assurance de mes salutations distinguées.

Sample letter

your NAME (last name in capitals)
your address

contact name
XYZ (company name)
company address

Paris, le (date)

Réf.: *(if you are answering an ad with a reference number, indicate the reference here, as well as on the envelope if sending your application by post)*

Madame, Monsieur,

J'ai pris connaissance de l'offre de poste de (position) dans votre société par le biais du Service Stages et Orientation/Carrières de The American University of Paris.

De langue maternelle anglaise avec une bonne maîtrise du français, je suis en fin de cursus en *(see list of majors translated into French on the last page of this document)*.

Comme vous pourrez le constater en lisant mon curriculum vitae ci-joint, j'ai travaillé dans une société d'import-export à Toronto pendant 6 mois. J'étais responsable du développement de nouveaux marchés dans les pays de l'Europe de l'Est. Cette expérience professionnelle m'a permis de gagner en rigueur, autonomie, relationnel et facultés d'intégration au sein d'une équipe.

XYZ m'intéresse tout particulièrement puisque c'est une société internationale, dynamique, et innovante. Désireux/euse d'investir toute ma motivation dans la réalisation de vos objectifs, je suis disponible à partir de fin mai pour un travail à temps complet. Dans l'espoir de vous rencontrer prochainement, je vous prie de croire, Madame, Monsieur, à l'expression de mes salutations distinguées.

Your signature

Your NAME (last name in capitals)