



**BELLEVUE  
COLLEGE**

**CENTER FOR CAREER CONNECTIONS  
AND WOMEN'S CENTER**

# Cover Letter Essentials

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## Purpose of a Cover Letter

**Job seekers often don't give enough attention to their cover letters.** This is a way for employers to weed people out, so you should make sure this document is **well-written** and **not generic**. The purpose of a cover letter is to convince an employer to call you for an interview. It should not simply repeat what is on your resume. A cover letter should address your qualifications specific to this job and show you know something about the company.

## Basic Rules for Cover Letters

- If you are applying for a specific job that is currently available, always send a cover letter, even if the advertisement doesn't ask for one. Even if they don't read it, it will help you stand out.
- Do not send a generic cover letter. Employers can spot a generic cover letter from a mile away, and they don't like it. If it's going to be effective, you need to tailor it to each new job for which you apply.
- Do not use more than one page, unless the ad says you can. Most experts say that at most, your cover letter should be two to three paragraphs and under 150 words. The idea is that your cover letter should not be any longer than one computer screen in length.
- **Do not simply repeat what you have written in your resume.** Instead, sum up what you have to offer for the specific job, and use this opportunity to bring your resume to life. Let it serve as your introduction to the reader. In simple direct language, demonstrate your interest and enthusiasm by telling why you are uniquely qualified for the job. A successful cover letter highlights and enhances the information on your resume, and targets it toward the prospective employer.
- It's okay to let your letter reflect your individuality, but do not be aggressive, overbearing, familiar, or cute, and don't write your life story. Use the interview as a chance to show your personality and go into more detail about your experiences. This is just a chance to get the interview. You want to stand out by having professional, mistake-free, visually appealing documents.
- Use the same font that you used in your resume. Many people will use their name, phone number, and email address as a header on both the resume and the cover letter. It's like your own personalized stationary, and if your documents get separated, they are easily identifiable.
- Use perfect grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Proofread it before sending it to anyone, and have a friend, family member, or Specialist in the Bellevue College Career for Career Connections proofread it before sending it to an employer! If you need help with grammar, visit the BC Writing Lab: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/writinglab/>



## Before You Start

- Find the company online and do some research. Read their 'About Us' page and their mission statement. In your letter, you'll want to appeal to the company or department's mission/values/goals. Looking at their web site may also help you identify other types of positions available within that particular company.
- Try to find the hiring manager's name and email address. Cover letters should be personalized whenever possible. Try to find the name on the company's web site or call them *once*, but do NOT harass the company just to get a name.
- Use the job advertisement to help you write the letter. If the ad has a bulleted list of qualifications, pick the most important bullets and write down how you meet those requirements. If the ad is a paragraph, type it into a short list. Use the list to help you write the letter. If there are too many requirements to address in your letter, pick out only the most important and summarize the rest. Remember, the letter should be brief. Exclude anything that's very obvious, like a high school diploma or a driver's license.



## Methods for Submitting Your Application Materials

- **Online Form:** This is becoming more common. Create a plain text version of your cover letter and clean up the formatting before you copy and paste it into the form.
- **Email:** Send your resume and cover letter as an attachment unless otherwise instructed. Some companies have spam blockers that block all emails with attachments, but this is uncommon. Always send attachments in Microsoft Word or as a PDF file, and create a very brief message for the body of the email. If you must send your resume and cover letter in the body of an email, make sure your formatting is *very* simple.
- **Snail Mail (USPS):** Use this method if explicitly instructed to or if there is no online form or email option. Use a full-sized manila envelope so you don't have to fold your documents, and type or print the label very neatly.
- **Fax:** The end product usually looks unprofessional, so use this method if there is no other option or if you are trying to get your materials in by a certain deadline.

## Contents of a Cover Letter

- **Letterhead:** Your resume and cover letter should match. This includes your name, email, and phone.
- **Date, Company Name, & Address:** Do some research if you don't have this information. You should be able to find the company's address on the internet or by calling them.
- **Greeting:** Personalize the greeting with a name or use "Dear Recruiter", "Dear Hiring Manager", "Dear Search Committee", or "Dear Sir/Madam." Try to avoid "To Whom It May Concern." If you know the person's name, always use "Mr." or "Ms." (Never use "Mrs." unless you know the person is married.)
- **Paragraph #1:** Tell why you're writing, the name of the position (and job number if applicable), and where you heard about position so that your reader knows where to direct your resume and letter. This is a good place to state (or restate) your objective. Since you know the specific job being offered, you can tailor your objective to suit the position.  
→ Drop names in the first paragraph if you know someone in the company. Hiring managers take unsolicited resumes more seriously when they assume you were referred by one of their employees or customers.

- **Paragraph #2:** Briefly explain why you're interested in this employer and this job, what your career objectives are, and your experience/skills/knowledge. Describe how your education, experiences and other personal qualifications will support your capacity to succeed in the work you are targeting. *Emphasize your skills or abilities that relate to the job for which you are applying.* If you mention the company and its needs, it becomes immediately obvious that your cover letter is not generic.  
→ This section can be two paragraphs if needed, but don't make this section too long or you will quickly lose the reader's interest. Here is where you sell yourself, so be sure to write this in a confident manner. Entice the reader to find out more about you by reading your resume. **And remember that the reader will view your cover letter as an example of your writing skills.**
- **Paragraph #3:** The closing should be concise. Briefly restate your interest (in one sentence), let the reader know what you want (an application, an interview, an opportunity to call), and close your letter with something like: "I look forward to hearing from you soon." and "Thank you for your consideration."
- **Closing:** Always use "Sincerely," and if you are emailing your documents, you can use a font signature if you like. If you really want to stand out, scan your signature and insert it as an image!

## Additional Tips

- Avoid starting every sentence with "I" – turn the focus to what you can do for them. For example, change "I have expert knowledge of Photoshop" to "Your marketing department would benefit from my expert knowledge of Photoshop."
- Prove that you have soft skills (like communication) by saying what you did that necessitated that skill.
- Use industry buzzwords. Because your cover letter may be filed into a database, using critical keywords will enhance the likelihood that your cover letter and resume will be retrieved in a search for qualified candidates.
- Address any weak spots in your resume, but remember – don't get too personal.
- We don't recommend that you say you'll call them in a week, especially if it's a large company. They most likely don't want you to call, unless it's a really aggressive sales position.
- Read the letter out loud to help you catch mistakes and/or identify any awkward sentences. Have a friend or family member (or Career Specialist) proofread it for you. There is no excuse for spelling errors!
- If sending your documents as an attachment, name the documents appropriately, such as "Jane Doe Cover Letter.doc" - Make sure they can identify the document on their computer without having to open the document.

## Ask Yourself These Questions

- Knowing *only* what is on your resume and cover letter, would you hire you?
- Do you clearly qualify for the position?
- Is it obvious that you value *this job* and *this company*?
- Do you stand out in a stack of 100 cover letters?
- Is everything perfect? This is a test of your writing skills, as well as your ability to pay attention to details.



## Don't Disqualify Yourself

Read and re-read the application instructions, and make sure you've done everything they requested. **The number one way people disqualify themselves is by not following instructions.**

## Thank You Letters

After a job interview, send a follow-up or thank you letter addressed to the person(s) who interviewed you. Thank the interviewer, express your continued interest in the position, and include any additional relevant information, which you may have overlooked during the interview. **Send the letter within 24 hours of the interview.** This is good practice and helps the interviewer(s) to remember you and to understand that you are motivated, courteous, and responsible. Follow-up letters can be emailed, typed & sent in the mail, or hand-delivered to the office (if it's not an imposition).

## Acceptance Letters

When you are offered a position and you decide to accept, send a letter of acceptance to the company, addressed to either your future supervisor or the personnel officer who offered you the position. Let the employer know when you can begin and that you're looking forward to joining the company or organization.

## Declining a Job Offer

If offered a position and you do not want to accept it, let the employer know. Thank her or him for offering you the position. You don't have to give details on why you're declining the position, but this helps you maintain good relations with the company. Who knows, maybe there will be a job there in the future that you really want!

## Sample Cover Letter

Sometimes it helps to see an example. Below you will find a sample job advertisement, as well as a sample cover letter. Notice that the cover letter directly addresses the qualifications in the advertisement. Here are some other things to keep in mind when looking at the example:

- Do NOT just plug your information into this template. Give your documents your own style.
- Different circumstances require different approaches. Your cover letter may need to look drastically different depending on your industry, age, experience, skills, etc.
- You don't know if the employer will read the resume or the cover letter first, so both must clearly outline your qualifications.

## Sample Job Advertisement

### Accounting Intern Wanted:

Small accounting firm is looking for an accounting intern. Qualifications include:

- Associate degree in Accounting or Finance (or nearing completion of degree)
- Advanced MS Excel, Access, and Word required, Peachtree knowledge a plus
- 2+ years of professional work experience
- Effective oral and written communication skills
- Self-motivated, high energy, and excellent organization skills

Email resume & cover letter to: [lpalm@evergreenaccountingservice.com](mailto:lpalm@evergreenaccountingservice.com)

## Sample Cover Letter

**Sarah Sample**

Cell: (206) 596-5984 | [jsample@email.com](mailto:jsample@email.com)

February 20, 2010

Ms. Louise Palm  
President & CEO  
Evergreen Accounting  
10028 South Kensey Avenue  
Renton, WA 98124

Dear Ms. Palm:

Thank you for the opportunity to apply for the Accounting Internship you recently advertised on Bellevue College's CONNECT web site. I recently graduated from Bellevue College with an Accounting Transfer Degree. I have been looking for an opportunity to intern at a small accounting firm, and I believe my skills and work ethic are a good fit for your firm.

The Accounting program at Bellevue College provided me with much of the knowledge I would need to be a successful intern at Evergreen Accounting. I gained thorough knowledge of PeachTree, Excel, Access, Word, and QuickBooks. I also studied federal and state income tax regulations, so I understand the bigger picture of the work you do at Evergreen.

In addition to my education, I have four years of office administration experience. As the Lead Receptionist at Media Link, I polished my oral and written communication skills. I was recognized by my supervisor as being highly organized and reliable, and I was twice selected as Employee of the Month. Clients often commented on my upbeat and helpful attitude.

I am a highly-motivated professional, and I am eager to apply my knowledge and skills as your intern. I look forward to speaking with you about the position and how I might be able to help your firm. Please feel free to contact me at your convenience to schedule an interview. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*Sarah Sample*

Sarah Sample

Enclosure: Resume

## Anatomy of a Cover Letter

As you can see from the sample cover letter above, there is a certain format that needs to be used. Here is a breakdown of what's needed:

### Your Name

Phone and Email  
(This should match your resume)

Today's Date

Hiring Manager's Name  
Hiring Manager's Title  
Company Name  
Address  
City, State, Zip

Greeting:

Opening Paragraph: See "Contents of a Cover Letter" section above.

2nd (and possibly 3rd) Paragraph: See "Contents of a Cover Letter" section above.

Closing Paragraph: See "Contents of a Cover Letter" section above

Closing,

*Your name in font signature* (Optional if you're emailing your letter)

Your name typed

Enclosure: Resume

## More Sample Cover Letters

**David A. Snipes**

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Phone (425) 442-5973

Email [d.snipes@gmail.com](mailto:d.snipes@gmail.com)

June 11, 2010

Ms. Marjorie Daw  
Editor-in-Chief  
Eastside Times  
PO Box 1000  
Bellevue, WA 98000

Dear Ms. Daw:

I would like to submit my name as an applicant for the position of Assistant Copy Editor (position #J302) for the Eastside Times. Mr. Jack Anjill of the Olympia Daily Herald informed me of this position.

As the Copy Editor, and most recently Editor, of The Bellevue College Weekly, I have both the experience and the practical skills needed for working in your office. During my term as Editor of the BC Weekly, campus-wide readership increased by ten percent. While working as a summer intern with the Olympia Daily Herald, I also wrote two guest columns.

I've enjoyed reading the Eastside Times since moving to the area five years ago. The Times is widely-known for being an outstanding medium-sized community newspaper, with its circulation and list of advertiser increasing at a steady annual rate. I feel confident that I could bring a sound academic and journalistic background to the position, as well as a fresh, enthusiastic approach.

Enclosed is a copy of my resume which contains additional information that I'm sure will be of interest to you. I have also attached copies of articles and commentaries I've written for the BC Weekly and the Olympia Daily Herald. If you feel, as I do, that the experience and training you are seeking in an Assistant Copy Editor are closely aligned with my background, please let me know when we can meet to explore the possibility of my joining your staff. I am available for an interview at your convenience.

Sincerely,



David A. Snipes

Enclosure: resume



# Margaret Foreman

[Margo.Foreman@mac.com](mailto:Margo.Foreman@mac.com) | <http://www.linkedin.com/in/margoforeman>

Cell: 206-564-8754 | Home: 425-748-8942

August 30, 2010

Maxwell Jones  
Lead Engineer  
Ganco Engineering  
4567 Main Street  
Yokomo, IL 99999

Dear Mr. Jones:

Recently, I completed a cooperative education experience with an engineering firm in Northern California where I was given the responsibility of managing a small project. I am looking for the opportunity to perform in this capacity for Ganco Engineering. I believe my background and experience will help me be an asset to your company in a very short time.

I have conducted survey and mapping assignments, participated in soil mechanics and foundation formation, and performed preliminary structural analysis and design for a grocery store. I was given the responsibility of producing a general lay-out for a new transportation system. I first surveyed the area, produced a traffic analysis and survey, researched city rules and regulations for compliance, and wrote a twenty-five page report depicting the feasibility of building a new freeway off-ramp. My mathematical skills are excellent and I am very conscientious about meeting deadlines and completing tasks unsupervised. If given the opportunity to accomplish an assignment, I can develop a plan that will meet the needs of the project.

I am very interested in becoming a part of this project after reading your company brochure and an article in the Civil Engineering Journal about your company's involvement in building a new mall in the area. I can be reached at the address and phone number below. I'll be calling your office within ten days to inquire on the status of my application. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Margaret Foreman

Enclosure: Resume

## Sample Thank You Letter

**Joe Sample** – Phone: (425) 442-5973 | Email: [joesample@joesample.com](mailto:joesample@joesample.com)

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June 11, 2010

Ms. Linda Livingston  
Director, Networking Division  
XYZ Engineering Company, Inc.  
3333 Third Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98121

Dear Ms. Livingston,

I appreciated the opportunity to talk with you on Tuesday afternoon, May 28<sup>th</sup>, about your Network Support position. Thank you for the time and courtesy that you extended in permitting me to further investigate the employment opportunities at XYZ Engineering Company. I am excited about the possibility of contributing my computer networking knowledge to your Networking Division.

During the interview I hope you found that my technical skills and working knowledge of computer networks match the requirements for the position. My recent degree in Network Administration from Bellevue College would bring fresh ideas and skills to your team.

I welcome the opportunity to work at XYZ. If I can provide you with any additional information, please let me know. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,  
Joe Sample

## Sample Acceptance Letter

Dear Mr. Donaldson,

Thank you for your offer of employment at the Court Road facility of Royal Baking Company. I am pleased to accept the invitation to join your company as a Computer Programmer at the salary and benefit terms described in your letter of May 31, 2010.

I will be able to begin working on June 18, 2010. Prior to that time, I would like to arrange a mutually convenient time to take the physical examination.

I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

*Robin Clark*

Robin Clark

## Sample Text for Declining a Job Offer

Dear Ms. Spratt,

After considerable thought, I have decided not to accept your offer of employment as outlined in your May 31, 2010 letter. This has been a very difficult decision for me. However, I feel I have made the correct choice for this stage in my career.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Your confidence in me is sincerely appreciated.

Sincerely,

Elmer Fudd

## Internet Resources

### **About.com: How to Find a Job**

<http://jobsearch.about.com/careers>

Includes information on various job-search related topics, including cover letters. There are samples and tips for creating successful cover letters, sample thank you letters, and other job search correspondence.

### **MonsterTrak: Cover Letters**

<http://www.monstertrak.com/>

Covers various kinds of cover letters, thank-you letters, terminating discussions, accepting an offer, and rejecting an offer. It also covers the resume letter, prospecting letter, networking letter, thank you letter, acceptance letter, and rejection letter. You must create an account in order to access this information.



### **Quintessential Careers: Cover Letter Tutorial**

[http://www.quintcareers.com/cover\\_letter\\_tutorial.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/cover_letter_tutorial.html)

This tutorial condenses and highlights some of the most important points in the book, *Dynamic Cover Letters for New Graduates*, and is a comprehensive guide, with more than 100 pages of information and examples. This has specific advice for college students and new grads in the most popular majors.

### **Virginia Tech Career Services: Cover letters and other letters for the job search**

<http://www.career.vt.edu/JOBSEARC/coversamples.htm>

Guidelines, etiquette, and samples of cover letters, thanks you letters, acceptance letters, etc.

### **Don't Be a Stranger: Follow-Up after Applying for Jobs, February 3, 2006**

<http://www.roberthalffinance.com/PressRoom?id=1937>

Robert Half International Survey suggests job seekers should follow-up within two weeks of submitting resume. Only 5% said don't follow up.

### **College Grad: How to Write a Good Cover Letter**

<http://www.collegegrad.com/coverletter/how-to-write-a-good-cover-letter.shtml>

Topics include: The Reality of Cover Letters, The Best Use of a Cover Letter, Sample Cover Letter, The Postscript Technique, The Worst Use of the Cover Letter, The Testimonial Cover Letter Technique, and Cover Letter Checklist.

### **WikiHow: How to Write a Cover Letter**

<http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Cover-Letter>

Topics include: Before Writing the Letter, While Writing the Letter, Cover Letter Exercise, Tips, Warnings, and Related Wikis.