Cover Letters

Job candidates are often asked to include a cover letter with their resume but many overlook the importance of crafting a good letter. Employers sometimes read cover letters prior to resumes or use cover letters as a tie-breaker between two equally-qualified candidates. Below are some tips to help you write a cover letter that effectively markets your value to potential employers.

PURPOSES

- Express your enthusiasm for the position and organization.
- Describe the congruence between your experiences and the requirements of the open position.
- Demonstrate your writing skills, attention to detail, and professionalism.

TARGETING

- Unless a job posting specifically states you should not send a cover letter, send one.
- Write a separate cover letter for each job. Targeting your letters shows you have researched organizations and are serious about your desire to work for various employers.
- Keep the focus on employers’ needs and how your best 3-4 skills will help fill employers’ needs.

LOGISTICS

- Keep your cover letter to one single-spaced page, in most cases.
- Use business letter format and make your letter aesthetically pleasing.
- Use the same paper and font for your cover letter that you use for your resume.
- If possible, address your cover letter to the hiring manager rather than the human resources department.
- Do not address your letter: “To Whom it May Concern” or “Dear Sir or Madam”
- Be honest – do not lie, mislead, or exaggerate.
- Have somebody proofread your letters before you send them.

OPENING PARAGRAPH

- Indicate the position and/or department to which you are applying.
- Mention how you heard of the open position.
- Briefly introduce your background (degree, university, expected completion date, etc.) – if relevant.
- Begin expressing enthusiasm about the position.
- Start discussing skills – your top selling points.
- Mention how you match with the job description or the ways you will contribute to the organization.
- Feel free to be a little creative in writing an introductory paragraph that grabs readers’ attention.
MIDDLE PARAGRAPH

- The middle paragraph should demonstrate your fit with and value to employers.
- This paragraph should logically flow from the selling points you mentioned in your first paragraph.
- Discuss 2-4 relevant skills and then prove your skills by describing experiences (jobs, internships, projects, volunteer positions, etc.) where you demonstrated those skills.
- Do not disqualify yourself by discussing skills and experiences you lack.
- While this paragraph may repeat information discussed in your resume, it should not simply be a narrative version of your resume.
  - Consider organizing this paragraph skill by skill, rather than job by job.
  - Elaborate on information you cannot include on your resume due to space limitations.

CLOSING PARAGRAPH

- Summarize the strengths you will bring to the position and value you will bring to the employer.
- Mention your enclosures.
- State your intended method of follow-up or directly ask for an interview.
- Indicate the best method of contacting you.
- Express appreciation for the employer’s consideration.
- Sign your letter.

EMAIL

- If you are asked to submit a cover letter via email, attach the original version of your cover letter and write a brief email cover letter in the text of the email.
  - Email cover letters are much the same as traditional cover letters.
  - The email cover letter is generally shorter and more concise.
  - You should mention how you learned of the position, express interest in the position and company, and discuss a few skills that demonstrate your fit with the position.
  - Do not discuss in detail how you have demonstrated those skills in the past.

COVER LETTER INFORMATION & SAMPLES

- University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, Graduate College Career Services Office
  - http://www.grad.uiuc.edu/careerservices/CoverLetters
- University of Washington, The Career Center
SAMPLE COVER LETTER

January 7, 2010

12345 Washington St.
Seattle, WA 91985

Bob Brown
Director of Marketing
Stellar Marketing Company
54321 Oregon Ave.
Seattle, WA 98101

Dear Mr. Brown:

I recently learned about your open Marketing Associate position after one of your current employees, Chris Chang, spoke on a panel at the University of Washington. I am eager to apply for the position because my skill set is an excellent match with the job description. My skills in research, writing, collaboration, and creative problem-solving would be an asset to Stellar Marketing Company.

I am skilled at unearthing information – on a variety of topics, using an array of resources. Brainstorming diverse ways to find information, following a trail of clues until I find what I am looking for, and then piecing my findings together until I have a complete picture gives me great satisfaction. I recently demonstrated these skills as a research assistant where I helped a faculty member locate primary and secondary sources to support the ideas he was writing in a book. In addition to research, I enjoy writing about the information I uncover. I am comfortable writing memos, abstracts, grant proposals, reports, and even 100+ page documents. Furthermore, I can write for diverse audiences – from insiders to the public, from novices to experts. Recently, I had the opportunity to write a variety of documents as the Marketing Intern at the UW Alumni Association, where I helped increase new graduate memberships by 10% over the previous year.

I believe eliciting input from others leads to innovative ideas and effective solutions. Therefore, I enjoy collaborating with immediate coworkers, members of related teams, and stakeholders outside the organization to meet group goals. Most recently, I demonstrated my skills in collaboration and creative problem-solving as the conference chair for an annual interdisciplinary conference on climate change. I worked with students, staff, faculty, and employers to create an interesting schedule of programs, raise funds, advertise the event, and even find a new location after our venue flooded two days before the event! The conference was well-attended and received outstanding evaluations.

I am very interested in the opportunity to use my skills in research, writing, collaboration, and creative problem-solving as a Marketing Associate with Stellar Marketing Company. You can learn more about the ways my background fits with your job description in the enclosed resume. I look forward to speaking with you about this opportunity in more detail. Feel free to contact me by email at amanda@thedub.edu or by phone at 555-123-4567. Thank you for considering my application.

Sincerely,

Amanda Avondale