

**JOB SEARCH MATERIALS GUIDE**

CONTENTS

[USING YOUR COVER LETTER](#_Toc424120527) 2

[USING YOUR RESUME](#_Toc424120528) 5

[USING YOUR REFERENCE PAGE](#_Toc424120529) 8

[INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP](#_Toc424120530) 10

[USING YOUR THANK-YOU NOTE](#_Toc424120531) 10

[GETTING FEEDBACK](#_Toc424120532) 13

***USING YOUR COVER LETTER***

**TRANSITIONING CAREERS**

WHAT TO DO WHEN IT’S TIME TO MOVE ON.

It is not uncommon for employers to receive hundreds of résumés for one position, so including a well-written cover letter can set you apart from the competition. An effective cover letter must convey your value, align your experience and abilities to the company needs, and influence the reader. It is also the perfect place to infuse your personal branding message and showcase your personality and traits beyond technical skills.

It is very important that you think of this document as a template, which can be altered for each job you apply to in order to meet these three goals:

**ALIGN TO THE ROLE:** The best way to modify your cover letter is to customize the bullet points that describe how your skills or work experience align to the needs outlined in the job. This advanced level of understanding should be gained through your experience and the research you have conducted.

**1**

**CONVEY THE COMPANY’S VALUES:** To win a hiring manager’s interest, it is necessary to relate what you offer and the challenges you solve directly to the company’s particular culture, needs, and business challenges. You are a problem-solver. Now answer the question, “What are their problems?”

**2**

**PERSONALIZE TO THE READER:** Capture the reader’s attention by addressing your message specifically to the actual person who will read your cover letter and résumé. To ensure you are reaching a person with influence, research the company first. Call to find the name of the hiring manager for your desired position or the name of a recruiting specialist to whom you should address your cover letter. By making the effort to connect with a real person, you are demonstrating a willingness to exceed expectations and seek out answers on your own. If this information is inaccessible, use a greeting such as “Good Morning” or “Good Afternoon.”

**3**

Proofread your customized cover letter before you send it. There is no excuse for typos, and if you are likely to miss details, ask a friend to proofread it as well.

3 KEY OPPORTUNITIES TO SEND COVER LETTERS:

* When applying online for a job, upload a customized cover letter along with your résumé.
* After submitting your online application, follow up and thank the hiring manager for taking the time to review your application. First, identify the hiring manager for the position (hint: try a Google, social media, or professional networking site search to find a contact name). Then, email him or her a personalized version of your cover letter in the body of the message with your résumé attached.
* “Snail mail” can increase your visibility too! After you have applied online, send the hiring manager a short thank-you note version of your cover letter in a traditional mail format. As you did in your email, express your gratitude for his or her time and note your interest in the company expressing the desire to get his or her attention as reasons that triggered this “snail mail” approach.

COVER LETTER TEMPLATE

YOUR NAME

Address | City, State Zip | (xxx) xxx-xxxx | email@email.com | social media URL

[DATE]

Contact person

Company name

Street address

City, State Zip

Re: Job title and/or job order number

Dear [Mr. or Ms. Last Name],

Develop a paragraph of two to three sentences that cover the following information: Why you are writing, what position you are targeting and where you saw the position advertised (or how you became aware of the position). This paragraph can also explain why you are currently looking for work (e.g., you recently graduated, moved to a new location, or are finishing a temporary assignment).

Provide an introductory statement to some of the highlights you are offering:

* List some of the job-specific skills that are relevant to the target job (or that are mentioned in the job posting) and how you acquired or applied those skills.
* List a few of your transferable skills that illustrate how you perform relevant tasks. Provide a supporting example.
* List an example of an accomplishment that was achieved by applying skills that are relevant to the target job.
* Say something about your interpersonal and/or communication skills and provide an example of how they impacted your performance.

For the closing paragraph, indicate that the résumé is enclosed, acknowledge its limitations and request an interview. Tell the employer how to reach you (you may also suggest the best times), and include any additional information that will confirm your interest in connecting.

Thank the employer for his or her time and consideration. Indicate an interest in the next step.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

SAMPLE COVER LETTER

YOUR NAME

Address | City, State Zip | (xxx) xxx-xxxx | email@email.com | social media URL

**MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL**

Date

Decision Maker, Title

Company Name

Address

City, State, Zip

Dear [Name of Decision Maker],

As an experienced [job title], I was pleased to see the [job opening] opportunity within [target company]. I am an ideal candidate for this position because of my [insert specific experience], ability to work collaboratively to deliver value and results, and enthusiasm to grow long-term with your company

While researching your company on [insert source], I was happy to learn your workplace culture lives out the values you set forth on a daily basis. This is exciting to me because as a [target job title], I thrive in taking on challenges in a [use keywords that describe the culture, i.e., fast-paced and high-energy environment]. You want to hire passionate people who want to [use keywords that describe who they hire, i.e., make a difference and continue learning]. Last year, I was recognized for my leadership and willingness to readily and voluntarily take ownership of [insert problem]. My positive influence is a [your job title], team member, and business partner contributed to my success in [insert result of the problem you solved].

My focus as a [previous job title] was to achieve eﬃcient and transparent communication on all levels, so no one was left wondering about the purpose of a meeting, their role on a call, or how to prioritize their work [give an example of one of your top accomplishments]. My success in creating candid and agile teams that could respond to conventional and unconventional issues aligns with your workplace values of candor and agility [align your accomplishments with their values]. In my trainings and presentations, the goal was not only to share information and deliver a concise mission-driven message to benefit the organization, but also to leave my team inspired to make decisions and feeling accountable for their accomplishments. I am an ideal fit for your company and this position because of my previous experience, ability to deliver value and results, and willingness to fit in with your workplace culture and grow long-term with your company.

I hope to speak with you further about how my qualifications match well to your needs. Please contact me to schedule an interview at your convenience. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

USING YOUR RESUME

Again, employers may receive hundreds of résumés for one position. It is crucial to modify a résumé for each job. Do not make the mistake of submitting an identical résumé with every application, especially for different roles or companies. It is very important that you think of this document as a template that you can alter to satisfy:

**ROLE MATCH:** First, you want the hiring manager to recognize you as a match. Give your résumé a focus with a headline that contains the exact same target job title from the ad. The headline will be the first thing to capture the reader’s attention if it is positioned on a separate line immediately below your contact information.

**1**

**SKILL MATCH:** The reality of the process is that many companies use computerized screening systems programmed to scan résumés keywords and rank them by relevance. Create a section in your résumé that can act as a keyword bank − this will help your résumé pass the computer’s screening system. A core competencies section can house the abilities and expertise that were listed as requirements in the job ad.

**2**

**VALUE MATCH:** In order to win the reader’s interest it is necessary to directly relate what you offer and what problems you solve to the company’s particular needs and business challenges. Describe how you meet those needs with bulleted descriptions of your achievements in a summary of qualifications.

**3**

JOB AD ALIGNMENT:

Now, how do you modify your résumé to incorporate the listed job requirements so the employer will recognize you as an exact match for this position? Follow a few steps to sharpen your résumé so it will hit the bull’s-eye:

* 1. Find one job ad in your target area. Print it out or paste it into a document on your computer.
  2. Highlight the job ad. What you highlight will become your résumé’s target job title, core competencies, and summary of qualifications sections.
  3. Give your résumé a headline with the target job title. Use the exact title from the ad.
  4. Add core competencies to match keywords in the ad. List your relevant skills, abilities, and expertise.
  5. Ask yourself, **“What kinds of problems does this employer face?”** Align your value with the employer’s advertised needs. Share accomplishments or work experience stories in the summary of qualifications section of your résumé. From an employer’s perspective, the most important part of a work experience story is the result of the action you took or the challenge you faced. If you need help understanding what these challenges are, ask people in your network, look for more information online, or conduct an informational interview with someone in the industry.

Example of how to put this in action: **CHALLENGE + ACTION = RESULT.**

Potential employer’s job requirement **(CHALLENGE)**: “Our ideal candidate will successfully recruit, develop, and motivate staff.”

+ Your work experience story **(ACTION):** “Stimulated employee engagement through relationship-building and idea-sharing on team assignments.

= Your business impact **(RESULT):** “Motivated junior business partners to take greater ownership over development and implementation of new projects quarterly.”

* 1. Add any other relevant projects or results to your professional experience section.

RESUME TEMPLATE

YOUR NAME

Address | City, State Zip | (xxx) xxx-xxxx | email@email.com | social media URL

**HEADLINE/TARGET JOB**

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

* Years of relevant experience; types of companies and/or industries in which you have worked.
* Summarize 2-4 job-specific skills: These are skills learned through education and/or on-the job training relevant to the target jobs and/or employers.
* Summarize 2-4 transferable skills: These are skills that illustrate your work and behavioral style.
* Summarize factors that set you apart from the competition: Specific degree, certification and/or credentials; internship experience; bilingual or multilingual; willingness to travel and/or relocate.

CORE COMPETENCIES

* Relevant Skill
* Relevant Skill
* Relevant Skill
* Relevant Skill
* Relevant Skill
* Relevant Skill
* Relevant Skill
* Relevant Skill
* Relevant Skill

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Job Title, Company Name**, City, State Month/Year to Present

Overview of what this job entails: Job scope and function within the company; key tasks/areas of accountability; quantify size of department, number of people on team and/or supervised, number/type of customers served. This description could apply to anyone who holds this job title at this company. No more than five lines total.

* Achievement, contribution, problem solved. Quantify when possible. This value is unique to you.
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* Achievement, contribution, problem solved. Quantify when possible. This value is unique to you.
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EDUCATION

**Degree, Major, College**, Location—year completed

**Degree, Major, College**, Location—year completed

USING YOUR REFERENCE PAGE

During the application process, employers may request a list of professional references to contact and confirm whether or not you are an appropriate fit for the job.

Be sure your references are listed along with their current job title and company. It will reflect poorly on you if an employer contacts one of your references and discovers that she holds a different title or works for a different company than what is listed on your sheet. You don’t want to appear out of touch or as if you’re using a stranger’s information.

It is essential to keep your references informed about your goals and progress. There is no need to overload them with information by emailing them a copy of every job ad to which you apply; however, if an employer requests a list of references, you should let your references know they might receive a call from a potential employer.

Need help deciding who your references should be? Consider asking people from the following sources:

* **Past employment:** supervisors, managers, senior co-workers, or peers.
* **Recent trainings or certifications:** instructors, teachers, professors, or trainers.
* **Educational institutions attended:** department chair professors, faculty, or department staff.
* **Volunteer work:** organizers, senior leaders, or peers.
* **Professional associations:** chairpersons, committee leaders, senior members, or industry thought leaders.

None of your references will appreciate you posting their names, titles, employers, and personal telephone numbers anywhere on the Internet. Stay in their good graces by choosing not to upload your reference page when you put your résumé online.

HERE ARE EXAMPLES OF WHEN IT IS APPROPRIATE TO PROVIDE A LIST OF REFERENCES FOR POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS, AND WHEN TO HESITATE:

* **WHEN REQUESTED BEFORE THE INTERVIEW:** This is very unusual and a little suspicious; however, you may respond by declining to provide contact information until after you meet for an interview. (The exception is when you are applying for an internal position.)
* **DURING ANY INTERVIEW:** The interview is the most common time for employers to request a reference page, so be sure to bring copies with you to every interview. (If you are interviewing remotely, email your list of references.)
* **FOLLOWING AN INTERVIEW:** The employer may request references after the interview, most likely to gain further details that will help differentiate between two or more candidates.

A SAMPLE REFERENCE PAGE

YOUR NAME

Address | City, State Zip | (xxx) xxx-xxxx | email@email.com | social media URL

**PROFESSIONAL REFERENCES**

Name

Occupation and/or company

Street address

City, State Zip

Phone (work, cell, or home)

Email address (business or personal)

One or two lines that explain your relationship and how long you have been acquainted.

Name

Occupation and/or company

Street address

City, State Zip

Phone (work, cell, or home)

Email address (business or personal)

One or two lines that explain your relationship and how long you have been acquainted.

Name

Occupation and/or company

Street address

City, State Zip

Phone (work, cell, or home)

Email address (business or personal)

One or two lines that explain your relationship and how long you have been acquainted.

Name

Occupation and/or company

Street address

City, State Zip

Phone (work, cell, or home)

Email address (business or personal)

One or two lines that explain your relationship and how long you have been acquainted.

INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP

Following up with the hiring manager after the interview is one of the most powerful ways to ensure you stay top of mind with that person and become a leading contender for the position.

At the end of the interview, ask strong “next steps” questions to discover the hiring manager’s timeline for filling the position. If the hiring manager gives you a definitive date, be sure to check in if that date passes and you haven’t heard anything. For a cursory “Probably in the next 3-4 weeks,” consider following up in that timeline to reiterate your interest. Be sure to get the appropriate contact information (or a business card) during the interview.

For most job seekers, applying and interviewing with numerous employers for various jobs can be hard to juggle. Keeping a calendar can help you remember when your interviews occurred and help you keep track of your follow-up. Similar to how a good sales person always checks in with a customer, following up is your chance to make her decision in the hiring process easier. For best results, send an email within 24 hours of the interview.

USING YOUR THANK-YOU NOTE

This note is a “thank you” for what someone else did, not a hard-sell pitch for what you want. It serves as an expression of appreciation as well as a chance to show why you are the right candidate to hire – graciousness!

FOCUS ON THE EMPLOYER:

Use the thank-you note template in this packet as a guide for creating your personalized thank-you note. Feel free to alter it as necessary to satisfy the following three goals:

**EXPRESS ENTHUSIASM:** Bring up information discussed during the interview – about the company, department, or role – and express how the discussion reinforced your interest in the role.

**1**

**ALIGN TO COMPANY NEEDS:** Accentuate three of the top qualifications you and the hiring manager discussed during the interview. Connect this with the employer needs you discussed during the interview.

**2**

**ELIMINATE ANY DOUBT:** Confirm the bottom-line goal the company needs to achieve as a result of your employment. Seal the deal by promising to deliver on that goal.

**3**

Remember, this note is going to the person you want to be your future boss, so take five minutes to look for typos.

NEXT STEPS:

**Within 24 hours:** After the interview, send the hiring manager an email immediately to thank her for the opportunity to interview and reiterate why you think you’d be the right fit for the position. List two or three modified bullet points from your résumé that you can align for relevance to the company and position. You can also add any unique points that may have been brought up in the interview (such as a shared hobby, interest, or industry topic that came up). The hiring manager may not respond, but this effort keeps you top of mind.

**Within three business days:** Differentiate yourself from the other job seekers by sending a hand-written thank-you card in addition to the email thank-you. Use bullets for the same key attributes that make you a match for the position, and mail this card out at least by the next day. Again, this effort keeps your name on top of the pile.

THANK-YOU NOTE TEMPLATE

YOUR NAME

Address | City, State Zip | (xxx) xxx-xxxx | email@email.com | social media URL

[DATE]

Interviewer name

Title

Company name

Street address

City, State Zip

Dear [Mr. or Ms. Last Name],

The first paragraph is a friendly and quick reminder of the interview and any memorable circumstances that will jog the interviewer’s memory. This includes the interview date and position, thanking the interviewer/s (and search committee or panel members, if appropriate) for his/her/their time, and anything else that transpired (e.g., tour of the facility, opportunity to talk to other department personnel, etc.).

Brieﬂy review/select three to four key points mentioned during the interview as priorities for the position and connect them to your qualifications. This can be easily accomplished by revising skills and strengths from your resume and matching them to what you learned about this employer’s needs.

* + - Modify a relevant skill/strength from your resume to align with this opportunity.
    - Modify a relevant skill/strength from your resume to align with this opportunity.
    - Modify a relevant skill/strength from your resume to align with this opportunity.

Thank the interviewer/s again for the time and consideration. Include an enthusiastic reminder of why you are interested in working for the company. Close with a call to action by stating your interest in the next step.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

GETTING FEEDBACK

Use this template to follow up…

* If an application did not garner an interview – reiterate your interest and express the intention to “keep the door open” for future opportunities by asking for insight into the qualifications that would make you a better fit for the role and organization. This can be communicated to internal recruiters via social media.
* If you don’t get a job offer after going through the interview process – take this opportunity to ask for feedback to improve your efforts for the next interview. This can be sent to the hiring manager via email.

Contact Person, Title

Company

Street Address

City, State Zip

Dear [Mr. or Ms. Last Name],

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider me for the position of [name of position].

I also want to thank you for giving me this information about the status of my application. I truly appreciate the follow up! I would also like to express my enthusiasm for your company and keep the door open to potentially join your workforce in the future through a different position. In order for me to keep my eyes and ears alert to roles that would be a good fit for me and to simplify your job when reviewing future applications, could I ask you to give me a little more information about the minimum requirements and preferred qualifications you look for in a strong candidate?

[Optional section to customize – only include if you want specific feedback about something from an interview:

During our conversation you mentioned [insert a reference here if there is something on your mind, whether a specific question or qualification prevented you from receiving the offer]. I wonder if this might be one of the essential qualities you look for in employees.]

Again, thank you so much for your generosity of time and communication. Feel free to contact me through whichever medium you prefer. I have included both my email address and phone number in the letterhead of this note for your convenience.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]