Writing an Effective Cover Letter

Table of Contents

- Introduction ........................................................................................................................................2
- Principles ........................................................................................................................................2
- Outline of Standard Cover letter ..................................................................................................3
- Examples of First, Second and Closing Paragraphs ......................................................................4
- Letter of Application, Hard Copy ...................................................................................................5
- Letter of Application, E-Mail Version .............................................................................................6
- Letter of Inquiry for Internship Referral of 3rd Party ..................................................................7
- Letter of Application Targeting Exact Requirements in Advertisement ........................................8
- Letter of Inquiry About Internship Opportunities ........................................................................9
Introduction

An effective cover letter is just as important as an effective resume in your job search. A cover letter provides an opportunity for you to elaborate on your career objective, demonstrate your knowledge of the employer, further emphasize your special qualifications, and describe some of the unique or unusual personal qualities you bring to the position. **Always send a cover letter with your resume, unless specifically told not to within the application instructions.**

Principles

Like the resume, the cover letter should **attract attention, stimulate interest, create desire, and generate action.** Consider the following principles when writing your letters.

**Personalize:** Each letter needs to be addressed to a specific individual. Write the person’s name and title in the address. If unknown, check online for a company/organization directory, on alternative social media sites like LinkedIn, or contact the company/organization and ask them the name of the person(s) who will be doing the interviewing. Confirm you have the correct spelling and check for the proper title to be used in the salutation, e.g., “Vice President Smith” when gender is unknown. If it is not possible to obtain the name of the interviewer(s), use “Dear Hiring Manager” or Dear Search (or Selection) Committee.” **NEVER USE “To Whom it May Concern.”**

**Individualize:** Each letter needs to be original; tell the employer the position for which you are applying and how you fit a need within their company. Form or generic letters will not have the impact you need. Tailor each letter to the specific requirements listed in the job announcement or vacancy notice. Be relevant and focused for which position you are applying, demonstrating specific examples of how your skills and qualifications meet or exceed their specific needs. You should also demonstrate that you know something about their company/organization, perhaps something brief that you read on their website in the mission statement or elsewhere. In addition, reflect your attitude, personality, motivation, interest, and enthusiasm for the specific position. Close by thanking them for their time and consideration and referring to an opportunity to interview.

**Proper English:** Follow the rules of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Proofread the letter, not just spell check! Use a standard business letter format. Your cover letter should be a good example of your writing skills.

**Format:** Keep the cover letter to one page. The content of the letter is generally three to four short paragraphs. Make sure the letter is centered on the page and make adjustments as needed.

**Types:** Several different types of letters exist depending upon the reason you are writing. A letter of application accompanies resumes for job listings or other vacancies. A referral letter is used when an intermediary recommends you to a colleague or associate. A letter of inquiry is sent when you are conducting a proactive job search. One major difference between them is the information contained in the opening paragraph.

In addition to these principles for writing the letter, remember to keep a copy or computer file of your job search correspondence. This is essential for your follow-up. Regardless of type, do not forget to send a thank you letter / card after each telephone conversation, meeting, or interview.
OUTLINE OF STANDARD COVER LETTER

Your street address
City, State Zip Code

Today’s Date

Name of Interviewer
Title
Name of Company
Company Address
(Additional Company Address)
City, State Zip Code

Dear ________________ (salutation):

Start with something that will catch their eye… establish a connection with the employer. A few options are that you can start with a compelling question or use a quote (maybe from the website or something an employee said in a recent publication) or something about the company that you can tie in with the position and the employer’s current needs. Mention the job you are applying for and where you heard about the position.

The mid section of your cover letter should be one to two paragraphs that tell the employer exactly how you match or exceed their needs. You do this by talking about your skills as they relate to the job description. Synthesize your relevant work experience and/or educational background, but do more than reiterate information on your resume. Remember that your prior accomplishments are an indication of your future potential. Explain your qualifications and how you are a solution to their problem and an asset to their company. You may want to use the “full” paragraph setting to make the sides of the paragraphs even (like here).

As far as organizing the mid section, there are a few options. You can talk about your qualifications in one paragraph (two if they have a laundry list of needs) or you can talk about your qualifications in one paragraph and in a second paragraph, talk about why you want to work for the company (but not stating things about their benefits, location, and other external factors). You may also want to use a bulleted list of accomplishments, summaries or qualifications that directly match the employer’s needs.

In the closing paragraph, request an interview. Tell the employer how you will follow-up or what action you will take to set up an appointment (you will call the office on Monday, etc). Although it does not hurt to be this direct (as long as you follow through), many people do not feel comfortable being this bold. In this case, state again that you are an excellent match for their needs and say you look forward to meeting them in an interview to further discuss the position. Thank the employer for their time and consideration.

Sincerely (or other complimentary closing),

(Handwritten signature)

Name typed

Enclosure/Attachment (depending on if it is mailed or emailed)
### Examples of Cover Letter First Paragraph

Are you looking for a motivated salesperson with a proven ability to exceed sales every quarter? If so, then look no further! My skills and qualifications make me an excellent match for the [title of job] position, as described [in/on] [where you found out about the job].

Are you looking for a motivated salesperson [or representative] with a proven ability to exceed sales every quarter to fill your [title of job] position? If so, then I am that person. Relevant to your needs, I offer:

- [match one of their qualification with your skills]
- [give another match]
- [give another match or a selling point you know would benefit them, but they do not actually ask for]
- [Another match or selling point]

My skills and abilities match your need for a [title of job], as described [in/on] [where you found out about job]. I consider this an excellent opportunity and am very interested in this position.

### Example of Second Paragraph

I am particularly interested in working for XYZ because I know that you have a reputation for being one of the best accounting firms in the region, ranking number 11 out of 75 in the *Industry Weekly*. I expect that XYZ will be moving up in the rankings soon, based on the strategic planning and direction discussed in the company mission. I am very eager to be a part of the team that moves XYZ into the future and become an even bigger influence in the industry. Reading your job description, relevant to your needs, I offer:

- About you
- More about you
- And more

### Examples of Closing Paragraph

I would like to meet with you in an interview to further discuss how my skills and experience can fill your need for a [title of job]. I will call on Monday to see when we can schedule an interview at your convenience. Thank you for your time and consideration.

I welcome the opportunity to meet with you to further discuss my candidacy for the [title of job] position. Please contact me if you have any questions or need additional information. I look forward to hearing from you to schedule an interview. Thank you for your time and consideration.

I consider this an excellent opportunity and look forward to meeting you in an interview to further discuss how I can benefit your department in the [title of job] position. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.
123 Main Street  
Reading, Pennsylvania  19604  

January 1, 2015  

Mr. Robert M. Jones  
Manager of College Relations  
XYZ Company  
123 South Street  
Reading, Pennsylvania 19604  

Dear Mr. Jones:  

My experience in marketing has prompted me to respond to your vacancy for a marketing representative as listed with the Experiential Learning and Career Development Center at Albright College. The XYZ Company has an excellent reputation for product quality as noted in the recent issue of The Journal of Marketing and I wish to be affiliated with a company with such high standards.  

To be successful in marketing one must first understand a potential customer’s needs. To accomplish this one must have excellent interpersonal and active communication skills. My experiences as a volunteer promoting our student radio station to local advertisers can help attest to my capabilities to successfully market XYZ’s products. As a member of the campus center board, I successfully promoted a number of campus events which resulted in a positive financial statement at the end of the year.  

Written communication can only tell you so much about my motivation and qualifications. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss my background with you in greater detail. Thank you for your consideration.  

Sincerely,  

Alan Albright  

Enclosure
January 1, 2015

Mr. William Jones
Employment Manager
ABC Pharmaceutical Corporation
12345 Campbell Parkway
Malvern, Pennsylvania 19019
jones@abcpharm.com

Dear Mr. Jones:

From your company’s website I learned about your need for a sales representative for the Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New Jersey areas. I am very interested in this position with ABC Pharmaceuticals, and I believe that my education and employment background match what you are seeking.

While working toward my bachelor’s degree, I was employed as a part-time sales representative for a small fence company in the area. Through my efforts, the company doubled its sales volume in less than six months. I would like to have the opportunity to repeat this success in the pharmaceutical industry. In addition, I had the opportunity to work as a pharmaceutical technician for two summers. My work in the pharmacy taught me a great deal about the variety of drugs that are manufactured and marketed today. This relevant work experience along with my degree in marketing will enable me to help you reach your sales goals.

I look forward to talking with you regarding the position with ABC Pharmaceutical Corporation. I will contact you within the week to confirm you received my e-mail and resume and to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Sally Albright
5454 First Avenue
Reading, PA 19601
(610) 555-1212
Sa555@albright.edu

Resume attached as MS Word document (or follow the instructions on company website about how to attach resume)
May 1, 2015

Ms. Mary Johnson  
Research Director  
Pennsylvania Historical Society  
One York Way  
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

Dear Ms. Johnson:

Dr. John Pankratz, Professor of History at Albright College, recommended I contact you regarding a research assistant internship position. I will be entering my senior year and have specialized in colonial history of the United States.

As a result of taking Dr. Pankratz’s course in research methodology and having completed a special project, I have experience with research techniques, including use of original source documents. My project examined the role of religion on the writing of early colonial legislative laws regarding education. The experience furthered my knowledge of historical research and investigative principles.

Also, I have been a volunteer for the past year at the Berks County Historical Society where I assisted the Education Coordinator in developing outreach programs for the county school districts. My assignment was to contact teachers and discuss how the Society could assist them in classroom presentations and field trips and arrange services. I enhanced my understanding of the teaching of history in school systems and the role historical societies can play.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss my qualifications and interests with you. I will contact you next week and look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

Alice Albright

Enclosure
LETTER OF APPLICATION TARGETING EXACT REQUIREMENTS IN ADVERTISEMENT

67 Summit Highway  
Philadelphia, PA 19752

May 1, 2015

Mr. David Darwin  
Department of Human Resources  
1900 Whitney Avenue  
Baltimore, MD 21030

Dear Mr. Darwin:

When I read your advertisement for an Associate Director on the Marylandworks job site, I could not help but notice how well your requirements align with my experience, education, skills, and background.

While my enclosed resume provides a good overview of my strengths and achievements, I have also listed some of your specific requirements for the position and my applicable skills:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You require:</th>
<th>I offer:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to coordinate and oversee the work of subordinates</td>
<td>Experience in supervising 112 students on a residence hall floor and managing the work of 5-7 volunteers in an after-school program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to strategically plan, develop and implement programs and operations toward achievement of team’s mission, goals, and objectives</td>
<td>Experience developing and implementing programs for college students toward achieving residence life’s mission, goals, and objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The analytical skills to perform needs assessments, evaluate current programs, and initiate changes or adjustments to current systems and improve operations.</td>
<td>Success in performing assessments to current programs and recommending necessary changes to enhance the delivery of services to college students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving and decision-making abilities</td>
<td>Success in solving numerous problems during my internship working with inner-city youth; success in increasing attendance and results for the after-school program through creative marketing and programming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial and personnel management expertise</td>
<td>Expertise in management of 112 residence students and 57 inner-city children in the after-school program as well as 5-7 volunteers; I manage the budget for the residence hall and for a national organization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since my experience and expertise fit your requirements so closely, I am looking forward to speaking with you in person about the position. Please feel free to call me at 215-555-5432 for additional information. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Clemmons  
Enclosure
LETTER OF INQUIRY ABOUT INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES, HARD COPY VERSION

123 South Main Street
Reading, PA 19604

March 15, 2015

Ms. Ann Smith
Special Programs Assistant
Berks County Family Court Wilderness Challenge
1 Court Street
Reading, PA 19601

Dear Ms. Smith:

As a junior at Albright College working toward a degree in Child and Family Studies, I have prepared myself well to positively interact with troubled youth. While seeking an internship for this summer and researching opportunities in this field, I learned about your program. I am writing to inquire about possible internship opportunities with the Berks County Family Court Wilderness Challenge.

My work background and coursework have supplied me with many skills and an understanding of dealing with the adolescent community; for example:

- I worked as a hotline assistant for a local intervention center. I counseled teenagers about personal concerns and referred them, when necessary, to appropriate professional services for additional help.
- As a current resident hall assistant, I establish rapport with over fifty residents and advise them on personal matters, as well as college policies. In addition, I develop social and educational programs and activities each semester for up to 200 participants.

My enclosed resume provides additional details about my background.

I am excited about the prospect of working with you this summer. I will call you next week to see if it would be possible to meet with you in early April to discuss your program.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Susan Adams

Enclosure