

Illinois Central College - Cover Letter Guide

The Purpose

As a general rule, send a cover letter every time you submit a resume. Customize the cover letter for each specific job for which you apply. The main job of the cover letter is to get the employer to take a close look at your resume. Cover letters that show how the writer's skills and experience will benefit the employer help accomplish this purpose. Don't use the cover letter to describe what you want from the employer. Use the cover letter to the employer know what you can bring to the organization.

Guidelines

Headings: Use the same heading you have on your resume—center it. Left justify the rest of the letter – date, salutation, paragraphs, and closing. Keeping the same format really helps to make your document more professional.

Inside Address: The full name, title, and address of the person who will review your resume. Take the time to research the name of the person who is the hiring manager.

Salutation: Use “Dear Dr., Ms. or Mr.” and the last name of the individual (call the company for the name of the person and correct salutation) end with the salutation with a colon. (:) Do NOT use “To Whom It May Concern” or “Dear Madam” or “Dear Sir” – those are outdated greetings, and it will appear you don't care enough to find out the name of the person.

Opening paragraph: This paragraph lets the employer know the specific job in which you are applying. You might also make a note of the person that referred you to this position or where you learned of the position in this paragraph.

Middle paragraph/s: Point out your more relevant skills, qualifications or accomplishments that highlight your value to them. Be concise. You are not rewriting your resume, just highlighting those things that may be of most interest for the position.

Closing paragraph: Say that you would welcome the chance to meet in person to further discuss how your background and skills would allow you to bring value to the organization immediately. If you are willing to follow through, you could say that you will call in four or five working days to schedule a time to meet (the caution here is that some recruiters may find that level of assertion off-putting.) End the letter with “Sincerely” and your signature in blue ink (if you will be sending a hard copy).

Final Tips

Keep it brief! Write no more than three or four paragraphs and use 10 point font or larger. Long letters in small fonts are less likely to be completely read (than shorter letters in 11 or 12 point fonts).