

**WRITING TO APPLY
FOR
COLLEGES AND JOBS**



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Each component listed in this Table of Contents includes information on the stated topic as well as examples to help you see what a good letter should look like and exercises to help you write your own excellent application letter.

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Know Whom You are Writing To

What is the purpose of an application letter? Whether you are writing a letter to get into a college or to get a job, the purpose of an application letter is the same: it is your chance to show your reader how you stand out from the crowd. By showing that you are special, you will greatly increase your chance of getting into the college/job that you want.

It is important to note, however, that when you show that you “stand out from a crowd,” you are showing that you have some special quality or qualification which your reader will be interested in. A professional employer will not be impressed by the fact that you have a tattoo of Curious George on your ankle; you need to find out what your reader will be looking for, and then show that you fit their needs.

Why do I have to write an application letter when I’ve already got my resume/transcript? While employers and enrollment offices take great interest in resumes and transcripts, it is not always easy to get the measure of a person just from a list of accomplishments. The application letter is a chance to highlight positive experiences and qualifications, to expand on what is already in your resume, and to show that you can communicate well. Oftentimes, having a great application letter will have a stronger impact than having a great resume (although you should have both.)

Can researching the college or business really help me in getting the position? Yes, it definitely can. First off, a little research may help you from making a mistake. If you are applying to the University of Washington to become a large animal veterinarian, they may be surprised and tell you that Washington State University is actually the state university that has that particular program. A little research could have saved you some time and embarrassment. This is a simplified example. Research can also tell you some important things about the college or business: what they have done, what research they are interested in, or candidates that have been accepted into their program in the past. Knowing all of this information can really help you write a letter specifically for the intended reader. A clear example is the difference between these two lines:

“I am interested in attending Washington State University because I heard they have a good veterinarian program.”

“I am particularly impressed by Washington State University’s recent advances in large animal medicine. I would like to work with cows, and Dr. Tobias Sweeney’s recently published study on cows and how their health affects the environment is one of

the main reasons I am applying to this university. After reading his essay, “Organic Emissions and the Ozone Layer,” I knew I would be proud to study under him.”

Don’t forget: the people in a business or university are proud of their work. Show that you are interested, and you could open a door of opportunity for yourself.

Know Whom You are Writing To

You try! Take a look at the following job announcement and answer the questions.
See some possible answers in the Answer Key at the end of this module.

Advertising/ Account Executive

ROOKIE MANAGERS

**Young Firm Seeks sharp
People for Marketing, Sales,
and Advertising. Learn all
aspects of expanding business
while training for management.
No experience necessary. E-mail
your resume and cover letter to
Boots@Bootbiz.com, or Call
888-JOB-BOOT.**

- 1. What position is being advertised?**
- 2. What skills will this business probably be interested in from applicants?**
- 3. What qualities is this business probably interested in from applicants?**

Know Whom You are Writing To

You try! Assigned questions are sometimes used in college or university applications. Read over the question and then answer the questions.

Some possible answers can be located in the Answer Key at the end of this module.

Please write about one of your accomplishments and explain why it made you proud.

- 1. What kind of accomplishment should you choose?**

- 2. What skills or qualities would a college or university be most interested in?**

Know Whom You are Writing To

You try! Think about your goal, whether it be gaining admittance into a certain college or looking for a certain job. Answer the following questions. NOTE: By answering the questions, you will get a better idea of what an enrollment officer or boss would be looking for. Some of these qualities and skills you may already have, others you may not. Don't worry if you don't meet all of the qualifications right now; answering these questions may help you discover what you need to do to get ready for this type of work. If you are applying now, you may focus on the skills and qualifications you have that match the position now. Also, don't worry; the next section will deal with tailoring your letter to your reader.

1. What is your specific goal?
2. What skills do people who go into this field or major usually have?
3. What qualities do people who go into this field or major usually have?
4. Is there a specific company/business/college that you are interested in? If so, what makes them special. What particularly makes them the "right fit" for you. (If you don't know, do some research!)

THE RIGHT STUFF

After you have done some research into the place you are sending your application letter, it is time to move on to the next step.

NOTE: If you have not taken the time to do any research, do NOT move on to the next step. You should not attempt to write an application letter without researching. One of the biggest mistakes people make is thinking that they can write one generic application letter and send it out to everybody, just changing the contact address. If you do this, you are very likely losing opportunities. It takes time to research and write each letter for a specific audience, but your effort will be noticed and you will end up sparking a lot more interest.

The next step is tailoring your application letter to your reader. This three-part plan will help you do this:

- 1) *Find a need and fill it.* If a job announcement calls for computer skills, explain your skills in detail. Sometimes job announcements will make it easy for you. If there is a list of skills the employers want, you can just explain how you meet their needs. For college applications, you may look at the college's mission statement and show that you believe in the same goals as the college. Think, too, about what services, long or short term, you could provide for the job or college.
- 2) *Give relevant examples.* It is a fact: examples sell! Don't just say that you have a skill or experience; give an example to prove it. Almost everybody will say they have a skill, but it is the examples that will stand out the reader's mind.
- 3) *Be detailed.* The more specific you are in your information/examples, the better, too. Saying that you interned at a company is okay; giving the name of the company and explaining your duties is much better! Saying that you took a class in Business Writing is okay; detailing what types of skills you learned and how you did will be impressive.

THE RIGHT STUFF

You try! In the following chart, write down the skills and qualities needed and then give a specific personal example (or two) for each one.

<i>Skill or Quality Needed</i>	<i>Specific Example</i>
<u>Example</u> Strong letter writing skills	I took a course in Business Writing at Green River Community College, in which I wrote three professional business letters. I received an A on the second two.

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CREATE A GOOD IMPRESSION

In addition to learning more about the business or university your are sending your application to and finding skills and qualities that match their interest, there are other ways you can make sure to create a good impression:

- 1) Use a professional tone. Do not use slang, informal language (although “I” is fine), or too many contractions (I’m, I’d, didn’t, etc).
- 2) Write in the correct format. Please see the next section.
- 3) Show that you are interested in the reader and know about them as mentioned in the first section.
- 4) Always stay positive, no matter what. There are times that you may feel that you are not the right person for a job or university. You may not have quite all the qualifications necessary, or you may feel that you are either inexperienced or that it is too long since you have had any experience (for instance if you are returning to university after a long time.) Don’t let this phase you. Simply, find a way to write (or speak) about yourself and your qualifications in a positive manner. You don’t have all the qualifications? Write extensively about what qualifications you do have, and possibly write about how you are working on building up your other skills. You feel inexperienced? Focus on positive experiences that you have had, and not the ones that you haven’t. Please try the exercise on the next page to get some practice with this.

CREATE A GOOD IMPRESSION

You try! The following are three situations you may find yourself in while writing your application letter. Write what you would say in each instance, remembering to put a positive spin on each one.

Some possible answers appear in the Answer Key at the end of this module.

1. The company you want to work for is looking for somebody who has strong knowledge in computers. You have taken a class, but you haven't had much actual experience and you are not very confident in your abilities.
2. You graduated from high school five years ago, and since then you haven't taken a single class. You are confident that you can do well, but you feel that your past doesn't reflect this.
3. You want to show that you will be a hardworking employee, but you have never had a job before.

FORMAT

What are the main components of an Application Letter?

1. **Heading:** A correct letter heading will make you look professional. If you are applying for a college, you may not need this heading, but if you are applying for a job you almost certainly will. There are several different formats for headings so checking a style book could help, but one very common, professional format is lining your heading up on the upper left, like this:

■

Monroe Mickelbaum
504 Castle Drive
Auburn, WA 30303
Tel. 253-867-5301
Cell. 253-000-0000
E-mail: m&m@yahoo.com
Website: www.monroemickelbaum.com

February 14, 2008

Ms. Patricia Flavin
President
Flavin's Flavors, Inc.
813 Meriwether Dr.
Athens, GA 87960

Dear Ms. Flavin :

Please note all of the components of this heading (as well as spacing) and follow them as closely as possible. They are:

- The sender's contact information, including name, address, telephone numbers, fax (if possible), e-mail address, and website address. Put as much of this as you can. *Note:* There is one problem in this heading and that is the e-mail address. It is not professional. If your personal e-mail has a fun, irreverent name like this, go ahead and get a second e-mail address for business. An appropriate e-mail for this business will usually be some version of your name (monroe_mickelbaum, mmickelbaum, mickelbaum).
- The date. Make sure you write the date that you will be sending the letter. If there is a noticeable difference between the date on your letter and the date that it arrives, an employer may find this unprofessional.

- The addressee's name, title, and address. Try to include all of this information. If you do not already know who will be reading your letter, you can call and ask to whom you should address your letter. If it turns out to be impossible to discover this information, you can just include the address. *Note:* You should not include the addressee's telephone or other information, just the address!
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- 2. **Opening salutation.** In the example above, the writer's salutation is "Dear Ms. Flavin." If you know the name of your addressee, this is a professional salutation. If you do not know the name, you could write "To Whom It May Concern," or "Dear Sir or Madame." Note that, unlike in personal letters, the salutation is followed by a colon rather than a comma.
- 3. **Introduction/Statement of Purpose:** Like any essay, your introduction should catch the reader's interest. In an application letter, however, the way to catch the reader's interest is by including the appropriate information: primarily who you are, your reason for writing, and possibly a brief summary of why you would be good in the position you are seeking.
- 4. **Supporting paragraphs:** Each paragraph should focus on one quality or qualification which will make you a strong candidate for the position you seek. *NOTE:* Your reader may be reading a great deal of application letters so the easier you make it for them to read yours, the better your chances will be. Use strong topic sentences to start off each paragraph; these will help your reader scan your letter to see if they want to read further. Oftentimes, a lack of clear topic sentences will prevent application letters from being read in their entirety. It is also a good idea to start with your strongest qualification/quality. If the most striking point comes first, this might also strike your reader's interest.
- 5. **Conclusion:** This should be a brief conclusion, oftentimes thanking the reader for their time.
- 6. **Closing salutation.** This will include a salutation word ("Sincerely" is almost always the most professional) and comma, followed by four spaces in which you will write your signature, and your typed name.

Frequently Asked Question

How long should my application letter be? In most cases, application letters should be short. It is advisable to keep your letter between 1 and 1 1/2 pages, 1 page being the best.

FORMAT

You try! Read the following application letter and then answer the questions.

Sheena Anjou
1234 Dorm-B
Norfolk University
Norfolk, AL 44271
Tel. 555-335-5553
E-mail: sanjou@hotmail.com

September 17, 2002

Dr. S.R. Jones
Department of Neuroscience
Cambridge Building
University of Britain
London H20 2AK
United Kingdom

Dear Dr. Jones:

I am very pleased to apply to your graduate school and inform you about myself. My name is Sheena Anjou and I expect to receive my B.S. in Life Science from Norfolk University in February 2003. Since I was young, I have been interested in nature and scientific events and had several curiosities about the surroundings. Especially when I was in high school, I was concerned about the human body and diseases and wanted to find powerful treatments. While taking Neuroscience at university, my interest narrowed to concentrate on the human brain and its associated diseases. On the basis of my experiences and knowledge, I want to study Neuroscience more deeply by researching brain diseases and attempting to discover good treatments in your School of Neuroscience.

I have a lot of experience and knowledge of my major subject. When I was in my junior year, I started to work for the Animal Physiology Laboratory (A.P.L.) at Norfolk University as an intern graduate student; thus, I have learned and done several experiments, taken graduate school classes, and had discussions and seminars on the interests of the lab. Specifically, I have carried out gene cloning and used several skills such as plasmid DNA purification, electrophoresis, electrophoration, transformation, and PCR, cultured cancer cells of the womb and neural stem cells, and bred rodents such as mice and rats. In addition, I experienced patch clamping and whole cell recording of neurons and this has enabled me to understand electrophysiology more deeply. I also signed up for subjects that focused on the nervous system such as neuroscience, neurochemistry, and biophysics. Among these subjects some taught neurocellular anatomy, so I am familiar with the complicated brain structure and this makes me understand new information on

neuroscience quickly.

I have the personality fit for a researcher including the virtues of responsibility, fast adaptability, and enthusiasm. As I have a strong sense of responsibility, the professor of the A.P.L put me in charge of part of a big project, although I was an undergraduate student. In addition, I have lived alone far away from my family; however, I adapted very fast and have had success in doing my work. My personality will enable me to adapt to new environments and concentrate on my work well. Although the above things are very helpful in working at the position, the best quality is my strong enthusiasm for medical research.

I really hope to improve my knowledge and skill in your School of Neuroscience and contribute what I learn to the discovery of new treatments, in collaboration with famous professors and updated technology. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sheena Anjou

Sheena Anjou

NOTE: This letter is an actual student letter used by permission; the name and contact information of both the student and addressee have been changed, however.

- 1) What is the purpose of Ms. Anjou's letter? Where is this purpose made clear?**
- 2) What skills does Anjou have? Are they specific?**
- 3) In what ways can Anjou be contacted?**

FORMAT

You try! Now that you have read some advice on writing application letters, go ahead and write your own, making sure to follow the correct format. When you are done, use the following Top Ten list to ensure that you haven't made any big mistakes. If you've done a good job, then you may soon get an e-mail that makes you look like this:



TOP TEN THINGS
TO AVOID
IN WRITING AN
APPLICATION LETTER

- 10) Being lazy or unprofessional (*Check your grammar or spelling carefully!*)
- 9) Improper Organization (*The most important ideas usually go first*)
- 8) Lack of Development (*In other words, generalizing or not giving enough details about key points*)
- 7) Negativity (*For example, "I wasn't a good student, but I'm confident I can do well at this job" or "I'm not good at public speaking"*)
- 6) Overconfidence/ Overweening Pride (*For example, "I've researched your company, and I know what you are doing wrong. I am sure I can help you fix your problems."*)
- 5) Unprofessional Presentation (*Make sure that your format is correct, that your paper is pristine and clean, and that your ink is clear, black, and dry.*)
- 4) Not using the correct Tone and salutations (*For example, "Hello! Have you ever wondered who would be the best person for this job? Well, don't worry about that. It's me."*)
- 3) Forgetting to include your signature in your closing salutation.
- 2) Forgetting to include all necessary contact information.
- 1) Not stating the purpose of your Introduction Letter (*What job do you want?*)

ANSWER KEY

PAGE 4

1. What position is being advertised?

This is a position in a relatively young business in which new employees would be trained to become managers. They would be dealing with advertising, accounting, and/or marketing.

2. What skills will this business probably be interested in from applicants?

Don't be fooled by the fact that the advertisement states "No experience necessary." This doesn't mean that just anybody can apply. The business will be looking for people with certain skills. They will, of course, be impressed by an applicant who has specific experience, but there are general skills that will impress them as well: classes that have been taken, degrees that have been received, any experience working with other people, or any work experience which shows reliability and professionalism.

3. What qualities is this business probably interested in from applicants?

Probably the most important quality in an applicant for this job would be genuine interest in this type of work. Other than this, the business will probably be interested by the following qualities: dependability, friendliness, efficiency, skills in working with others, and leadership.

NOTE: It would be a good idea to call this business and get information before sending any information. That way you could learn more about what the employers are looking for and write a resume and cover letter that suits their needs.

ANSWER KEY

Page 5

1. What kind of accomplishment should you choose?

You could choose almost anything to write about, but make sure that whatever you choose reflects positively on your character. Of course, it is definitely out of the question to write about being proud of something generally considered bad, such as “I’m proud that I hate men,” but also don’t make the mistake of writing about overcoming a personality flaw; do not write how happy you are that you do not swear as much as you used to. You can, however, write about overcoming difficult circumstances, or possibly a positive experience that you have had. When writing about personal experience, make sure that you actively did something to be proud of.

2. What skills or qualities would a college or university be most interested in?

A college or university will be interested in knowing that you have determination, that you can overcome obstacles, that you are hard working, that you are dedicated to your schoolwork, that you are competitive, and that you work well with others. An experience involving your prospective major will probably be very interesting to a university; they want to enroll students who are dedicated to their major, and who will make the university proud later.

ANSWER KEY

Page 10

1. The company you want to work for is looking for somebody who has strong knowledge in computers. You have taken a class, but you haven't had much actual experience and you are not very confident in your abilities.

I recently successfully completed a class using HTML and designed my own website through the computer program at Green River Community College. This experience gave me the chance to work more in-depth with computers and I plan on taking more classes as I continue to work to ensure that I grow with my job.

Note that the author focuses on the good work he has done, and his future plan.

2. You graduated from high school five years ago, and since then you haven't taken a single class. You are confident that you can do well, but you feel that your past doesn't reflect this.

I graduated from high school in 1999 with a 3.75 grade point average. Although I have found my high school learning benefited me greatly, my strongest education comes from what I have done in the five years since I graduated. Since July, 1999, I have worked at the Malmont Clothing Store, helping customers choose clothes, working on committees to decide what to order, and planning out store catalogues. These five years have given me experience in customer service and shown me that I have management capability; I am returning to school now to major in business and I am sure that my experience will help me in my classes.

Note that the author shows that her experience has strengthened her ability and desire to learn, rather than dulled it.

3. You want to show that you will be a hardworking employee, but you have never had a job before.

One of my strongest qualities is that I am hardworking. In my schoolwork, I always applied myself, and was rewarded with strong grade point average. In addition to this, I have had experience in groups. As a member of the cheerleading squad, I was named one of the Outstanding Cheerleaders of the Year for my spirit and participation in sporting events. As a cheerleader, I was

also in charge of choreographing 25% of the cheers, a job that takes careful planning, schedule coordination, and teamwork. These are qualities that I will be proud to bring to the Jamboree Company.

Note that the author finds an example of a time when he did work hard. Although it may not be what he will be doing in the Jamboree Company, this experience does show that he takes pride in his work and that he is hardworking. Find examples of your good qualities like this, rather than focusing on what you haven't done!

ANSWER KEY

Page 14

1) What is the purpose of Anjou's letter? Where is this purpose made clear?

Anjou is writing to become a graduate student in the University of Britain's School of Neuroscience. She states this very clearly in her introduction paragraph.

4) What skills does Anjou have? Are they specific?

Anjou has very specific skills, including lab experience such as patch clamping, plasmid DNA purification, electrophoresis, electrophoration, transformation, and PCR, and a strong work ethic.

5) In what ways can Anjou be contacted?

In her heading, Anjou includes her telephone number and e-mail address as the ways in which she can be contacted.