

Effective Cover Letters

Workshop Series
2009

Purpose of a cover letter?

- ▶ To introduce yourself and demonstrate your interest in the position or organization
- ▶ To demonstrate your suitability for the job by showing that you know and understand your qualifications as they relate to the job
- ▶ To show the employer you understand how your qualifications will enable you to make a tangible contribution to the organization

When is the Cover Letter reviewed?

- ▶ Many employers read the cover letter after an initial review of the résumé
- ▶ As a result, the purpose of the cover letter is not to ask the employer to review your résumé

To be Effective You Should:

NOT restate a lot of details from your Résumé

- ▶ Target each employer individually
- ▶ Do your homework on the industry and organization
- ▶ Know your most relevant qualifications
- ▶ Understand the key job qualifications
- ▶ Focus on a few key points, perhaps 5 -6 key themes or qualifications (Do not try to cover everything)

AN EFFECTIVE COVER LETTER

Part I

Aesthetics

Part II

Structure

Part III

Content

Wording:
Does the
information
SOUND relevant
and targeted

Part 1 - Appearance

- ▶ Consistency in appearance with your Resumé
 - Minimal graphics** (lines, watermarks . . .)
- ▶ **The heading style can match your Résumé**
- ▶ **Paper** type/style should match your **Résumé**
Good quality paper (24 lb) Plain, Parchment or Granite in White, Buff, Ivory or Gray (easily read if copied)
- ▶ Consistent **Margins** • 0.5 (min) to 1 inch (1.5-2.5 cm) top and bottom 1 inch (2 - 2.5 cm) on either side
- ▶ Black text with **two fonts** maximum

Part 2 - Structure

- ▶ **Maximum of ONE page** (very few exceptions)
- ▶ Approximately **3 - 5 paragraphs** of content
- ▶ **Opening paragraph** – Introduction and Greeting
- ▶ **Middle Paragraphs** – Content and Connection
- ▶ **Closing Paragraph** – Wrap up and follow-up

What do you include in the Letter?

- Your Contact Information
 - Date of mailing
- Reference #
- Addressee
- Job reference
- Body of letter
- Your name/signature

Name

Address

Date

Name, Title

Company Name

Address

Job Reference #

To The Manager,

Xxxxxxxx

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

xxxxxxxxxx

Xxxxxxxxxxxx
XXXXXXXXXX

xx xxxxxxxx xxxxxx xxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

xxxxxxxxxx

Xxxxxxxxxxxx

xx xxxxxxxx xxxxxx xxxxxxxx

Xxxxxxxx

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

xxxxxxxxxx

Xxxxxxxxxxxx

xx xxxxxxxx xxxxxx xxxxxxxx

Signature

Typed Name

Addressee

► If you know the name of the individual to whom you are sending the cover letter:

- Use a proper title - Mr. or Ms.
- Begin with a personal greeting such as 'Dear' or you may select a more impersonal option such as 'To'
- If you are uncertain of the person's gender, address the person by their first and last name.
For example, To Robin Smith or Dear Robin Smith

► If you do not know the name:

- Address your letter to a specific position or committee. For example: 'To the Director of Human Resources'

Opening Paragraph

‘Your goal in the opening paragraph is to grab the employer’s attention and entice him/her to read further’

▶ Key components of the opening paragraph?

- ❖ The name of the position (and/or department)
- ❖ How you learned of the opportunity
- ❖ One or two key qualifications to grab the employer’s attention
- ❖ Why you are interested in this position or organization (this should be brief). *You may place this information in a later paragraph*

Structure Opening Paragraphs

- ▶ Three different situations
 1. Responding to a specific job posting
 2. Inquiring about potential positions
 3. Referred by another person

Opening - Cover Letters

1. *I am writing in application for a position in the Customer Service department with ABC Inc., as posted on your website.*
2. *I was reading an article in the Globe and Mail and learned of the excellent reputation of motivated me to inquire regarding current openings in this division.*
3. *In a recent conversation with Brian Charters, I was pleased to learn of the possible opportunities at Mr. Charters provided me with your name and suggested I contact you to learn more about your organization.*

Content: Opening Paragraph

- *Set up you next section by creating expectations*

*I am writing in application for a position in the **Customer Service** department with ABC Inc., as posted on your website. With a strong interest in the _____ industry and a solid education in _____ and excellent skills in _____*

- Mention something you know about the company (reputation, values, history, news . . .). If not in the opening paragraph then in the middle or the final is fine.

Part 3 – Structure Main Body

- ▶ This section may contain 2 to 3 paragraphs
- ▶ Do not repeat details and facts from your **Résumé**

Option 1: Organized based on what you offer

- ❖ Discuss the relevance of your educational and/or training
- ❖ Discuss the relevance of your experiences (paid/unpaid)

Option 2: Organized based on the Job

- ❖ Divide paragraphs into different job themes
 - Paragraph 1 - Customer/client management needs of job*
 - Paragraph 2 – Technical/administrative needs of the job*

Content- Main Text (Body)

What are you trying to do in this section?

- ▶ Demonstrate that you know the key components and functions of the job
- ▶ Present your transferable skills and connect them to the job you are applying for
- ▶ Communicate information which demonstrates that you understand the organization/industry

Middle paragraphs

❖ When discussing specific skills/qualifications

- ✓ Do not simply list a number of skills and 'claim' to have them
- ✓ Do provide relevant, specific examples of key skills
- ✓ Do indicate that you understand how the key skills are relevant or how they will be used on the job

For example

My background working with the public has provided me with the skills to effectively manage customer inquiries and relationships. My ability to listen and explain information with clarity and enthusiasm makes the customers feel welcome. This will be a benefit to your organization when you seek to increase repeat customer business

Education and Training Discussion

- ✓ Mention specific, relevant skills you developed or knowledge you acquired during your training (do not list your training courses!)
- ✓ Focus on your applied knowledge and its relevance – do not focus on the fact that you learned something

Do **not** say ‘During my studies I learned’

Instead, say . . . ‘My knowledge of _____ (finance or child development and so on) includes’
or ‘In understand the importance of _____’

Work Experience

❖ When discussing previous work experiences

Mention specific relevant skills you developed do not focus on the exact job where you developed them

For example, if you had previous experience working as an assistant manager at a retail store you do not need to list the job title and name of the store. You could say

‘As a result of my previous experience working in retail managing complaints from the public I have a solid understanding of effective conflict resolution techniques and customer service management’

Part 4 - Closing Paragraph

- ▶ Avoid being too repetitive, bland or generic
- ▶ Show your understanding of yourself and the job by selecting insightful points
- ▶ Summarize 2 or 3 key, unique points

I am very interested in using my skills in co-ordination and planning, **in particular** my ability to identify opportunities and generate public interest in an idea to assist your team as an . . .

CLOSING PARAGRAPH

Express your interest in meeting with the employer

- ❖ If you are responding to an advertised position, invite the employer to contact you
- ❖ If the application was unsolicited - Invite the employer to contact you, indicate that you will contact her/him and within a time frame

I will be in Toronto on Sept 2nd. Would it be possible to arrange an opportunity to meet? I will contact you early next week to arrange a convenient time. If you have any questions, please feel welcome to contact me.

Final Tips

- ▶ Ensure your letter is error free
- ▶ Always target your letter to an organization and a specific job or department
- ▶ Your letter should ‘compliment’ and build from your r sum 
- ▶ Your letter should reflect you (your style, language, personality)
- ▶ Always follow-up on every letter you send

Any Questions?

Thank You For Your Interest