

Cover Letters

When you apply for a job, you should include a cover letter with your résumé. A cover letter tells the employer that you are interested in the job, and explains why you are a suitable candidate. It gives you the opportunity to highlight your most relevant skills and experience. It is your first, and possibly your only, opportunity to make a good impression with the employer, since most employers will not look at an attached résumé or consider interviewing you if the cover letter is poorly done.

Here are some guidelines for writing effective cover letters:

- Customize your cover letter to the position you are applying for.
- Be brief – cover letters shouldn't be longer than one page.
- Address the letter to a specific person when possible (a contact name is often listed on the job posting).
- Mention the skills and qualifications listed in the advertisement.
- Describe how you are a good fit for this position; be specific and highlight a few especially relevant skills.
- Keep the tone positive and professional.
- Proofread your letter to ensure there are no grammar or spelling errors.

Opening paragraph: state the reason for your letter and the position you are applying for.

Second paragraph: Make it personal. Why are you a good candidate for this position?

Third paragraph: Thank the employer, request an interview and end on a positive note.

February 16, 2011

Ms. Debra Walsh
Director of Human Resources
WireTech Inc.
777 King St. Suite 400
Kitchener, ON

Dear Ms. Walsh:

Please accept my application for the position of customer service representative at your company. I would very much like to be considered for the position. I have enclosed my résumé for your review.

I believe I can make a positive contribution to your company. I have extensive experience as an assistant manager, and later as a manager in two different retail settings. In these positions, I was responsible for all areas of customer relations, including staff scheduling, training and supervision as well as sales generation and reporting. In addition, I have worked in restaurant management. Currently, I am working as a part-time sales associate with a large retail chain.

I am confident that my skills and experience would be an asset to your organization. I would welcome the opportunity to participate in a personal interview to answer any of your questions and present my qualifications. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

1 In pairs, use the checklist below and discuss the quality of the cover letter below. Circle the parts of the letter that you think are incorrect or inappropriate. Write your comments about each paragraph in the space provided. Give suggestions on how this letter could be improved.

To Whom It May Concern,

I am applying for the position of marketing associate at Garamond Electronics. Please accept my application.

I think I would do a very good job for your company. I have all the skills that the job advertisement asks for, and I am a hard worker. Most of my work experience is directly related to the job you are advertising. I have over 10 years experience in this field.

Thank you for considering my application. I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,
Jason Mancuzi

Cover letter checklist:

Letter is made out to a specific person	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letter addresses the skills and qualifications described in the advertisement	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letter shows that the applicant is a good fit for this particular job; is specific	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tone is positive and professional	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letter is free of spelling and grammar errors	<input type="checkbox"/>

2  Search the Internet for sample cover letters and tips for writing effective cover letters. Make a cover letter checklist for your own use. Share your list in a small group.

Possible search terms: *sample cover letters; writing cover letters; how to write a cover letter + video*

Hard and soft skills

In your cover letter, you should emphasize your hard skills and your soft skills. Hard skills are also referred to as technical skills. They include skills learned through training and experience, such as cooking or designing software. Soft skills sometimes refer to qualities and attitudes, such as dependability and flexibility. You should be able to identify both kinds of skills you have. For a examples of soft skills, go to the Work Habits section of the Ontario Skills Passport website at: <http://skills.edu.gov.on.ca>.

Highlighting your strengths

Take some time to consider what you can include in your cover letters. Begin by thinking about the skills and strengths you can bring to any job, then focus on the ones that are specific to the job you are applying for.

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Search the three websites below to find listings of skills related to your occupation. These skills can help you to determine the skills and experience you should highlight when applying for jobs. Answer the questions that follow.

The Essential Skills Profiles

Find the *Essential Skills Profile* for the occupation(s) you are interested in. Answer the questions below.

1. What are the most important Essential Skills identified in this Essential Skills Profile?
2. Review the task examples. Do you have experience with these kinds of tasks? If so, write down some examples from your own work experience.
3. Look at the section on *Attitudes* (in the Essential Skills Profile, it is listed under *Other Information*). Write a sentence to describe how your own attitude meets the occupational demand.

The Ontario Skills Passport

1. Search the *Work Habits* list to find habits you feel you have.
2. Write a sentence for each work habit that shows a potential employer you have this quality.

Conference Board of Canada Employability Skills

1. Go to the *Conference Board of Canada's* web site at www.conferenceboard.ca and search for *Employability Skills 2000+*.
2. Review the skills listed under *Personal Management* and *Teamwork*. Consider your own work experience: can you think of examples from your past that demonstrate you have some or all of these skills?

- 4** Read the cover letter below. Circle or highlight the hard and soft skills Joanna Silva indicates she has. Use the *Ontario Skills Passport* list of *Work Habits* to help you decide. Then discuss whether or not this is an effective cover letter.

February 16, 2011

Ms. Debra Walsh, Director of Human Resources
WireTech Inc.
777 King St. Suite 400
Kitchener, ON

Dear Ms. Walsh:

Please accept my application for the position of customer service representative at your company. I was excited to learn of this opportunity, and would very much like to be considered for the position.

This position will give me the opportunity to use my experience gained as an assistant manager, and later as manager in two different retail settings. In these positions, I was responsible for all areas of customer relations, including staff scheduling, training and supervision as well as sales generation and reporting. My additional experience includes working in restaurant management and, currently, as a part-time sales associate with a large retail chain.

Other skills that make me uniquely qualified for this position include excellent interpersonal skills, attention to detail, ability to work as a member of a team, and a dedication to work to the highest-quality standards. My references from previous positions speak to these qualities.

I am confident that my skills and experience would be an asset to your organization. For your convenience, I have attached a résumé to this application. I would welcome the opportunity to participate in a personal interview to answer any of your questions and present my qualifications. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Joanna Silva

- 5**  Search the *Employment Ontario* website to find services or courses in your community that can help you to write cover letters and résumés. Go to the *Employment Ontario* website at www.edu.gov.on.ca. Click on *I am new to Ontario*. Follow the online instructions to find services in your community.