

How to compose an effective COVER LETTER

HEGI FAMILY CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

A cover letter affords you the opportunity to present yourself as the perfect candidate for a particular job. Employers have needs, or they wouldn't have openings. You have qualifications. A cover letter helps to bridge the two.

Highlight your most attractive features as a potential employee. A cover letter allows you to select one or two accomplishments or special skills that reflect your suitability for a desired position.

When should you send a cover letter?

Every time you make contact with a potential employer.

** Download our Resume & Cover Letter Writing Guide for more help at www.smu.edu/career/careersmu/resume_guide/ccassistance.html **

WHY CREATE A COVER LETTER?

A well-prepared resume is sometimes not enough to convince an employer that you should be interviewed for a position. As important as your resume is your cover letter, which allows you to direct the reader's attention to aspects of your education and experience that are the most relevant.

Cover letters demonstrate your knowledge of the company you are targeting and explains any part of your work history that needs clarification. A cover letter also demonstrates that you can organize your thoughts and express yourself clearly and appropriately. In a sense, your cover letter reflects your communication skills and, to a certain degree, your personality.

WHAT MAKES UP A COVER LETTER?

Cover letters are usually one-page documents consisting of a beginning, middle, and an end. Typically, these three components can be conveyed in as little as three paragraphs. The **introduction** is where you express who you are and why you are writing. Include any relevant contacts you have in the company, and for which specific position you are applying. The **body** can be one or two paragraphs and is the sales pitch that describes what you have to offer. This section should also expand upon your interest in the position and how your qualifications fit with the position. The **closing** paragraph is where you propose steps for further action. You should request an interview or meeting. Ask for the next step in the process, clearly and without apology or arrogance.

CONTENT OF THE LETTER

Address the company/employer

A cover letter should be addressed to the specific company and individual who will process your application. You can usually find this information through research or by calling the company. Do not write "to whom it may concern."

Address the position

The letter should name the position for which you are applying, indicate your knowledge of and interest in the company, and your qualifications for the position. You want the reader to know:

Why do you want to work with this specific company?

How do you fit in with this company?

What are your qualifications for this particular position?

Address your assets

Include - Positive information supporting hire. **Omit** - Information unrelated to position.

- Information on your skills, strengths, accomplishments, interests, and goals.	- Negative talk about you or prior employers.
- Examples of productivity, performance.	- Salary requirements or history.
- Benefits you can offer the employers.	- Personal information such as marital status, hobbies, etc.

LAYOUT OF THE COVER LETTER

- Paragraph form with a conversational, though formal tone
- No spelling or typing errors
- Write the letter in your own words so that it sounds like you, not like something out of a book
- Individually typed and signed
- Writing style should be clear, objective, and persuasive, rather than narrative
- Use 8 ½" by 11" paper, good quality that matches your resume

Cover Letter Format

Contact's Name
Contact's Title
Company Name
Company Address
City, State Zip Code

Date of Letter

Dear Mr. or Ms. Contact:

Your opening paragraph should arouse interest on the part of the reader. Tell why you are writing the letter, the specific position or type of work for which you are applying, and how you learned of the opening. Give information to show your specific interest in this company. Mention why you are interested in the position, the organization, its products, or its services.

Your middle paragraphs should create desire. Give the details of your background which will show the reader why you should be considered as a candidate. Above all, indicate what you can do for the employer. If you are a recent graduate, explain how your academic background makes you a qualified candidate. If you have some practical work experience, point out your specific achievements or unique qualifications. Refer the reader to your general qualifications, cited on your enclosed resume. Use as much space as you need to tell your story, but keep it brief and to the point.

In your closing paragraph, ask for action. Indicate a desire for a personal interview. You may suggest alternative dates and times or simply advise employers of your flexibility as to time and place. State your phone number in the letter and offer any assistance toward a speedy response, such as additional information. A positive request is harder to ignore than a vague hope.

Sincerely yours,

Sign your name here

Print Your Name

Your Street Address
City, State Zip Code
Your Phone Number
Your Email Address

Enclosure: List any enclosures if needed (ex: Resume, Transcript, References, Letter of Recommendation, Work Sample, Portfolio, etc.)

Cover Letter Example

**Mr. John M. Curtis
Recruiting Coordinator
ABC Company
123 Washington Avenue
New York, New York 10000**

January 30, 2005

Dear Mr. Curtis:

I would like to express my interest in an entry-level analyst position with ABC Company. Throughout my job search and conversations with investment advisors I have come to respect the professionalism that characterizes your firm and its employees. I am confident that the Company team's values and objectives would highly compliment my own strengths and enthusiasm. I would like to be considered for your Investment Banking Analyst Program, or a similar position that requires refined analytical and communication skills.

I was impressed to learn of ABC Company's recent acquisition of XYZ Group, a tactic which I see as indicative of ABC Company's commitment to achieving growth and success in the future. Innovative and exciting approaches such as this, coupled with ABC Company's highly regarded Analyst Program, convinced me that ABC is the ideal environment to begin my business career.

Evidence of my leadership and analytical skills can be seen in my responsibilities as analyst intern at SMU, and my commitment to my academics. My educational background in government and business, combined with my internship experiences, has been excellent preparation for a career with ABC Company.

Please review the enclosed resume and references and consider my application for your Investment Banking Analyst program. I would appreciate the opportunity to come to New York to meet with you and explore the company environment, as well as possible job opportunities. I will call your office next week to discuss these possibilities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

John Doe

John Doe

**1234 15th Street
New York, New York 10000
(518) 271-0000**

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE WRITING YOUR COVER LETTER

What is the prospective employer seeking?

Think about skills, knowledge, and experiences that would be an asset in the job you are targeting.

What are your objectives?

Are you applying for a specific position, trying to get an interview, or hoping to spend some time talking to someone who can discuss opportunities in general at that organization?

What are the qualities that you bring to this employer or job?

Think of at least two specific accomplishments you can mention which give credit to the qualities you identified.

Why do you want to work for this particular organization or person?

What do you know about the organization?

What is it about their products or services, philosophy, mission, goals, and needs that relates to your interests, background and values?

GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL COVER LETTER WRITING

1. Tailor your letter as much as possible to target the reader and industry.
2. Talk more about what you have to offer the prospective employer than about what they can do for you.
3. Communicate focused career goals.
4. Avoid saying anything negative about yourself.
5. Get to the point quickly and clearly.
6. Back up claims with examples.
7. Keep the letter to one page unless told otherwise by the prospective employer.
8. Let other people read it and get their opinions before sending it.
9. Keep easily accessible copies of all letters you mail, fax, or e-mail.
10. Proof read for misspellings and typing errors.
11. Use terms and phrases that are meaningful to the employer.
12. Show concern, interest, and pride for your profession; demonstrate energy and enthusiasm.
13. Avoid stuffiness, and maintain a balance between professionalism and friendliness.
14. Include information relevant to the job you are seeking.
15. Utilize SMU Career Services by getting your cover letter critiqued, or by using the library resources.

USEFUL ACTION VERBS

Utilize action verbs to highlight your skills:

Management Skills

adapted
delegated
oversaw

Technical Skills

administered
maintained
utilized

Financial Skills

allocated
appraised
reduced

Helping Skills

advocated
resolved
supported

Communication Skills

addressed
explained
resolved

Teaching Skills

advised
coordinated
facilitated

Creative Skills

created
invented
integrated

Organizational Skills

distributed
implemented
executed

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Hughes-Trigg Student Center

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214-768-4292 (fax)

Visit us anytime at www.smu.edu/career