

Crafting Your

STUDENT HANDOUT

COVER LETTER



The Purpose of a Cover Letter

A cover letter introduces you and your resume to potential employers. It is the first document an employer sees, so it is often the first impression you will make; therefore, it is a vital opportunity to make yourself stand out.

Cover letters do more than introduce your resume, though. They can also:

- Explain your experiences in a short story-like format that works with the information provided in your resume. You pick the best examples of your strengths and skills and put them in your cover letter.
- Allow you to share important experiences and skills that may not pop out in the resume but that relate to the requirements of the job.
- Show the employer that you are individualizing this job application. If an employer thinks that you send the same cover letter out to everyone, your application will probably get thrown out.
- Give the employer a sense of your written communication skills.

The Basic Rules

- Keep it simple: One page maximum!
- Single-space everything, and put one space between paragraphs.
- Use standard business letter format (see the Anatomy of a Cover Letter student handout).
- Be direct and concise. This is no time to be wordy!
- Be absolutely positive that there are no typos in your cover letter.

If the average employer sizes up a resume in 6 seconds flat, how long do you think they spend on cover letters?



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Before You Write Your Cover Letter

Preparing to write a cover letter is much like preparing for an interview. Here are some tips:

- Read the job ad/posting carefully for the skills and attributes the employer is looking for; and make a point of addressing them.
- Follow any specific directions for sending your cover letter and resume.
- Research the corporate/organization website; read and try to understand its mission statement (sometimes an organization's mission may not be overtly stated).
- Contact any connections you might have to the organization (including people who work with the company, members of the Bottom Line network, and college alumni connections).

What to Say in Your Cover Letter

Stay brief but always cover these points:

- Why you are writing (what job are you applying for and how do you know about it?).
- Why you are a good match for the job and the organization.
- If okay with the employer, when you will follow up. (But if you are responding to an ad that says not to contact the employer, don't.)
- Anything you're sending along with the cover letter, such as your resume, writing samples, application forms, and so forth.

NO MATTER WHAT, you should ALWAYS tailor your letter to the specific position you are applying for—**do not use a generic form letter.**

Sending Your Cover Letter

These days most employers want you to use email, but it's very important that you follow specific directions for sending your documents. If the job posting asks you to send an attachment, send your cover letter as a PDF or a Word document. After all, if you can't follow the instructions for how to apply for the job, how are you going to do following instructions if you actually get the job?

“ We trash generic inquiries (i.e., form letters) automatically. If you don't care to put in a little effort to tailor your communication to my company, I sure don't care to read it. ”

—Hiring Manager



Crafting your Cover Letter, cont....

Some employers do not accept attachments. In these cases, paste your cover letter and resume into your email message. Use a simple font and remove the fancy formatting. Don't use HTML. You don't know what email client the employer is using, so simple is best: the employer may not see a formatted message the same way you do.

Email a trial message to yourself to test that the formatting works. If everything looks good, then resend it to the employer.

Double-check your message. Make sure you spell-check and check your grammar and capitalization. They are just as important in an email cover letter as in a paper one.

Following Up

After you submit your materials, wait at least two weeks to hear back from an employer. If you have not heard, there are a couple of ways to follow up without being too pushy. If it's a larger organization, call human resources or the recruiter to ask if the position you applied for has been filled or not. If the position is still open, ask if you can double-check with someone that your application was received. You should only make one check-in call. Anything more than that will seem pushy to the employer. If the job posting says, "No calls please!" or the organization is smaller, then follow up through a brief email message, like: "I submitted my application for your [Job Title] position last week, and I just want to make sure my materials were received."

If the posting says, "No calls or emails!" **do not call or email.**

Different Kinds of Cover Letters

The most common type of cover letter (or email) is in response to a job or internship posting. Other situations that call for a cover letter include:

- An inquiry: Usually an email expressing your interest in working for a particular organization. It is not in response to a job posting. In this case, you need to stay as succinct as possible.
- A referral: A letter or email you write to a prospective employer when someone has given you permission to use their name as a



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reason for communicating. Example: Your professor gives you the name and email address of someone she thinks might be hiring summer interns.

What Should a Cover Letter Look Like?

Example Email Inquiry Letter

This is an example of a cover letter that you'd send via email expressing interest in working for a particular company. It is not in response to a job posting. In this case, you need to stay as succinct as possible.

From: (Your Name)
Subject: Gray Matter Blog inspires request
Date:
To: Mr. Brown

Dear Mr. Brown,

I've been reading your Gray Matter Blog since you began writing it 3 years ago. Your insights on accelerating brand potential have influenced my point of view on the role of social media in the branding process.

In my internship last summer with Big Social Marketing Firm, I researched and wrote media POVs and used Nielsen software to assess and interpret media data. Your spin on the impact of this data has informed my tweets (give Twitter address here) and my own blog (give blog address here).

Any chance to talk with you in person about the work you do at Gray Matter Advertising and potential opportunities for new social media planners would be extremely welcome. Even 10 minutes would be invaluable.

Thank you for considering my request, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Your Name
Address
Email
URL (blog, twitter)
Home Phone
Cell Phone