

CONTACT EMPLOYERS: COVER LETTERS

Every résumé requires an introduction—an explanation as to why a résumé is sent. An effective cover letter introduces your résumé, summarizes your immediate career goals, and is used for many reasons:

ECS TIPS

◆ Every résumé requires an introduction or explanation as to why a résumé is sent. Most likely, your “cover letter” will be emailed as the body of the email with your résumé attached.

- Respond to specific job postings for direct hire
- Request an interview invitation
- Inquire about opportunities
- Follow-up an interview to show appreciation

Form Letters

Never send a “form” letter to employers. At first glance to the student, this is an easy and quick way to contact hundreds of employers with résumés. Often called the “shot gun” approach, candidates erroneously use this approach to claim that they have done an “exhaustive” job search, sending résumés to hundreds of employers and receiving no responses. Upon this premise, they conclude that there are no jobs “out there,” and they blame the bad economy or others for their joblessness. How often have you heard, “I’ve sent out 400

résumés and posted a résumé on every major job board, but no one is getting back to me. There are no jobs.” ECS would never condone this as even an “outlier” strategy for conducting an effective job search.

Letter Format *(See page 32 for proper business letter format)*

The use of form letters is a waste of your time, so create a targeted list of employers. Then develop letters or emails specifically for each employer. Each communication will include these basic elements:

Introduction: Clearly and simply state why you are writing to the employer. It is crucial for you to make it clear that you deserve further consideration. If appropriate, identify the person, by name, who suggested you contact the employer. This use of networking is particularly effective.

Body: Emphasize the match between your qualifications and the employer’s needs. Do not simply repeat your résumé but expand upon 1 or 2 qualifications that fit the specific position for which you are applying. Describe how your background has prepared you as a “good match” for the ongoing and/or future needs of that specific employer.

Closing: Request employer action (i.e., an interview, an INVITED letter, or a response for a site visit) at the employer’s earliest convenience. Indicate the next step you will take, such as “I will contact you during the week of October 2 to follow up on this request.” Close with a goodwill/appreciation statement: “I look forward to meeting with you. Thank you for your time and consideration.”

The three basic paragraphs of a cover letter

Tone and Timing

Professional Tone: While the message content is important, the tone is equally important. Be professional. Address the message to Mr., Ms. or Dr. XXX. It is rarely acceptable to use first names in a business salutation. Avoid using slang and contractions (“I’ve” and “you’ll”). Be courteous and respectful.

Effective Timing: Traditionally, “new college hires” are recruited on campus in early fall and early spring, but new market needs and budgets affect timing.

A TRUE (but unfortunate) EMAIL STORY

CHARACTERS: *(student names changed)*

Bob (UW–Madison engineering student; strong candidate)
Ms. Hanson (Human Resources Manager, Large, Good Co.)
Wally (Engineering student’s buddy)

PLACE: *(place not changed; it happened)*

CAE Lab
Late one night
Not too long ago