

# Cover Letter Basics

While a resume is a summary of your qualifications, the cover letter gives you the opportunity to draw an employer's attention to the skills and experience outlined in your resume, expand upon information which particularly matches you to the position for which you wish to be considered and highlight special achievements which might otherwise be overlooked. A well-written cover letter can make a significant difference in successfully arranging an interview or meeting with a potential employer. The key is to approach the letter as though you were the employer reading it. Be sure the letter gets right to the point. A strong cover letter is one that can relate your experiences to the skills listed in the job description -- what differentiates you from other candidates? What you decide to include will depend on the position you apply for, your qualifications, and your own preferences. Be yourself and let the employer know why you want the job and why they should want you.

## Cover Letter Types

- The Invited Cover Letter is written in response to a published opening.
- The Inquiry Cover Letter is written to an organization you are interested in working for but have not advertised an open position
- The Referral Cover Letter springs from networking efforts. The referral letter allows you to make a common connect to a mutual acquaintance

## What is a Cover Letter?

The structure of the cover letter consist of an introductory paragraph, a middle paragraph for reflecting your unique strengths matched to the employer's needs, and a concluding paragraph stating your planned course of action. When writing a successful cover letter please keep in kind:

- Letters should be individualized for each employer
- Keep a copy for yourself
- Double check grammar and spelling
- Have other proofread your work
- Cover letters are typically one page

## Sections of a Cover Letter

### Your Contact Info

At the top, list your address, city, state, zip code, email address, and the date. You can also add your phone number or include it in the closing paragraph.

### Addressee's Info & Salutation

Try to address the letter to an individual and include their job title. Check job description, employer's web site, or call the firm for a name. If you absolutely cannot come up with a contact name, it is better to write "Dear Director of College Relations: (or Educational Programs: or Human Resources:, etc.)" in the salutation, rather than "Dear Sir/Madam:"

### First Paragraph

- Explain why you are writing the letter (be clear about the position or type of position you are seeking).
- Attract the employer's interest by briefly touching on your specific knowledge of the organization and/or position.
- Is this an inquiry or are you applying for a job? How did you find out about the position or the organization? If someone referred you, you may mention his/her name here.

### Middle Paragraph(s)

- Your middle paragraph(s) should communicate precisely what you have to offer the employer. Why do you want to work for this organization? How has your background prepared you for this position?
- Select your most relevant details and skills from past experiences that relate to the position/organization at hand. Show the employer how your

background matches the requirements of the job.

- Avoid vague statements; back up claims with specific examples. Refer to your resume. (Your middle paragraph(s) is critical to your success.)

### Closing Paragraph

- Restate your interest and willingness to meet the employer. Elicit a response and/or mention that you will follow up with a phone call if appropriate.
- Thank the employer for his/her time and consideration of your application/inquiry.

### Complementary Closing & Signature

End the letter with "Sincerely," or "Yours Truly, ". Type your name after your closing. Include a signature in black ink if you are mailing or faxing your cover letter.

### **Proofread**

Double check your grammar, spelling and style and have someone proofread your work. When proofreading your own writing it is easy to overlook silly mistakes... the point is to have it read by someone else!!!

### **Other Resources:**

#### Career Spot Videos:

<http://tinyurl.com/mg4mbm>

#### Vault Guide on Résumés, Cover Letters & Interviewing:

<http://tinyurl.com/nsfnqe>

September 14, 2009

Your Current Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Mr./Ms./Dr. Name of Person You are Writing To  
Job Title  
Name of Organization  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Last Name:

I am writing to express my interest in securing a research analyst position at ABC Company. I would like to apply my analytical and organizational skills to the types of projects and clients with which ABC Company works. I believe my education and experiences will enable me to make a positive contribution to your company.

Through my courses in economics and mathematics at Oberlin College, I have gained skills in understanding and interpreting economic trends. I had the opportunity to apply these skills in my summer internship at Merrill Lynch. During my time at Merrill Lynch, I learned a great deal about how the business world works, and came to understand the importance of thinking globally and interdisciplinary in solving business problems. Both my internship and my coursework have made me eager to continue to develop my business skills, and I am confident that ABC Company would be an excellent fit for my background.

In addition to my analytical skills, I have developed strong interpersonal and communication skills. As captain of the basketball team and vice president of Acme organization, I became adept at motivating and encouraging people. I am a dedicated hard worker who enjoys working with a team to accomplish a common goal.

Enclosed is my resume for your review. I am excited about this opportunity and know I can make a positive contribution to ABC Company, if selected for this position. I am available for an interview at your convenience. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to talking with you soon.

Sincerely,  
*(Handwritten signature if mailing or faxing)*  
*(4 spaces if mailed or faxed, 2 spaces if emailed)*

Your Typed Name

Enclosure *(include only if mailing materials)*

OCMR Box 0000  
Oberlin, OH 44074  
(440) 000-0000

Vincent.Ravinia@oberlin.edu

September 14, 2009

Ms. Monica Ringle  
Houghton Mifflin  
College Division  
222 Berkeley Street  
Boston, MA 02116-3764

Dear Ms. Ringle:

I am interested in working with Houghton Mifflin during the upcoming summer as a Foreign Language Intern. I am currently a junior at Oberlin College, where I am majoring in Russian and Psychology. My interests include writing and communications, as well as studying foreign languages. Through my varied experiences attempting to master Spanish, Russian, French, and Hebrew, I have learned which textbook styles are most effective for the foreign language student. I would like to be involved in the production of foreign language textbooks from both cultural and grammatical perspectives.

As an editor of my high school and college newspapers, I gained editing, writing, layout, and design experience. With few exceptions, I find grammatical, punctuation, or spelling errors in all of my textbooks. It would be gratifying for me to be able to use and develop my editing skills while learning about the overall production process. I am especially interested in publishing and am considering the field as a potential career choice. The opportunity to work at Houghton Mifflin would give me insight into the publishing field and help determine my postgraduate plans.

My coursework at Oberlin has provided me with a modest background in economics, as well as substantial experience with conducting research and analyzing data. I would hope that my many years spent studying foreign languages and my passion for them would be valuable to the company.

I am available to work June, July, and August. I have enclosed my resume. Please contact me if you have any questions. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to talking with you soon.

Sincerely,  
*(Handwritten signature if mailing or faxing)*  
*(4 spaces if mailed or faxed, 2 spaces if emailed)*

Your Typed Name

Enclosure *(include only if mailing materials)*