

COVER LETTER

WHAT IS A COVER LETTER?

The purpose of a cover letter is to convince an employer that your skills and background make you a candidate worth interviewing. While a resume summarizes your experience, a cover letter persuasively relates that experience to a particular job.

A good cover letter will make you a more attractive candidate by demonstrating:

- **Knowledge** about the job, the company, the industry
- **Effort** in your job search and **enthusiasm** for the job
- **Professionalism** and detail orientation
- **Writing** skills
- **Organized** thinking
- **Understanding** about **yourself**

It's true that some employers barely glance at cover letters; however, many others review them attentively. Increase your chances by sending a well-written cover letter with every application.

ANATOMY OF A COVER LETTER

A cover letter generally consists of three or four paragraphs; very experienced candidates applying for senior positions may write more.

Prepare

- **Review the job description** in detail
- List each type of experience and skill the employer is seeking
- Outline how your qualifications answer each of the employer's needs
- Choose the best two or three qualifications to describe in your letter
- **Research the employer** to decide what about the organization or its products appeals to you
- Outline how your interests, values and goals match those of the employer

Salutation

- Address your letter to a specific person whenever possible
- Be sure of the correct spelling and appropriate title (Mr., Ms., Dr., etc.)
- Acceptable alternatives include "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Search Committee"

First Paragraph

- Explain clearly and succinctly why you are writing
- State the full name of the position and how you learned about it, including the name of the person, publication or website and the date of the listing

This paragraph can be as simple as the following:

"I am writing in response to your advertisement for a Special Events Assistant in the May 24 *Boston Sunday Globe*. I believe that my skills and experience would enable me to excel in this position."

Some applicants prefer to begin this paragraph in a way they hope will grab the reader's attention:

"If you're looking for a Sales Associate with boundless energy and a record of excellence, your search is over..."

"As a recent Electrical Engineering graduate with a 3.9 GPA, I can offer your firm a mastery of the latest technologies..."

This can be an effective technique if you know the personality of the organization or the individual receiving the letter, but it is risky if you don't.

Second/Third Paragraph

- Write these paragraphs using the outline you prepared, tailoring your letter to the job
- Explain how your qualifications match the job description by highlighting relevant experience and briefly describing accomplishments that demonstrate your capabilities:

"During college, I worked 20 hours a week while carrying a full course load and maintaining a 3.2 GPA. This required the capacity for hard work as well as strong organizational and time management skills."

Employers are interested in your motivation as well as your experience.

- Explain why this job and this organization appeal to you and fit into your career goals
- Demonstrate that you have researched the organization by referring to specific products, services, philosophy or mission in your explanation of why you are a good match:

"Boston Pharmaceuticals' cancer vaccine has revolutionized preventative medicine. One of my most important career goals is to help bring cutting-edge health care products to doctors and patients, which is why I would be proud to work for your organization."

Sometimes a resume leaves questions in the employer's mind, for example, about periods of unemployment or reasons for a career change or relocation. These questions may be serious enough to prevent you from getting an interview, so it is usually best to address them:

"I resigned from my last position six months ago in order to care for an ailing family member. I am now ready to recommit myself full time to my career."

"Although I currently live in Boston, I am preparing to relocate to the San Diego area in order to be closer to my family."

Last Paragraph

The closing paragraph can be short and simple

- Stress your enthusiasm for the position and your interest in meeting for an interview
- State how and when you can best be contacted
- Thank the individual and end with an appropriate closing

"I am eager to discuss with you the kind of contributions I can make to Zephyr Advertising as an Account Representative. Please contact me days or evenings at 123-456-7890 or via email at jobseeker@yahoo.com. Thank you for your kind attention to my application; I will look forward to hearing from you."

EMAIL VS. STANDARD MAIL

Some employers will express a preference between standard mail and email, while others will accept either. There is no need to send both.

Email

Use the cover letter as the body of an email, and attach the resume as a Word or PDF document. Or simply cut and paste the resume into the body of the email, following the cover letter. This may be preferable to employers who want to avoid viruses in attachments. Just make sure the formatting on the resume stays the same.

Sample Cover Letter via Email

Dear Ms. Garvin,

I am writing to express my interest in the editorial assistant position posted on your web site the week of November 18. I will graduate from Northeastern University with a degree in English in the spring, and I would love to begin my publishing career with Beacon Publishing.

Through my work at The Voice, Northeastern's student newspaper, I experienced the publishing process first hand. As an editor, I evaluate and select submissions, give feedback to authors (including those whose work is rejected), help authors polish their work, and assist with layout and proofreading. Through office temp and research assistant positions, I've developed the outstanding clerical and organizational skills necessary for the job of editorial assistant, and I believe my combined skills are an excellent fit with the position's requirements.

I would welcome the opportunity to visit Beacon Publishing and speak with you about the editorial assistant position. Thank you for your time and interest, and I hope to hear from you soon. I have attached my resume as a PDF document. Please let me know if you would prefer it in another format.

Regards,
Ahmed Hota

Standard Mail

Using business letter format (see sample) print your resume and cover letter on matching stationery and enclose them in a matching envelope.

For either format, make sure that your cover letter is grammatically correct and has NO MISTAKES. Spell checkers don't catch every type of error ("field" when you mean "filed," for example) so proofread your letter very carefully after the spell check.

TAILORING YOUR LETTER TO A JOB AD

Sample Ad

Entry-level Software Engineer, AlphaOmega Technologies

Requirements:

- BS in Computer Science or equivalent related experience
- Strong coding, debug and troubleshooting skills
- Solid knowledge of operating systems (Windows, OS9, OSX, UNIX)
- Ability to work well in a team environment
- Strong problem-solving skills
- Knowledge and practical experience with software development tools

Experience:

- Relevant coursework in operating systems, development methods, networking and file systems
- Knowledge of internal workings of a kernel file system highly desirable
- Practical experience in developing and debugging C and C++ code

Sample Letter

Dear Ms. Farah:

I read with interest your advertisement in the April 16 *Boston Sunday Globe* for an Entry-level Software Engineer. Please accept this letter and the enclosed resume as my application for this position.

As a recent Computer Science graduate of Northeastern University, I have solid knowledge of a variety of operating systems, software development tools, and networking and file systems as well as practical experience in these areas. During my cooperative education placements, I had successful experience in developing and debugging C++ code; in fact, during my placement at Genius Software, my supervisor told me I was the most efficient student programmer he had ever worked with. When my classes required me to collaborate with other students on team projects, I was nearly always asked by my peers to organize the work and present the results. In addition, I found that my problem-solving skills were enhanced by working as part of a team and by considering other people's ideas.

AlphaOmega Technologies is a leader in creating data storage solutions, while at the same time being a small, focused enterprise. Both of these qualities appeal to me greatly. I am actively seeking the kind of challenge offered by working for a technically innovative firm that is small enough to be flexible in response to the market.

I am eager to have the chance to discuss this position with you in an interview. Please contact me days at 123-456-7890 or evenings at 098-765-4321. Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Jared Cohen

Sample Ad

Managing Director, Urban Mentors Collaborative

Requirements:

Urban Mentors Collaborative seeks a master's level experienced program leader with strong communication, organization, and management skills. The ideal candidate would have five to ten years of experience in non-profit management and staff supervision, and a demonstrated passion for making a difference in the lives of urban youth.

Responsibilities include:

- Organize parent communication, including parent meetings and family events
- Recruit and screen students and coordinate ongoing evaluation of participants' progress
- Oversee the recruitment, screening, and training of volunteers as implemented by program staff
- Communicate clearly and consistently with Principals and lead administrators at partner schools
- Hire and train highly qualified, passionate people
- Provide guidance, support, and leadership to program staff
- Communicate program developments to Board of Directors

Sample Letter

Dear Mr. Janson:

I grew up in an urban neighborhood where a program much like yours helped me and many of my friends to achieve our educational and career goals. I am writing to apply for the Urban Mentors Collaborative Managing Director position listed on your website because I am committed to making the same kind of difference in the lives of the next generation.

Program development for young people is one of my particular interests. As a school guidance counselor, I created very successful workshops and presentations on a range of personal and academic issues. I introduced the practice of actively including students in the program development process. We used their ideas extensively and with great success. In addition, I provided guidance, support and leadership to these students and to other staff members, which I found very gratifying.

The style I developed as a Jobs for Youth program manager is similarly inclusive. My ability to communicate candidly to superiors, subordinates and community members earned me a great deal of trust and credibility. I made it a priority to organize regular meetings, newsletters and other communications to keep employers, students, parents and volunteers informed and involved. As a result, my programs had overwhelming support and participation.

Urban Mentors Collaborative has earned its outstanding reputation not only through the success rate of its participants but by demonstrating how all the resources of a community can be mobilized to succeed at a common goal. I would feel privileged to have the chance to use my experience and enthusiasm to lead Urban Mentors Collective to even greater success.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my qualifications with you. Please call me at 123-456-7890 if you are interested in arranging an interview. Thank you for your time, and my best wishes for your continued success.

Sincerely,
Cherilyn Gaines

Sample Business Letter Format

James Kensington
10 Hope Street
Boston, MA 02115

June 21, 2003

Blaine Johnson
Acme Securities
265 Wellfleet Road
Quincy, MA 02169

Dear Mr. Johnson,

I am writing at the suggestion of your colleague Sara Caruso. At a recent meeting with Ms. Caruso, she told me that Acme Securities had openings for entry-level analysts and she advised me to apply.

During my education at Northeastern University, I learned about the intricacies of the market including options, dividends, bond valuation, and mutual funds. My membership in the Northeastern Finance and Investments Club for the past year enhanced my financial background. I have practical experience through my cooperative education jobs at State Street Corporation and Gillette, where I built upon my already strong communication skills by working directly with customers and gained valuable first-hand experience in the financial industry.

Acme Securities' online brokerage department particularly interests me. Your innovative approach to allowing customers access to research and real-time movement has intrigued me throughout my participation in the Finance and Investment Club. I believe that my experience developing online banking systems, as well as my personal use of your online brokerage system, will help me become a valuable team member in your organization.

I am confident that my skills and experience qualify me as a strong candidate for an entry-level position in your company and I would welcome the opportunity to interview with you. I can be reached day or evening at 123-456-7890. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
James Kensington

9/03

