

Cover Letter Writing

What is a Cover Letter? It serves as an introduction to a resume. A cover letter should always accompany a resume, even if one is not specifically requested. Think of the resume as being about you and the cover letter as an opportunity to talk about your fit with the employing organization. It is another chance to show, in your own words, what and how you can contribute to them! You can expand your resume and go into greater detail about yourself, your education, and experiences in the cover letter.

The purpose of a cover letter is to:

- Introduce yourself
- Elicit interest in you
- Highlight one or two exceptional and relevant skills from your resume
- Show a particular interest in the organization

Your cover letter should be written in business format and addressed to a particular individual. It should be clear, concise, brief (one page), and flawless! This represents you at your best, after all.

Use your own words – be natural. Your cover letter should reflect your personality and style. Don't sound like something out of a book. Employers are looking for knowledge, enthusiasm and focus. Show that you know something about the organization. Your research experience could definitely come in handy here.

Try to use terms and phrases that are meaningful to the employer (i.e., pairing your qualifications to requirements that they stated in an ad). Explain what special skills and qualities you can bring to the job. Avoid empty clichés such as “I am a self-starter” or “I am a people person.”

Explain how your class-related projects, your co-curricular activities or volunteer experiences have prepared you for work.

Compare:

“I was president of the French Club.”

Vs.

“In my term as president of the French Club, I developed valuable leadership skills as I organized a ten-person team to undertake fundraising activities.”

Compare:

“I haven't worked in public relations but contributed articles to the Kenyon Collegian.”

Vs.

“Conducting interviews, performing research, and writing informative, concise articles under strict deadlines has provided solid experience that is essential for the public relations field.”

COVER LETTER CONTENTS

ADDRESSES AND DATE

Your address will appear at the top of the document without your name, which is typed and signed at the bottom. The date appears below your address. Next, you'll

have the inside address, for the recipient, essentially as it would appear on the outside of an envelope. This is a standard format for business correspondence.

SALUATION

Each letter should be addressed, by name, to the person with whom you want to talk – the one who can hire you. Make sure you have the correct name, title and address. If necessary, call the organization to get the name and title of the person. While on the phone, make sure you have the correct spelling of the person's name. If no name is available, use a title, such as "Dear Hiring Manager:" or "Dear Director of Institutional Research:"

If a title is not available (some employers make the process difficult to protect staff time and to help filter out the less-motivated candidates), you have a couple of choices. "Dear Sir or Madam:" is technically correct but is seen as outdated. "To Whom it May Concern:" is acceptable to some but too impersonal for others. In many cases, just putting "Representative:" after the name of the organization will suffice, as shown.
Dear AT&T Representative:
or
Dear Red Cross Representative:

INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

Keep this section short! Identify yourself. State how you learned of the organization and job opening. Clearly state your reason for writing. If you are applying through a contact, be sure to mention the contact's name in the first few sentences. Express your interest in both the company and the job.

This is a great opportunity for a touch of creativity. Cite an article or source beyond the web site that helped prompt your interest. Be careful about disclosing interests that might appear too self-serving,

such as, *"I'm interested in working for a company such as yours that has an excellent reputation. I've also heard very good things about your training programs."*

A better approach – using some nugget of research that's of equal interest to you – might be something such as, *"Three months ago, American Demographics ran a story about your innovative outreach to a broader clientele. I'd like to apply my creativity, multi-cultural awareness, and results-orientation with a company that's taken such positive strides."*

YOUR QUALIFICATIONS (Middle Paragraphs)

This brief summary of your outstanding attributes and experiences should be one or two paragraphs. Try not to repeat your resume by simply restating those phrases into sentence format. Highlight the education credentials, employment experiences and personal qualities that relate to the position for which you are applying. Make a stronger impression by limiting your

focus to one or two of your experiences. The more specific you can be, the better. Cite your skills and include any information that might not be on your resume but further illustrates your abilities. This includes class-related accomplishments, anecdotes, awards, etc. Identify yourself as a good solution to the employer's needs.

CONCLUSION (Final Paragraph)

In this closing paragraph, restate your interest in the organization and end your letter by initiating the next step – your commitment to action. Tell the employer what will happen next. Conclude with a sentence such as “I look forward to speaking

with you further and will contact you later next week.” – and DO it! Note: It really is OK to contact a potential employer. This type of follow through truly shows your initiative and enthusiasm for the job.

THE 10 DO'S AND DON'TS OF COVER LETTER WRITING

- 1) Always include a cover letter with your resume! Make each letter unique.
- 2) Keep it short! One page with 3-5 paragraphs should convey your message.
- 3) Keep it simple and brief. Say what you mean without a lot of verbage. Keep your paragraphs to 4-5 sentences. Use terminology and buzzwords of the career field to show your familiarity with the field, but don't over do it.
- 4) Use the active voice rather than the passive voice.
- 5) Don't use vague words and phrases. Avoid overused and meaningless terms such as “hardworking,” “strong communication skills,” or “loyal.”
- 6) Place the most important statements first, supported by facts. Don't make statements you can't verify. You should be able to cite specific examples of using any skills you say you have. Don't state facts unless you can back them up with experiences.
- 7) Avoid addressing letters to “Dear Sir or Madam” or “To Whom it May Concern.” Call the company to find out the correct name (and spelling) and title of the individual you should contact. Confirm the address while on the telephone.
- 8) Make sure there are no errors or typos. Have others look it over!
- 9) Use matching paper and fonts for the letter and resume. By your making them a matching set, you show continuity and professionalism.
- 10) Sign the letter. This may be obvious, but many forget to do so.

SAMPLE COVER LETTER #1 (CONSERVATIVE/FORMAL)

P.O. Box 93
Gambier, Ohio 43022
July 17, 2010

Mr. C. B. Scott, Manager
Wee-Care Children's Services
123 Main Street
Evanston, Illinois 60606

Dear Mr. Scott:

I am applying for the position of child advocate, which was advertised through Kenyon College's Career Development Office. In researching Wee-Care Children's Services on the internet, I applaud its devotion to the improvement of care and services for deprived, neglected youth and their families. The position seems to fit well with my education, experience, and career interests.

According to the advertisement, your position requires excellent communication and listening skills, a desire to learn as well as a commitment to child abuse prevention. While completing my degree in English from Kenyon College this spring, I promoted awareness of social issues as a columnist in our campus newspaper. As a volunteer with New Directions, a local women's shelter, I staffed crisis phone hotlines and cared for the children of violence victims. My involvement with such activities and issues convinced me to pursue an active role relating to children's rights. I understand the position also requires one who is team- and detail-oriented, works well under pressure, and is able to deal with a variety of people. These are skills I developed both in my course work and in my recent summer internship at the Child Welfare League of America in Washington, D.C.

My background and goals seem to match your requirements well. I am confident that I can perform the job effectively, and am excited about the idea of working for a dynamic, nationally recognized social service agency.

I look forward to speaking with you further about employment opportunities with Wee-Care Children's Services and will contact you next week. Should you need to contact me, please don't hesitate to call either number listed on my enclosed resume. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Candace Parson

enclosure

SAMPLE COVER LETTER #2 (CREATIVE/INFORMAL)

P. O. Box 1122
Gambier, Ohio 43022
July 17, 2010

Ms. Anita Taylor
Art Director
The Film Group, Inc.
1200 Plaza Drive
San Francisco, California 94112

Dear Ms. Taylor:

We live in a world where styles change constantly and fresh images are always in demand. Professionals in every field, especially graphic design, must be aware of these changes and possess the flexibility and imagination to stay ahead of the trends.

I know the Film Group seeks only the brightest and most creative designers for its team. I also know that I have the training and ability it takes to produce compelling images for your web and print publications. My liberal arts degree and my internship experiences have taught me how to bring ideas to life – on time and in a creative way.

The enclosed resume elaborates on the details of my skills and experiences. And the accompanying portfolio shows how I've turned ideas into reality.

I would appreciate the chance to meet you to discuss how I could be a vital part of your team. I will call you next week to see if there is a possibility of our talking further. If you need to contact me, you may reach me at the number or e-mail address on my resume.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

Michael Neven

enclosure

SAMPLE COVER LETTER #3 (Application to off-campus interview days)

P. O. Box 106
Gambier, Ohio 43022
October 10, 2009

Mr. Ronald Asher, Jr.
Macy's East
151 West 34th Street, 17th Floor
New York, New York 10001

Dear Mr. Asher:

As a child growing up in the Pacific Northwest, the closest I could come to the best department store in the country was through the magical televised Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Now, with the help of Kenyon and the Selective Liberal Arts Consortium, I am excited to learn that I may have the opportunity to join the Macy's East family as an Assistant Buyer.

My resume shows that I am a capable, well-rounded individual with a variety of interests and experiences. One of my strongest interests revolves around fashion, which is demonstrated through my acceptance as a member of the Nordstrom Fashion Board. With both the knowledge I gained through this experience and my own classic style, I find myself drawn to what Macy's has to offer to a prospective employee.

Not only am I well-versed in the realm of fashion, but my ten years of experience as a competitive swimmer has instilled in me dedication and a strong work ethic which are absolutely essential in this line of work. Throughout my four years at Kenyon, I have learned to become a team player through my membership both on the swim team and in a new student-run comedy club. The bachelor's degree in English I will earn in May will be the culmination of a productive four years at Kenyon.

I look forward to an interview in New York City to further discuss the contributions I could make to the Macy's team and Federated Department Stores.

Sincerely yours,

Jessica Stryker

enclosure

**SAMPLE COVER LETTER #4 (Prospecting Letter – These are used
when you aren't sure whether an organization has any openings.)**

P. O. Box 1160
Gambier, Ohio 43022
June 21, 2010

Mr. Dale Porfilio
Allstate Insurance Company
2775 Sanders Road, D-6
Northbrook, IL 60062-6127

Dear Mr. Porfilio:

During my first year at Kenyon College, the sequence of questions had become standard. “What’s your major?” was inevitably followed by “What can you do with a math major?” I had never really thought about it before; it was the math that I loved -- the problem solving, the data manipulation -- the major seemed nothing more than a natural progression.

Soon after these encounters began to increase, I saw a poster in the math department about the actuarial field. It included something about insurance, and challenges, and people, and a brief mention about some test. It all sounded fine to me. “An actuary,” I would respond. “I’m going to be an actuary!” “Oh,” my friends would respond.

As a soon-to-graduate Senior, I have learned more about the field, and find it fascinating. It would allow me to further my statistical knowledge, a subject that has captivated me since I took a probability course last year. Additionally, I could utilize my computer experience and programming skills to practical applications to benefit Allstate. Lastly it would allow me to interact personally with people on a daily basis, an experience I have cherished both as a college calculus tutor and a computer volunteer at a local elementary school.

In short, I like to think that the actuarial field meshes well with what I hope to accomplish in mathematics... even if my friends aren’t quite sure.

Although I know you are busy during this time of year, I would appreciate a few minutes of your time. Following up on this letter, I will contact you soon to discuss the possibility of an interview. In the meantime, if you need to contact me, please send an e-mail to HayesJ@kenyon.edu or call me at 740-427-5769. Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

Joseph Hayes

Enclosures: resume, unofficial transcripts

SAMPLE COVER LETTER #5 (Networking Letter – These are designed to generate informational interviews that allow you to meet individuals who can help you learn more about a particular career and give you advice about finding a job in that field.)

P. O. Box 657
Kenyon College
Gambier, Ohio 43022
September 20, 2009

Mr. James L. Throser
Blane, Collier, and Phips
Suite 3987
One Market Square
Indianapolis, IN 47401

Dear Mr. Throser:

While doing some career research at Kenyon's Career Development Office, I found your name in the alumni network. I liked what you said regarding the challenges and rewards of practicing law. It is my understanding that, as a member of the Kenyon Career Network, you would be willing to offer some suggestions and advice regarding a career in law.

Presently, I am looking for a position as a paralegal or legal assistant. It is my intention to gain exposure to legal work and learn some of the fundamental skills required of a lawyer before applying to law school, one or two years down the road. I would be interested in your thoughts concerning this strategy. Additionally, if you have any suggestions regarding law firms that might consider a bachelor-level candidate for a position, I'd be interested in learning about them.

I will be in the Indianapolis area over Fall break (October 12-13) and wondered whether it would be possible to meet with you then to learn more about the legal profession. I understand how busy you are, so I will come prepared with specific questions. Enclosed please find a copy of my resume to familiarize you with my background.

I will call your office soon to see if a convenient time can be arranged for a meeting. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Joseph E. Byrne

enclosure

SAMPLE COVER LETTER via EMAIL #6 (Networking E-Mail -- These are used in lieu of government mail. Note: It still should be free of spelling and typing errors.)

Hello Ms. Cheroutes,

I'm a senior at Kenyon College and found your name as an alumna contact through Kenyon's Alumni Career Network.

I will be graduating in May with Honors in American Rural Studies and I'm hoping to move to Wyoming, Montana or Western Nebraska at that time. I am currently finishing my honors thesis on the effects of the changing agricultural economy on farmers, their families and rural communities in Knox County, Ohio.

I would really like to find a teaching position in a small rural school but am having some difficulty finding lists of schools and open positions. If you could give me advice on moving to Wyoming or help me in my search in any way, I would greatly appreciate it!

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Chrissie Cunningham

SAMPLE COVER LETTER #7 (Thank-You Letter -- These are used to express your appreciation and/or strengthen your candidacy. Send to all who interviewed you.)

P. O. Box 219
Gambier, Ohio 43022
May 7, 2010

Ms. Pamela Stripay
Personnel Assistant
Random House
201 East 50th Street
New York, New York 10022

Dear Ms. Stripay:

Thank you for interviewing me yesterday for the editorial assistant position in your Acquisitions Department. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about your background. Meeting with other editorial assistants was particularly helpful. Thank you for coordinating those meetings.

I am confident in my Kenyon education and know that my editorial and leadership experience with Kenyon's campus newspaper has prepared me well for the publishing field. Additionally, I am certain of my interest in the book publishing field and am ready and willing to "pay my dues" in the field.

I want to reiterate my strong interest in the position and in working with you and your staff. Also, I wanted to mention my strong desire to work as a member of a team. I understand the value and importance of coordinating efforts when working on a team.

In short, I am anxious to put my experience to work at Random House. Please feel free to call me at 740-427-5445 if I can provide you with any additional information. Again, thank you for the interview and your consideration. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Justin Rice