



Ursinus College

# WRITING EFFECTIVE COVER LETTERS

## CAREER & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ursinus College

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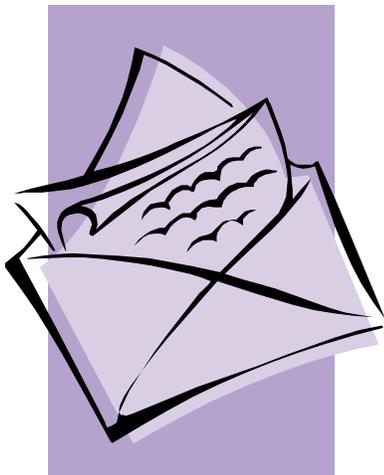
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Cover Letters are used in combination with your resume to narrate your experiences and explain to an employer why you are qualified and would excel in the position to which you are applying. The quality of your letters is crucial to your success! This handout reviews important aspects of the cover letter and provides guidelines and samples to help you with your writing.

## TYPES OF COVER LETTERS

The cover letter is a standard business letter that accompanies your resume. There are two basic types of cover letters:

- A **Letter of Application** expresses your interest in a specific position known to be open in an organization. It includes pertinent information about your qualifications and fit for the position and requests an opportunity to interview for the position. When responding to a specific job posting, ALWAYS include a cover letter with your resume.
- A **Letter of Inquiry** is used to contact an organization where no known opening exists. It communicates your interest in the organization and requests an opportunity to interview for an appropriate position. This is an invaluable tool for developing contacts in organizations you have targeted as being of interest to you.

## TRUTH ABOUT COVER LETTERS

### BE CONCISE:

- The average piece of business correspondence gets less than thirty seconds of the readers attention.
- Quality is valued above quantity.

### VARY SENTENCE STRUCTURE:

- Make your letter more interesting and engaging by varying your sentence structure. One trap that many job searchers fall into is starting all or most sentences with the pronoun "I."
- Good writers write sentences that are positive and direct containing action verbs that inform the reader about what you did and how you did it.
- Sentences should be no longer than 20 words, fewer is better.

### INCLUDE SALARY REQUIREMENTS WHEN NECESSARY:

- It is not recommended that the job searcher be the first to mention salary.
- There may be some instances where you feel obligated to include salary information in your application. If you chose to include salary information it should be in the cover letter or attached to the cover letter but never on the resume.
- When desired salary is requested do not limit yourself to a specific figure but instead provide a range.

### BE HONEST:

- Be confident and flaunt your qualifications.
- Never falsify or misrepresent your background.

## TOP 10 LETTER WRITING TIPS

Here are 10 tips to guide your creation of an exceptional Cover Letter. Remember CAREER SERVICES CAN HELP! Once you create a draft, you can request assistance from a counselor in the Career Services Office.

1. *Personalize* letters. If necessary, call the organization to learn the name of the appropriate individual, his/her title, and the correct spelling. The company's website may also provide these details.
2. *Individualize* your letter for each employer; never mass-produce job search letters.
3. *Maintain balance* in your letters. Job search letters should maintain a professional appearance and tone while reflecting your natural style and personality.
4. *Be specific and direct*. Avoid clichés and get to the point in an efficient and effective manner. Make every sentence count toward describing your qualifications.
5. *Use positive and active language*, conveying energy, productiveness, and benefit to the employer. Your letter should be work-centered and employer-centered (what you can do for the employer), not self-centered (what the employer can do for you).
6. *Tailor your letter* when responding to an advertisement, thoroughly read and re-read the ad to determine what competencies the potential employer is seeking. Try to speak to the "need" of the organization -- some reading between the lines may be necessary so that your letter will be focused toward a specific position.
7. *Accentuate the strengths* and qualities you can offer the employer. Avoid apologizing for strengths you lack.
8. *Be available*. Make sure you tell the employer how you can be reached during the day. Include your phone number and an email address that you check several times each day.
9. *Use high quality stationery* and envelopes, following standard business letter style.
10. *Proofread thoroughly* to ensure an error-free document. Do not rely on spell check – have a friend or a counselor in Career Services proofread your cover letters to ensure that they are error free. Don't forget to sign your letters! Keep a copy of all letters that you sent out in your job search files.

## RESOURCES ON THE INTERNET

<b>jobweb</b>	<a href="http://www.jobweb.com/students.aspx?folderid=134">http://www.jobweb.com/students.aspx?folderid=134</a>
<b>Quintcareers.com</b>	<a href="http://www.quintcareers.com/covres.html">http://www.quintcareers.com/covres.html</a>
<b>Monster.com</b>	<a href="http://resume.monster.com/coverletter/home.aspx">http://resume.monster.com/coverletter/home.aspx</a>
<b>Career Services</b>	<a href="http://www.ursinus.edu/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=833">http://www.ursinus.edu/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=833</a>