

Salutations in Cover Letters and E-mail

By Martin Yate

October 6, 2020

Best-selling author Martin Yate, a career coach and former HR professional, takes your questions each week about how to further your career in HR. Contact him at the e-mail address at the end of this column.

I was wondering if you could provide the recommended salutations to use in a cover letter and thank-you letter when addressing a hiring manager or HR professional. Clearly, the traditional salutations of "Dear Mr." or "Dear Ms." are no longer sufficient in today's gender-neutral environment.

First of all, well done for taking the time to write and send thoughtful cover letters and thank-you notes. Business letters and e-mail display your courtesy and professionalism, and no one ever lost a job offer by being professional and courteous.

That leads us to your question of how to address the recipient of your letters and e-mail. Your letters' salutations and closings should be inclusive and respectful, just as the body of the letters and e-mail should be well-written and specific to the job for which you are applying.

The opening and closing of your communications set the tone for what you have to say, who you are and your grasp of business etiquette. Getting it right shows your written communication skills, professionalism and social graces—and your willingness to learn will be of immeasurable help to an employer over the years.

Whenever you have the opportunity to address someone by name during a job hunt, do so. You can use any of the following salutations as appropriate. Notice that they all start with "Dear," which is the accepted standard; not doing so can sound abrupt or aggressive:

- Dear Susan Roberts
- Dear Martin Yate
- Dear Ms. Susan Roberts
- Dear Mr. Martin Yate
- Dear Dr. Roberts
- Dear Dr. Yate
- Dear Judge Roberts
- Dear Senator Yate
- Dear Pastor/Reverend Roberts
- Dear Professor Yate

Not all sources agree, but I feel that in these less-formal times, it is perfectly acceptable to drop the "Mr." or "Ms." if you don't know the recipient's preferred title and to replace it with a first name.

Note that in the instances above, the writer has taken the time to find a name.

When You Can't Find a Name

The cover letter can be your opportunity to connect with the hiring manager. But if you don't know the manager's name, you may be stuck with these salutations:

- Dear Sir or Madam
- To whom it may concern
- Dear Controller/Director/V.P.
- Dear Hiring Manager
- Dear Human Resources Manager

Unfortunately, none of these is a powerful communication-building opening. Soon, I'll share headhunters' tactics for finding names, so stay tuned.

Write Short Paragraphs

Your salutation should be followed by succinct content that is relevant to the reader and runs no longer than one page. Starting a new paragraph for every fresh point you make clarifies your messaging.

The body of your letter should also be constructed in paragraphs that rarely exceed seven lines. Longer paragraphs are harder for the reader's eye to penetrate. If you must take more than seven lines to make a point, try using bullet points to break up the text and make reading easier.

Take care with how you write your cover letter. It shows the hiring manager what your communication will be like on the job, as well as in the interview.

Closing Your Letter

Close your letter respectfully, and thank the reader for his or her time. These endings are appropriate for a cover letter, interview follow-up letter or any other business communication:

- Sincerely
- Sincerely yours
- Yours sincerely
- Regards
- Yours truly
- Most sincerely
- Respectfully
- Respectfully yours
- Thank you for your consideration

Have a question for Martin about advancing or managing your career? From big issues to small, please feel free to e-mail your queries to YourCareerQA@shrm.org (mailto:YourCareerQA@shrm.org). We'll only publish your first name and city, unless you prefer to remain anonymous—just let us know.

HR DAILY NEWSLETTER

News, trends and analysis, as well as breaking news alerts, to help HR professionals do their jobs better each business day.

Email Address

**CONTACT US (WWW.SHRM.ORG/ABOUT-SHRM/PAGES/CONTACT-US.ASPX) | 800.283.SHRM
(7476)**

© 2020 SHRM. All Rights Reserved

SHRM provides content as a service to its readers and members. It does not offer legal advice, and cannot guarantee the accuracy or suitability of its content for a particular purpose.

Disclaimer (www.shrm.org/about-shrm/Pages/Terms-of-Use.aspx#Disclaimer)