SUGGESTED CONTENT, FORMAT, AND CRITICAL COMPONENTS
OF A ONE-PAGE COVER LETTER
Clean, Correct, Clear, Concrete, and Concise

Your street address
City, State ZIP
E-mail
Date

No abbreviations in the Address section:
Formal full name of addressee
Official title
Organization
Address

Subject line: optional, but may get the employer’s attention and focuses on the content of the letter

Salutation: Dear Mr./Ms./Dr., etc. Do not use Miss or Mrs. unless you know that is the contact’s preference. First names are not appropriate even if you have used that name in the interview. Always use a colon in a business letter.

Every word in a one-page business letter should have impact, arouse the employer’s interest, and help you toward your goal. Your task is to write this three-four-paragraph letter, appealing strategically to the employer’s needs.

Always describe yourself in positive, confident terms that will match the employer’s picture of an ideal candidate. Get to the point quickly, personalize each letter, and have a professional tone. Use block format.

THE FIRST PARAGRAPH should include two or three sentences, beginning with the reason you are writing. If at all possible the first sentence should be your networking contact or referral: “So-and-so suggested that I contact you.”

In your next (or first) sentence, include your title, for instance, “I am a senior in the College of Management at North Carolina State University, majoring in business with a concentration in supply-chain management, and I am applying for ...” (do not write, “I am interested in applying...”), and include
how you heard of the job, whether from the Career Center or from the newspaper or the Web, etc.

The final sentence of this crucial first paragraph should be an informed, knowledgeable, and complimentary statement addressing what makes you want to work in this industry and for this particular company. Know the employer’s image, reputation, products, projects, innovations, and needs. Do the proper research because a generic letter is insulting to the reader.

THE SECOND PARAGRAPH should begin with a strong foundation statement, outlining the key attributes and the skills you offer that will fit this employer’s needs, solve company problems, and match the distinctive qualifications of the job. Instead of repeating verbatim information from your resume, expand on your experiences, citing concrete examples in action-oriented detail.

Do not waste this precious space and annoy the reader by writing unrelated, general “laundry lists” of your experiences.

Organize and describe your assets for the employer by showing that your mastery of relevant skills comes from a combination of your work in the classroom, extracurricular, and job activities.

Use precise, salient illustrations, describing achievements with specific companies, jobs, and projects.

Construct and control this paragraph carefully with a logical flow, so you lead the employer to the conclusion that you fit the job specifications and company culture perfectly!

YOU MAY CONTINUE MAKING YOUR CASE IN A THIRD PARAGRAPH. YOUR LETTER SHOULD BE EASY-TO-READ AND HAVE SHORT BLOCK PARAGRAPHS.

THE CLOSING PARAGRAPH shows your initiative, by repeating your value to the company and outlining the next steps you will take. An appropriate strategy in this paragraph is to include the assertive statement: “I will be in Atlanta the third week in November, and I will call you the week of … (allow two weeks for the letter to get to the contact’s desk) to discuss possible convenient meeting times.”
Employers, of course, may refuse your call but generally prefer candidates who take active responsibility for the job search. Phone at exactly the time you state and have a script ready so that you speak comfortably, whether talking directly to the employer, the assistant, or leaving a voice-mail message.

You may consider giving the employer the option to call you, but do not write, “feel free to call me,” and, if you insert your phone number and state hours you are reachable, make sure you will be available at that time. In general, do not expect this response from the employer.

Effective business writing is efficient and straightforward, yet warm, so IN THIS CLOSING PARAGRAPH include another sincere, goodwill statement to the employer about your wish to be part of the organization. Avoid the final sentence, “Thank you for your time and consideration,” which is an overused, unoriginal statement; a more personal closing of “I look forward to talking/meeting with you” is acceptable.

Sincerely or Very truly yours,

Written signature

Your typed formal name

Enclosure (your resume)