

Salutations (Greetings) in Job Search Correspondence

Often, the very first impression you make during a job search is your cover letter or email message. And the very, very first impression in that message is your “salutation” or greeting. So it’s important to get it right.

If you know the name of the person to whom you are corresponding – start with “Dear” followed by his/her name. If you’re already on a “first name basis,” the following are fine:

- Dear Audrey:
- Dear Michael:

For someone you have not met or for whom you have not established a “first name relationship,” start with:

- Dear Dr. Klein:
- Dear Mr. Hernandez:
- Dear Ms. Franklin:

Avoid “Mrs.” and “Miss.” Note also that in business letters, the punctuation after the person’s name is a colon : rather than a comma. (Not critically important, but good to know). Also note that all salutations are “gender neutral.” For example: Chair or Chairperson rather than Chairman or Chairwoman.

You should make every reasonable effort to learn the recipient’s name. Sometimes a phone call to an administrative assistant will do the trick. But it’s no tragedy if you absolutely can’t identify the person.

First - salutations to avoid. “Dear Sir/Madame” and “To Whom It May Concern.” They are outdated.

In higher education job applications, where search committees are commonplace, you can start with:

- Dear Search Committee:
- Dear Search Committee Chairperson:

For industry, not-for-profit or government applications, you can start with:

- Dear Hiring Manager: (*see below*)

A more personalized salutation includes the company/agency name, for example:

- Dear Apex Pharmaceuticals Hiring Manager:
- Dear Hendricks Health Systems Hiring Manager:

Including the organization’s name is a more personalized approach (and gives the impression that you are not cutting and pasting the same letter to multiple job applications).

If a job application instructs you to send documents or application materials to an HR (Human Resources) department, then “Dear HR Manager” or “Dear Acme Research HR Director” is fine. But some small companies don’t have HR departments. So, when in doubt, use “Hiring Manager.”

Some job applicants are confused about who exactly are “Hiring Managers.” A hiring manager is typically a department head who is leading a job search in his/her department. That’s not his/her actual job title – just a temporary role he/she is playing during the hiring process.



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