

Job Search Correspondence

<http://www.students.vcu.edu/careers/>

Cover Letter

What is a Cover Letter?

- A cover letter accompanies the resume, and tells the employer the type of position you're seeking -- and exactly how you are qualified for that position.
- A cover letter highlights the aspects of your experience that are most useful to the potential employer, and you can earn points for knowing what those aspects are.
- Also known as a letter of introduction, letter of application, transmittal letter, or broadcast letter.
- No smart job-seeker should send his or her resume without a cover letter. Few employers seriously consider a resume for a full-time position that is not accompanied by a cover letter; thus, a dynamically written cover letter needs to be part of your job-search strategy.

Why is a Cover Letter so Important?

- Employers get hundreds of resumes, especially when they advertise a choice position. Employers are also very busy. Often the person screening resumes skims each for only a few seconds. Your cover letter can call attention to the skills, talents, and experience the employer is looking for.
- Your letter can explain things that your resume can't. If you have large gaps in your employment history or you are reentering the job market or changing the focus of your career, a cover letter can explain these circumstances in a positive way.
- A cover letter can serve the same function as the "objective" on your resume, and expand upon it. Cover letters give you the opportunity to target your experience and skills to the specific position you are applying for and should, therefore, be unique to each position you apply for.
- Finally, a cover letter is a little window into your personality. A good cover letter can suggest to an employer, "I'd like to interview this person; she sounds like someone I'd like to get to know better. This seems like just the kind of dynamic person this company needs."

Adapted from: Quintessential Careers (www.quintcareers.com) & an excerpt from the 3rd edition of *Dynamic Cover Letters*.

Cover Letter Format

- Use business letter format when writing any job search correspondence, including your cover letter.
 - Start with your address at the top of the page.
 - Skip a line and add the date.
 - Skip a line and add the employer's name, the company name and the company address.
 - Skip a line and include your greeting. Start with "Dear" and use the employer's name if you know it, the appropriate title and a colon (e.g., Dear Mr. Anderson:, Dear Ms. Williams:, Dear Dr. Lloyd:).
 - If you do not know the employer's name, you can use a generic greeting such as "Dear Sir or Madam:," "To Whom It May Concern:," or "Dear Recruiter:." These generic greetings are very impersonal so another option is to omit the greeting so that your letter appears more like a memo.
 - Left justify each line (i.e., do not indent paragraphs) and skip a line between paragraphs.
 - Include three or four body paragraphs.
 - End with a professional closure such as "Sincerely," "Regards," or "Yours truly."
 - Skip four lines for your signature and type your name.
 - Skip a line and type "Enclosure" or "Enclosures" to indicate that you have enclosed your resume and any other requested documents.
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Cover Letter Outline

Your Street Address or P.O. Box
City, State Zip Code

Current Date (Month 00, 200_)

Employer's Name
Title
Company/Organization
Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear (Dr./Mr./Ms./Mrs.) Name:

Write what position you are applying for and where you found the position (newspaper, website, etc.) *Ex: I am writing in response to the Sales Coordinator position posted on www.salesjob.com.* Next comes what your degree is in and when you graduate(d). *Ex: I will receive my Bachelor of Science in Chemistry this May.*

In the second paragraph, this is your chance to tell the organization why you're interested. Show that you've done your research on them by referencing specifics on what you are impressed by. *Ex: I was very interested to see this position posted because your organization has an excellent reputation for providing exceptional service to its customers as demonstrated by winning the Sales Leader of the Year Award for three years in a row. Sales Company #1 has the values that I admire and is an organization that I would love to be a part of.*

Next, take the position description and for each skill/quality they want, list why you have that or how you've done that in the past. The more your cover letter mirrors the position description's needs, the better. Let's say the position description requires someone with excellent interpersonal skills, experience in customer service, and someone with initiative. *Ex: I have worked as a waitress for the past four years and during that time I have learned what it takes to deliver quality customer service. Having a positive attitude, a listening ear, and being flexible have aided me in better serving my customers. In addition to that, I have enhanced my interpersonal skills. I serve many customers from a variety of backgrounds and I am able to please my customers by tailoring my service to their needs. I often go above and beyond what is asked of me in order to help the restaurant to be as successful as possible. For example, the other day I noticed a problem that was not in my area of responsibility, but went ahead and fixed it when I had the chance because I knew it would help my coworker and the restaurant.*

In the last paragraph, you want to reiterate your interest, give your contact information and say how you will follow up. *Ex: I am very excited about the possibility of working for Sales Company #1. I may be reached at (804) 555-1234 or via email at studentvc@vcu.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to further discussing my candidacy with you.*

Sincerely/Warmest regards/Cordially/Yours truly,
(Skip four lines here & DON'T FORGET TO SIGN YOUR NAME! If you are e-mailing your cover letter, skip only one line and type your name instead of skipping four lines for a signature.)

Virginia C. Student

Enclosure: Resume (You type this whenever you are enclosing something else, like your resume. Delete this if you are e-mailing your cover letter because your resume will be attached, not enclosed.)

Sample Cover Letter

406 West St.
Richmond, VA 23220
(804) 566-8989

September 3, 2007

Ms. Lucy Nelson
Director of Human Resources
Company X
123 Main St.
Richmond, VA 23221

Dear Ms. Nelson:

I am writing in response to the entry-level public accounting position with Company X that appeared on washingtonjobs.com on September 2, 2007. I am very excited about this opportunity to utilize my education and experience in public accounting to contribute to the continued success of Company X.

I am a senior at Virginia Commonwealth University and plan to graduate in December 2004 with a Bachelor of Science in Business with a Major in Accounting. I recently interned with Company Y as an Accounting Assistant. This opportunity gave me exposure to auditing and budgeting, and allowed me to hone my report writing skills. I also have supervisory experience from several previous positions.

I am proficient in many computer software programs, including QuickBooks; Microsoft Word, Excel, Access, and PowerPoint. I work effectively under pressure and handle my time efficiently. I have developed excellent communication skills through my supervisory experience and campus leadership roles, which include serving as Vice President of my class and holding an office in Beta Alpha Psi.

Working at Company X would be a unique and challenging experience that would allow me to continue to develop my accounting skills. I will follow up with a phone call in a week to discuss the possibility of scheduling an interview. You are welcome to contact me at 865-9876. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Sophia Taylor

Enclosures: Resume, References

E-mailing a Cover Letter

- Many employers prefer receiving resumes electronically. When e-mailing your resume, you can either use the body of the e-mail for your cover letter or attach a cover letter.
- If attaching a cover letter, include a short e-mail with your full length cover letter attached. Follow the formatting guidelines above, with several exceptions: delete the enclosure indication; and after your closure, skip one line and type your name instead of skipping four lines for a signature.
- If using the body of the e-mail for your cover letter, you can delete the mailing and return address, the date and the enclosure indication. Also, after your closure, skip one line and type your name instead of skipping four lines for a signature.
- Because of the quick and efficient nature of e-mail communication, an e-mailed cover letter should be briefer than a traditional cover letter.
- Include your resume as an attachment. You can also cut and paste your resume into the body of your e-mail, which will allow the employer to view your resume even if they can not open your attachment. When including your resume in the body of the e-mail, left justify everything, replace bullets with dashes, and start each piece of information on a new line.
- Follow appropriate e-mail etiquette (see below).

E-mail Etiquette

Example of What *Not* to Do:

To: steve-hodge@dfwmarketing.com
From: beerman@yahoo.com
Subject: My perfect job!
Cc: mymom@hotmail.com
Bcc:
Attached: resume.doc; cover letter.doc; transcript.doc; future-goals.doc; 25-page essay.doc; family-photos.jpg; mydog.jpg;

I AM WRITING TO APPLY FOR THE MARKETING JOB. THANK! ?

Because your correspondence says a lot about you, you should be aware of basic email etiquette, called “netiquette.”

- When possible, be brief – without leaving out necessary details.
- Some messages get right to the point... a little too quickly. The writer should spend some time being polite.
- Use proper grammar and spelling.
- Avoid using shorthand (plz, thanx...)
- 3 words with 14 letters that carry a lot of meaning: please and thank you!
- Address person with Mr., Mrs., and Dr. when in doubt. If you are replying to a message where the person has used only his/her first name, then it is okay to address the message using their name. In the example above, begin your message with “Dear Mr. Hodge:”
- Positive Tone – come across respectful, friendly, and approachable.
- Avoid using emoticons (smiley faces, etc.) unless you know the person well and have a friendly relationship with them.
- Don’t use all uppercase letters as it appears as though you are screaming.
- Your email address! What does it say about you? It should be professional. Avoid addresses like beerman@yahoo.com.
- Don’t get too “attached.” Limit email attachments.
- Be careful with your subject line. Be aware of word choices, as some filters will consider your message to be ‘spam’ and possibly will not send the message.
- If you include a signature line with your emails, be sure that it is professional. Avoid sending quotations. Remove any automatic signatures by Yahoo, AOL, etc.
- Reply with history. Including the history of the e-mail exchanges is a courtesy to the employer. E-mail is the primary form of communication in most businesses today and some people receive hundreds of e-mails a day. Don’t expect the employer to remember who you are or your previous e-mail exchanges. Include the history as a helpful reminder.

Sample Cover Letter E-mails

Sample E-mail (if attaching a cover letter):

To: lnelson@publicaccountingfirmx.com
From: Sophia_taylor@gmail.com
Subject: Sophia Taylor - Application for tax associate position
Cc:
Bcc:
Attached: Sophia Taylor resume.doc ; Sophia Taylor cover letter.doc

Dear Ms. Nelson:

I am very interested in the tax associate position with Public Accounting Firm X and am attaching my cover letter and resume for your perusal. Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to talking with you soon.

Sincerely,
Sophia Taylor

Sample E-mail (if including cover letter in body of e-mail):

To: lnelson@publicaccountingfirmx.com
From: Sophia_taylor@gmail.com
Subject: Sophia Taylor - Application for tax associate position
Cc:
Bcc:
Attached: Sophia Taylor resume.doc

Dear Ms. Nelson:

I am writing in response to the entry-level tax associate position with Public Accounting Firm X that appeared on washingtonjobs.com on September 2, 2007. I am very excited about this opportunity to utilize my education and experience in public accounting to contribute to the continued success of Public Accounting Firm X.

I am a senior at Virginia Commonwealth University and plan to graduate in December 2004 with a Bachelor of Science in Business with a Major in Accounting. I recently interned with Company Y as an Accounting Assistant. This opportunity gave me exposure to tax, auditing and budgeting, and allowed me to hone my report writing skills. I also have supervisory experience from several previous positions.

I am proficient in QuickBooks and Microsoft Access and Excel. I work effectively under pressure and handle my time efficiently. I have developed excellent communication skills through my supervisory experience and campus leadership roles, which include serving as Vice President of my class and holding an office in Beta Alpha Psi.

Working at Public Accounting Firm X would be a unique and challenging experience that would allow me to continue to develop my accounting skills. You are welcome to contact me at 865-9876 or Sophia_taylor@gmail.com to further discuss my candidacy. Thank you for your time and I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,
Sophia Taylor

Cover Letter Do's and Don'ts

Here are the keys to writing successful (and dynamic) cover letters. Follow these simple rules and you should achieve success in this important phase of job-hunting.

- Don't ever send your resume without a cover letter.
- Do address your letter to a named individual.
- Don't use a sexist salutation, such as "Gentlemen" when answering a blind ad.
- Don't use such clichés as "Enclosed please find my resume" or "As you can see on my resume enclosed herewith." Employers can see that your resume is enclosed; they don't need you to tell them. Such trite phrases just waste precious space. And don't use pleonasms (wordy phrases), which also waste space.
- Don't depend on the employer to take action. Politely request action. Indicate an interest in meeting with the employer for an interview or to further discuss the opportunity. Take the responsibility to follow up yourself and tell the employer when you will follow up (i.e. within a week) and how you will follow up (i.e. by phone). Then, do so. It is imperative that you follow up. You will greatly increase your chances of getting interviews if you call the employer after writing instead of sitting back and waiting for a call. Those who wait for the employer to call them will generally have a long wait indeed.
- Don't send a cover letter that contains any typos, misspellings, incorrect grammar or punctuation, smudges, or grease from yesterday's lunch.
- Do use simple language and uncomplicated sentence structure. Ruthlessly eliminate all unnecessary words. Follow the journalist's credo: Write tight!
- Do write cover letters that are unique and specific to you.
- Do speak to the requirements of the job, especially when responding to an ad.
- Do keep your letter brief. Never, Never more than one page, and it's best to keep it well under a full page. Each paragraph should have no more than one to three sentences.
- Do tell the employer how you can meet his or her needs and contribute to the company.
- Do distinguish your cover letter from those of other job-seekers by quantifying and giving examples that amplify and prove the claims you make in your letter.
- Do try to answer the question that the employer will be asking while reading your letter: "Why should I interview this person?"
- Don't rehash your resume. You can use your cover letter to highlight the aspects of your resume that are relevant to the position, but you're wasting precious space -- and the potential employer's time -- if you simply repeat your resume.
- Do avoid negativity. Negativity never has a place in a cover letter.
- Do be sure the potential employer can reach you.
- Do use action verbs.
- Don't forget to personally sign the letter in black or blue ink.
- Do use e-mailed cover letters, but keep them shorter and more concise.

Source: Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D. and Katharine Hansen
Quintessential Careers (www.quintcareers.com) & an excerpt from the 3rd edition of *Dynamic Cover Letters*.

Thank You Letter

- At the very least, send one! Thank you letters following interviews are an expected courtesy; however, many applicants fail to send them. Simply sending a thank you letter will make a positive impression on the employer.
 - Send a thank you letter within a day or two after every interview for any kind of job or graduate school. Send individual letters to each person who interviews you.
 - Express appreciation for the interviewer's time and consideration of you as a candidate.
 - Refer to aspects of your discussion during the interview that further confirmed your interest in the job and/or company or that increased your confidence that you are a good fit for the position.
 - Reiterate your interest in the position. Employers will not assume that you are excited about the opportunity. It is your job to tell them that you are.
 - Continue to address the employer formally (e.g., Ms. Wyatt) unless you are invited to use their first name. Signing an e-mail with a first name only is an invitation by the employer to address them by their first name. Signing an e-mail with both first and last names is *not* an invitation to use the person's first name. Err on the side of formality. It demonstrates respect and good manners.
 - If your previous correspondence with the employer has been via e-mail, it is appropriate to send a thank you letter via e-mail. A handwritten thank you note on a note card, or a typed thank you letter is the most professional and courteous method of sending a thank you; however, it is better to e-mail a thank you letter than to not send one at all.
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Sample Thank You Letter

James Dalious
838 Marian Way
Chapel Hill, NC 27599
(919) 555-1959

November 15, 2007

Dr. Joan Nagle
Technical Design Group Director
Casey Engineering Systems Inc.
81796 Gulick Road
Charlotte, NC 28235

Dear Dr. Nagle:

I want to thank you very much for interviewing me yesterday for the associate engineer position. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about your research and design work.

The interview strengthened my enthusiasm for the position and interest in working for Casey. I believe my education and cooperative education experiences fit nicely with the job requirements, and I'm certain I could make a significant contribution to the firm over time.

I would like to reiterate my strong interest in the position and in working with you and your staff. You provide the kind of opportunity I seek. Please feel free to call me at the telephone number listed above if I can provide you with any additional information.

Again, thank you for the interview and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

James Dalious

Sample Letter to Accept an Offer
(This conversation may also occur verbally over the phone)

500 Green Court
Charlottesville, VA 22901

April 3, 2007

Ms. Laurie Breeden
Editor
Imagination
Emerald City, OZ 00000

Dear Ms. Breeden:

Thank you for the time you have spent considering me for the position of editorial assistant. I am very appreciative of your efforts and also those of Mr. Ken McKain who discussed the position with me and gave me the tour of your offices. It really helped me gain an understanding of the needs of the position and how Imagination is created and produced.

I am very pleased to accept your offer for the editorial assistant position at the salary of \$30,000. I am looking forward to beginning to work with Mr. McKain and his staff on the "science works" section. The opportunity to use my writing skills in conjunction with the science background I acquired as an Environmental Studies major attracted me to this opportunity from the time my friend, Jennifer McKain, told me about her father's work.

I will be moving to Emerald City in early May and will begin work on May 10, as we discussed. I will call you when I know what my new address and telephone number will be.

Please let me know if there is any other information you need or if any other details need to be worked out. Thank you again for offering me this opportunity. I eagerly look forward to becoming part of the Imagination team.

Sincerely,

Noelle Simpson

Sample Letter to Decline an Offer
(This conversation may also occur verbally over the phone)

1216 Emerson Street
Skokie, IL 60208

March 15, 2007

Mr. George Duvall, Manager
Sales and Marketing Division
Colonial Properties, Ltd.
1700 Colonial Parkway
Williamsburg, VA 23176

Dear Mr. Duvall:

Thank you very much for offering me the position of commercial leasing agent with Colonial Properties. I appreciate your discussing the details of the position with me and giving me the time to consider your offer.

You have a fine organization and there are many aspects of the position that are very appealing to me. However, I believe it in my best interest that I decline your kind offer. This has been a difficult decision for me, but I believe it is the appropriate one for my career at this time.

I want to thank you for the consideration and courtesy given to me. It was a pleasure meeting you and your staff.

Sincerely,

Melody Taylor