

# Cover Letters

## *Standing Out from the Crowd*

### What is a cover letter and why do I have to write one?

- A cover letter is a formal, one-page correspondence accompanying your resume.
- It is the first impression an employer has of you.
- The purpose of a cover letter is to introduce yourself and your skills to a potential employer, and to persuade an employer to review your resume/application and consider granting you an interview.
- Your goal – explain why you're the best fit for the job and provide context to the examples on your resume.
- Your cover letter should highlight your strongest qualifications, not simply restate information from your resume.

### When is it necessary to write a cover letter?

- Every time you make contact with a potential employer—whether it is a company, an organization, or a school system--you should include a cover letter.
- Whether you are following up on a phone conversation, writing to inquire about employment opportunities or responding to a job announcement that states "send resume" you must include a carefully written letter.

### What Should It Look Like?

- Keep your letter to one page; three to five paragraphs are the ideal length.
- Your cover letter should be professional in appearance.
- Use quality paper and envelopes that match your resume.

### Types of Cover Letter

- Response to an Advertisement
- Networking/Referral Letter
- Letter of Inquiry/Prospecting Letter

### Parts of a Cover Letter

- **The header:** Be sure the header of your cover letter matches the header of your resume.
- **The addressee:** Always address your letter to the hiring manager. If you do not have a contact name, call the organization to find out the name and title of the person who is doing the hiring (be sure to get the correct spelling of the name). If you are not able to find out the contact person, use "Director of Personnel."
- **Salutation:** The salutation should begin with "Dear Mr." or "Dear Ms." Also, you should never use a first name in the salutation. Avoid salutations like "Dear Gentlemen," "To Whom It May Concern," and "Dear Sir."
- **First paragraph:** State your purpose for writing the letter. Include the name of the position you are applying for and what makes you the best candidate for this position (ex: I am submitting my resume for consideration for the position of Research Assistant at Cambridge Associates. I am confident that my academic background in Sociology, work experience and language skills qualify me for this position) as well as the source where you found the job announcement and the date the ad appeared (i.e. the name of the newspaper, the web address, etc.). If you learned of the position through another person, mention his or her name as personal referrals often attract attention. Keep the first paragraph short and powerful.
- **Second paragraph:** Provide details on how you gained your skills and experience and how they match the qualifications of the position you are applying for (ex: My academic background in Anthropology and independent study have prepared me with solid research and writing skills which I believe will be an asset to your team.)
- **Third paragraph:** Mention your interest and knowledge in the organization and in the industry in which you are applying (ex: I would welcome the opportunity to work at ABC Environmental Group and to be part of a team committed to reducing toxic waste.)
- **Closing paragraph:** Close your letter with a plan of action. Tell your potential employer what you are going to do (ex: I will call you next week to schedule a mutually convenient time to meet.)
- **Signature:** Always sign your letters in the space between the complimentary closing and your typed name!

## Cover Letter Writing Worksheet

1. Find a job/internship description and highlight the key action verbs
  
2. How did you find out about the position
  - a. Friend/Family Member
  - b. Someone working within the organization
  - c. Academic advisor, professor, former supervisor, coach, etc.
  - d. Job listing, be specific as to where you found it \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. None of the above \_\_\_\_\_

3. List 5 reasons you want to work for this particular company
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_

4. List 5 reasons (Qualifications) why you would be a good candidate
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_

5. Complete the chart below

List the skills or qualifications needed (refer to the job description)	List jobs, classes, clubs/organizations, etc. where you have utilized skills/qualifications to the left.	Describe how you have taken action and provided value in the past highlighting skills and qualities (not just responsibilities). <i>Be as specific as possible.</i>

6. Circle your 2-3 strongest qualifications and examples in Question # 5 and use these to help formulate a strong cover letter.

**Header:** Be sure the header of your cover letter matches the header of your resume.

# YANK T. TIGER

1 College Road, Box 1234 • Hampden-Sydney, VA 23943 • *effective until 5.10.2016*  
5723 Germantown Road • Roanoke, VA 24019 • *effective as of 5.11.2016*

**The addressee:** Always address your letter to the hiring manager. If you do not have a contact name, call the organization to find out the name and title of the person who is doing the hiring (be sure to get the correct spelling of the name). If you are not able to find out the contact person, use "Director of Personnel."

Mr. J.S. Employer, Director  
Personnel Department  
Company Name  
Farmville, VA 23901

**Salutation:** The salutation should begin with "Dear Mr." or "Dear Ms." Also, you should never use a first name in the salutation. Avoid salutations like "Dear Gentlemen," "To Whom It May Concern," and "Dear Sir."

Dear Mr. Employer:

Please accept the enclosed resume as an expression of my interest in the Public Relations Specialist Internship (Position #00056) with Company XYZ as advertised in *The Richlands Herald* on Monday, August 1, 2013. I am a Junior at Hampden-Sydney College pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Economics/Business. I am seeking opportunities that will allow me to utilize my innovative and analytical skills with a variety of problems where applied creativity is necessary.

**First paragraph:** This paragraph should include information on who you are and your purpose for writing the letter. Include the name of the position you are applying for and what makes you the best candidate for this position. If you are responding to a classified ad, be sure to mention the publication and the date the ad appeared. You might make reference to a previous conversation or correspondence, giving specific dates if possible. If you learned of the position through another person, mention his or her name as personal referrals often attract attention. Keep the first paragraph short and powerful.

After researching your company, I am excited about pursuing the Public Relations Specialist Internship with an emphasis on managing accounts within the Research and/or Product Development branches. Company XYZ is of particular interest to me because of your culture of high ethics and values. In addition to my ethics and values, I will bring enthusiasm, a willingness to learn and my desire to be part of the Company XYZ team.

I have been building effective relationships with people all my life. I garnered the respect of my peers, prospective students, and parents based on my presentation skills and knowledge of the College while giving tours of campus as a Garnet & Grey. Additionally, as the first point of contact at Kelly Services, I explained our services and cost structure, answered questions and scheduled appointments with the appropriate job counselor. My experiences in planning, organizing, publicizing, and implementing programs are all skills that will make me an excellent intern for your company.

**Body:** The next one to three paragraphs contain your sales pitch, convincing the employer that you have what it takes to do the job. Provide details on how you gained your skills and experience and how they match the qualifications of the position you are applying for. Highlight important features of your resume that pertain to the position for which you are applying. Mention your interest and knowledge in the organization and the industry in which you are applying. Your letter will be effective if you incorporate specific knowledge of the position and the organization to which you are writing. It shows you have done your homework and appear to be truly interested in this organization.

Enclosed is a copy of my resume outlining my skills and experiences and would welcome the opportunity to talk with you about these as they relate to the internship. You can reach me at the above phone number or email address. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

**Closing paragraph:** This paragraph should be short and to the point. Indicate what steps you would like to happen next. There are two different approaches you might take in this section. The *passive approach* (most common) puts responsibility on the employer to make contact with the applicant. You will wait for the employer to contact you. With the *active approach* the applicant offers to initiate further contact with the employer in the near future. You may indicate that you will call the employer on a specific date to verify receipt of your letter and arrange for an appointment. Remember to thank the employer for his or her time and consideration.

Sincerely,

*Yank Tiger*

**Signature:** Always sign your letters in the space between the complimentary closing and your typed name!

Type your name here

Enclosure

# Cover Letter Rubric

	<b>Cover letter should get you the interview.</b>	<b>Cover letter could land you an interview. This is an average letter (borderline case.)</b>	<b>Cover letter needs significant improvement and would be discarded during screening</b>
<b>Business format and overall quality of writing ability</b>	This letter uses correct business format with date and addresses at the top, and a signature at the bottom. This letter is clear and concise, and grammatically correct. There are no spelling errors.	This letter uses correct business format with date and addresses at the top, and a signature at the bottom. There are minimal grammar and spelling errors. While its content is decent, this letter does not convince an employer to call.	Business formatting is not used in this letter. There is no address or date at the top. This letter is not signed. There are multiple grammar and spelling errors. The content of this letter does not make sense to the reader.
<b>Section 1: Introduction</b>	This section identifies the position for which you are applying and explains why you are interested in the job. You have described how you heard about the opening. The wording is creative and catches an employer's attention quickly.	This section identifies the position you are seeking. This letter does not describe how you heard about the opening. You vaguely describe why you are interested in this job. This section is bland and might not catch someone's attention fast enough.	This section does not clearly identify what position you are seeking. There is no description of how you heard about the position or why you are interested. This letter definitely will not grab an employer's attention and keep him or her reading.
<b>Section 2: Identification of skills and experiences as related to position</b>	This letter identifies one or two of your strongest qualifications and clearly relates how these skills apply to the job at hand. This letter explains specifically why you are interested in the position and this type of job, company, and/or location.	This letter identifies one of your qualifications, but it is not related to the position at hand. This letter restates what is on your resume with minimal additional information. You explain why you are interested in the position but are too vague.	This letter does not discuss any relevant qualifications. You have not related your skills to the position for which you are applying. This letter does not state why you are interested in the position, company, and/or location.
<b>Section 3: Closing</b>	This letter refers the reader to your resume or any other enclosed documents. This letter thanks the reader for taking time to read this letter. You are assertive as you describe how you will follow up with the employer in a stated time period.	You thank the reader for taking time to read this letter. You do not refer the reader to your resume or application materials. This letter assumes that the employer will contact you to follow up.	This letter does not thank the reader for taking time to review this letter. There is no reference to a resume or other materials. This letter does not mention any plan for follow up.

## Cover Letter Basics

- I have prepared a cover letter to accompany my resume (not needed to attend job fair) that is:
  - Printed on resume paper
  - One page in length
  - Error Free
  - Formatted to match my resume (using the same header, font, margins, etc.)
  - Targeted to specific audience
  - Receiver focused (Example: you will find that my \_\_\_ skills enable me to \_\_\_)
  - Has been reviewed by someone other than myself
  - Addressed to a specific person (not “To Whom it May Concern”). If you are unsure who to address to, contact the Human Resources Department, or leave blank as in a memo.
- In the first paragraph, I have:
  - Stated reason I am writing
  - Mentioned which position I am applying for and how I learned of position (give reader reason to continue) or send prospecting letter (indicating interest in positions that might become available in the future)
  - Demonstrated knowledge of company and what attracted me to apply
  - Shown how I have the major qualifications required for the job and how those qualifications fit the job description
  - Described how my special talents will be assets
- In the second and third paragraphs, I have:
  - Showcased why I am a good candidate
  - Used action verbs and key words from the internship/job description
  - Described how I’ve taken action and provided value to organizations in the past (highlighting skills and qualities not just responsibilities)
  - Highlighted my accomplishments with a specific example or “STAR story”
    - ❖ Situation
    - ❖ Task
    - ❖ Action
    - ❖ Result
  - Described what I can do for the reader (not just what I have done in the past)
- In the closing paragraph, I have:
  - Asked for the interview (politely and explicitly)
  - Referred to my resume (highlight major skills one last time)
  - Ended on a positive note, forward-looking
  - Said thank you
  - Included contact information (phone and email)
- Signature:
  - Always close with “Sincerely,” followed by white space (4 lines for printed, 2 for email/online submission) and then your full name
  - If printing and mailing your application, always sign your name in the white space with black ink
  - Include the word Enclosure to indicate that you have included your resume

# YANK T. TIGER

1 College Road, Box 1234 • Hampden-Sydney, VA 23943 • *effective until 5.10.2016*  
5723 Germantown Road • Roanoke, VA 24019 • *effective as of 5.11.2016*  
yankttiger@hsc.edu • 540-220-1774

October 10, 2015

Ms. Joan Lancaster, Director  
Human Resources  
Company XYZ  
Suite 1234  
Richlands, VA 22222

Dear Ms. Lancaster:

Please accept the enclosed resume as an expression of my interest in the Public Relations Specialist Internship (Position #00056) with Company XYZ as advertised in *The Richlands Herald* on Wednesday, October 9, 2015. I am a Junior at Hampden-Sydney College pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Economics and Business. I am seeking opportunities that will allow me to utilize my innovative and analytical skills with a variety of problems where applied creativity is necessary.

After researching your company, I am excited about pursuing the Public Relations Specialist Internship with an emphasis on managing accounts or within the Research and/or Product Development branches. Company XYZ is of particular interest to me because of your culture of high ethics and values. In addition to my ethics and values, I will bring enthusiasm, a willingness to learn and my desire to be part of the Company XYZ team.

I have been building effective relationships with people all my life. I garnered the respect of my peers, prospective students, and parents based on my presentation skills and knowledge of the College while giving tours of campus. As the first point of contact at Kelly Services, I explained our services and cost structure, answered questions and scheduled appointments with the appropriate job counselor. In addition, I have experience in planning, organizing, publicizing, and implementing programs. These are all skills that will make me an excellent intern for Company XYZ.

Enclosed is a copy of my resume outlining my skills and experiences and would welcome the opportunity to talk with you about these as they relate to the internship. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

*Yank T. Tiger*

Enclosure