

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
 - <http://careers.washington.edu/Career-Guide>

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