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Writing an Effective Cover Letter

Introduction

An effective cover letter is just as important as an effective resume in your job search. A cover letter provides an opportunity for you to elaborate on your career objective, demonstrate your knowledge of the employer, further emphasize your special qualifications, and describe some of the unique or unusual personal qualities you bring to the position. **Always send a cover letter with your resume, unless specifically told not to within the application instructions.**

Principles

Like the resume, the cover letter should **attract attention, stimulate interest, create desire, and generate action**. Consider the following principles when writing your letters:

Personalize: Each letter needs to be addressed to a specific individual. Write the person's name and title in the address. If the job posting does not specify who it should be directed to, check online for a directory, on alternative social media sites like LinkedIn, or contact the employer and ask them the name of the person who will be doing the interviewing. Confirm you have the correct spelling and check for the proper title to be used in the salutation, e.g., "Vice President Smith" when gender is unknown. If it is not possible to obtain the name of the interviewer(s), use "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Search Committee." Never use "To Whom it May Concern" or "Dear Sir or Madam."

Individualize: Each letter needs to be original; tell the employer the position for which you are applying and how you fit a need within their company. Form or generic letters will not have the impact you need. Tailor each letter to the specific requirements listed in the job announcement, which is helpful if the company uses an Applicant Tracking System. Be relevant and focused for which position you are applying, demonstrating specific examples of how your skills and qualifications meet or exceed their specific needs. You should also demonstrate that you know something about the employer, such as a personal connection or a point of interest in their values or products. In addition, reflect your attitude, personality, motivation, interest, and enthusiasm for the specific position. Close by thanking them for their time and consideration and referring to an opportunity to interview.

Edit: Follow the rules of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Proofread the letter, not just spell check! Use a standard business letter format for more conservative industries. Your cover letter should be a good example of your writing skills.

Format: Keep the cover letter to one page. The content of the letter is generally three short paragraphs. When submitting your application by email, unless specified otherwise, the cover letter will be the body of the email, with the resume included as an attachment. Be sure to read how the employer wants to receive your information: cover letter and resume in one document saved as a PDF, or two separate Word documents, or copied and pasted into separate boxes through an online application.

Types: Several different types of letters exist depending upon the reason you are writing: application, inquiry, or referral. The major difference between them is the information contained in the opening paragraph.

In addition to these principles for writing the letter, remember to keep a copy or computer file of your job search correspondence. This is essential for your follow-up.

Examples of Cover Letter First Paragraph

Are you looking for a child-focused counselor with a proven ability to form relationships and communicate effectively? If so, then look no further! My skills and qualifications make me an excellent match for the [title] position, as described [in/on] [where you found out about the job].

Are you looking for a motivated salesperson [or representative] with a proven ability to exceed sales every quarter to fill your [title of job] position? If so, then I am that person. Relevant to your needs, I offer:

- [match one of their qualification with your skills]
 - [give another match]
 - [give another match or a selling point you know would benefit them, but they do not actually ask for]
 - [Another match or selling point]
-

My skills and abilities match your need for a [title of job], as described [in/on] [where you found out about job]. I consider this an excellent opportunity and am very interested in this position.

Example of Second Paragraph

I am particularly interested in working for XYZ because I know that you have a reputation for being one of the best accounting firms in the region, ranking number 11 out of 75 in the *Industry Weekly*. I expect that XYZ will be moving up in the rankings soon, based on the strategic planning and direction discussed in the company mission. I am very eager to be a part of the team that moves XYZ into the future and become an even bigger influence in the industry. Reading your job description, relevant to your needs, I offer:

- About you
- More about you
- And more

Examples of Closing Paragraph

I welcome the opportunity to meet with you to further discuss my candidacy for the [title of job] position. Please contact me if you have any questions or need additional information. I look forward to hearing from you to schedule an interview. Thank you for your time and consideration.

I consider this an excellent opportunity and look forward to meeting you in an interview to further discuss how I can benefit your department in the [title of job] position. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

OUTLINE OF A STANDARD COVER LETTER

Your street address
City, State Zip Code

Date

Name of Interviewer
Title
Name of Company
Company Address
(Additional Company Address)
City, State Zip Code

Dear _____:

Start with something that will catch their eye and establish a connection with the employer. A few options are that you can start with a compelling question or use a quote (maybe from the website or something an employee said in a recent publication) or something about the company that you can tie in with the position and the employer's current needs. Mention the specific job you are applying and convey your interest and enthusiasm. This paragraph only needs to be 2-3 sentences, and should show your personality.

The mid-section of your cover letter should be one 5-7 sentence paragraph that tells the employer exactly how you match or exceed their needs. You do this by talking about your **top three or four skills** as they relate to the job description. Emphasize your relevant work experience and/or educational background, but do more than reiterate information on your resume. Explain your qualifications, how you are a solution to their problem, and will be an asset to their company. You may also want to talk about why you want to work for the company (but not stating things about their benefits, location, and other external factors). To really stand out, consider using a bulleted list of accomplishments, summaries, or qualifications that directly match the employer's needs. Or, you may want to use the justified alignment setting to make the sides of the paragraphs even (like here).

In the closing paragraph, use 2-3 sentences to state again that you are an excellent match for their needs and say you look forward to meeting them in an interview to further discuss your qualifications and the position. Provide them with contact information so they can reach out to you. Thank the employer for their time and consideration.

Sincerely (or other complimentary closing),

Full Name

LETTER OF APPLICATION, HARD COPY

789 Main Street
Reading, Pennsylvania 19604

March 1, 2020

Mr. Robert M. Jones
Manager
XYZ Company
123 South Street
Reading, Pennsylvania 19604

Dear Mr. Jones:

My experience in marketing has prompted me to respond to your vacancy for a marketing representative as listed with the Experiential Learning and Career Development Center at Albright College. The XYZ Company has an excellent reputation for product quality as noted in the recent issue of The Journal of Marketing and I wish to be affiliated with a company with such high standards.

To be successful in marketing one must first understand a potential customer's needs. To accomplish this one must have excellent interpersonal and active communication skills. My experiences as a volunteer promoting our student radio station to local advertisers can help attest to my capabilities to successfully market XYZ's products. As a member of the Albright College Activities Council, I successfully promoted a number of events, which resulted in a 30% increase in overall attendance at the end of the year. A recent graduate, my degree in marketing has given me a solid foundation of the industry fundamentals, including market research, strategies, and principles of sales. I am excited for the opportunity to utilize my knowledge and experience with XYZ Company to benefit your clients.

Written communication can only tell you so much about my motivation and qualifications. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss my background with you in greater detail. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alan Albright
Alan.albright010@albright.edu
555-610-1234

LETTER OF APPLICATION, E-MAIL VERSION

April 13, 2020

Ms. Samantha Williams
Director of Human Resources

Dear Ms. Williams,

From the ABC Pharmaceuticals website, I learned about your need for a sales representative for the Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New Jersey areas. I am very interested in this position with your company, and I believe that my education and employment background match what you are seeking.

While working toward my bachelor's degree, I was employed as a part-time sales representative for a small kitchen design company in the area. Through my efforts, the company doubled its sales volume in less than six months. I would like to have the opportunity to repeat this success in the pharmaceutical industry. In addition, I had the opportunity to work as a pharmaceutical technician for two summers. My work in the pharmacy taught me a great deal about the variety of drugs that are manufactured and marketed today. This relevant work experience, along with my educational background in chemistry and business administration, will enable me to help you reach your sales goals.

I look forward to talking with you regarding the position with ABC Pharmaceuticals. Please feel free to contact me by phone or email, and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Luis Torres
(610) 555-1212
LT555@albright.edu

LETTER OF APPLICATION TARGETING EXACT REQUIREMENTS IN ADVERTISEMENT

May 10, 2020

Mr. David Darwin
Department of Human Resources
Baltimore YMCA

Dear Mr. Darwin:

When I read your advertisement for an Associate Director on the Marylandworks job site, I could not help but notice how well your requirements align with my experience, education, skills, and background. While my enclosed resume provides a good overview of my strengths and achievements, I have also listed some of your specific requirements for the position and my applicable skills:

You require:	I offer:
Ability to coordinate and oversee the work of subordinates	Experience in supervising 112 students on a residence hall floor and managing the work of 5-7 volunteers in an after-school program.
Ability to strategically plan, develop and implement programs and operations toward achievement of team's mission, goals, and objectives	Experience developing and implementing programs for college students toward achieving residence life's mission, goals, and objectives.
The analytical skills to perform needs assessments, evaluate current programs, and initiate changes or adjustments to current systems and improve operations	Success in performing assessments to current programs and recommending necessary changes to enhance the delivery of services to college students.
Problem-solving and decision-making abilities	Success in solving numerous problems during my internship working with inner-city youth; success in increasing attendance and results for the after-school program through creative marketing and programming.
Financial management expertise	Expertise in management of the budget for a residence hall and for a national service organization, including allocations and fundraising.

Since my experience and expertise fit your requirements so closely, I am looking forward to speaking with you in person about the position. Please feel free to call me at 215-555-5432 for additional information. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Bonnie Clemmons

LETTER OF INQUIRY

March 15, 2020

Dr. Ann Smith
Director of Special Programs
Berks County Family Court Wilderness Challenge

Dear Dr. Smith:

As a junior at Albright College working toward a degree in Child and Family Studies, I have prepared myself well to positively interact with troubled youth. While seeking an internship for this summer and researching opportunities in this field, I learned about your program. I am writing to inquire about possible internship opportunities with the Berks County Family Court Wilderness Challenge.

My work and educational background have provided me with many skills and an understanding of dealing with the adolescent community; for example:

- I worked as a hotline assistant for a local intervention center. I counseled teenagers about personal concerns and referred them, when necessary, to appropriate professional services for additional help.
- As a current Resident Assistant, I establish rapport with over 50 residents and advise them on personal matters, as well as college policies. In addition, I develop social and educational programs and activities each semester for up to 20 participants.
- I have completed research and other assignments in relevant courses such as Human Services, Juvenile Delinquency, Cross-Cultural Psychology, and The Family.

I am excited about the prospect of working with you this summer. I look forward to meeting with you soon to discuss your program further. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Asha Jefferson
123-555-1098
a.jefferson@gmail.com

LETTER OF REFERRAL

123 Main Street
Reading, Pennsylvania 19604

May 22, 2020

Ms. Mary Johnson
Research Coordinator
Pennsylvania Historical Society
1 York Way
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

Dear Ms. Johnson:

Dr. Guillaume de Syon, Professor of History at Albright College, recommended I contact you regarding a research assistant internship position. I will be entering my senior year and have specialized in modern world history.

As a result of collaborating with Dr. de Syon to complete an Albright Creative Research Experience project, I have experience with research techniques, including use of original source documents and transcribing interviews. My project examined the role of propaganda in influencing support for and against the United States and Russian space race. The experience furthered my knowledge of historical research and investigative principles. Also, I have been a volunteer for the past year at the Berks County Historical Society where I assisted the Education Coordinator in developing outreach programs for school district across the county. My assignment was to contact teachers and discuss how the Society could assist them in classroom presentations and field trips, and arrange requested services. This enhanced my understanding of the teaching of history in school systems and the role historical societies can play.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss my qualifications and interests with you. Please feel free to contact me at 555-123-9876 or alice.albright@email.com. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alice Albright