

*
THE ULTIMATE
Cover Letters
WRITING GUIDE



CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

JOHN BROWN UNIVERSITY

www.jbu.edu/career-development/

UNIT #1: What is a cover letter?

Many positions require a letter of application. Such letter introduces you to your potential employer and explains your purpose for applying to a specific job. The letter should include details about your experiences or skills and request an opportunity to have an interview with your potential employer. Since this letter is your introduction to an employer and because first impressions make a difference, you should take great care in composing an impressive and effective cover letter. As we live in a digital world cover letters have evolved from hard copy correspondence to email and digital copies. This unit will walk you through the first steps in writing a powerful cover letter in any format.

All cover letters should:

Explain why you are sending a resume

Do not send a resume without an appropriate cover letter. Do not make the reader guess what you are asking for. Be specific. Tell the employer what you want and how you are a good candidate.

Convince the reader to look at your resume

Your cover letter will be the first material your potential employer will see, therefore, it must be very well written and targeted to that employer.

Call attention to elements of your background

Education, leadership, and experiences that are relevant to the position you are seeking should be listed. Reflect your attitude, personality, motivation, enthusiasm, and communication skills.

Provide all necessary information

Provide or refer to any information specifically requested in a job advertisement that might not be covered in your resume, such as availability date, or reference to an attached writing sample.

To Write or Not To Write?

In order to decide whether it is still necessary to write a cover letter, let's consider the following facts...



UNIT #2: Format

This unit focuses in discussing general aspects of your cover letter like style, fonts and size.

For a hard copy, the left and right page margins should be 1.5 inches. You can adjust your margins to balance how your document looks on the page. Use a font style that is simple, clear and commonplace, such as Times New Roman, Arial or Calibri. Font size should be from 10-12 points. Keep in mind that different font styles in the same point size are not the same size! A 12-point Arial is larger than a 12-point Times New Roman. You should adjust your font size accordingly.

Should your resume and cover letter font style and size match?

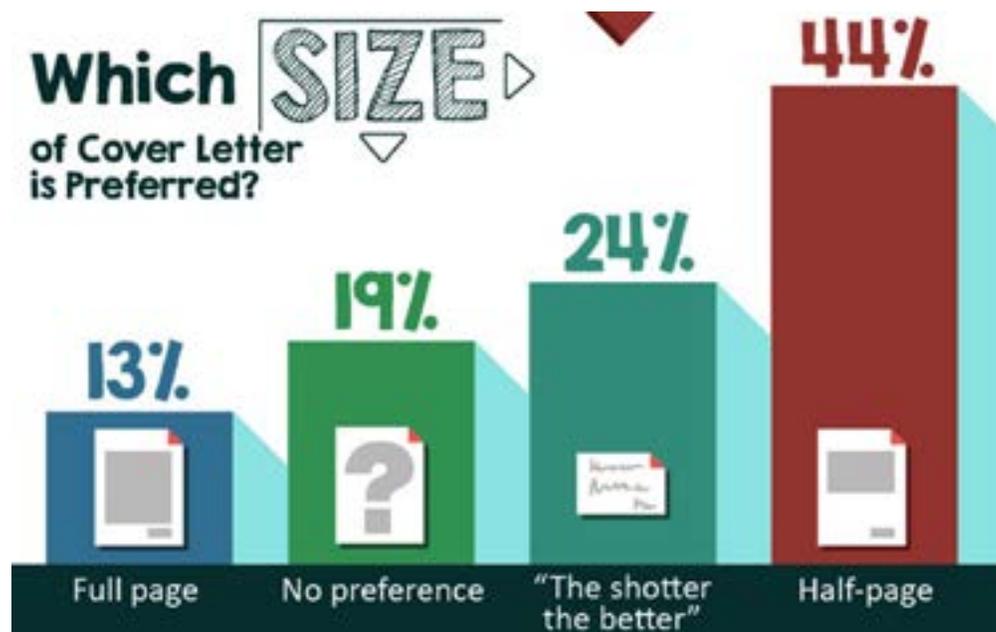
No matter what you decide, your documents need to look polished. However, it is also possible to have polished documents that are not in matching fonts. Make sure you use discretion.

Serif or sans serif?

Sans (without) serif fonts are those like Arial and Calibri that don't have the small finishing strokes on the ends of each letter. There is a great deal of research and debate on the pros and cons of each. Short story: use what you like, within reason; note what employers use; generally sans serif fonts are used for on-monitor reading and serif fonts are used for lengthy print items (like books); serif fonts may be considered more formal. As said before, just be sure your resume looks polished.

How long should your cover letter be?

Many employers prefer to receive a half-page cover letter. In the image below, you can see the results of a survey conducted by Global Essay which shows employers' preference on cover letter length.



UNIT #3: Other important information

This unit includes some other important resources and information that will help you in writing a great cover letters.

What to Write?

In order to create a good cover letter, it is important to consider its purposes:

- ✓ The need to introduce yourself
- ✓ To create a good first impression
- ✓ Explain your motivation
- ✓ To emphasize your strengths and core competencies
- ✓ To demonstrate communication skills

Why to Send a Cover Letter

Cover letters provide a great opportunity to explain to your target employers why you want to work for them and show them why you are a good candidate.

A well-structured and catching cover letter can provide an opportunity for a personal meeting, and can boost the employer's interest in you as a potential employee.



1 Introduce yourself and put the name of position you are interested in. Mention where you learned about it and about the company.

2 Specify the most interesting and significant facts from your biography, your skills or work experience which, in your opinion, meet the requirements specified in a job offer and bring value to a potential employer.

3 Suggest some options for further interaction: for example, indicate your willingness to meet and discuss your experience in more detail.

Do's and Don'ts

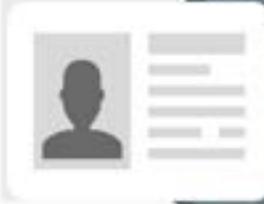


- Do write your cover letter in the body of your application e-mail or insert it into the document of your resume itself
 - Make your CL exclusive and adapt it for each employer you're addressing to
 - Individualize the letter. Put the name of a person you are writing to
- Make it as polite and positive as you can
- Use the same font and format as in your CV
 - Be creative in your CL when applying for positions requiring creativity and be more formal for the positions such as accountant or air traffic controller.
 - Proofread it. Check your letter for grammar and spelling mistakes or ask somebody to do it instead of you.



- Don't submit it as a separate doc, the recruiters are not likely to open them
- Don't repeat what you already wrote in your CV
- Don't put multiple employers in the copy of your mail. Send one letter to one company.
- Don't try to guess which words you are expected to say. Try to express your own vision, which may turn to be much more interesting
- Don't be too wordy. The length of your letter shouldn't exceed a half of A4 page
- Don't be a supplicant. Instead, underline your qualities which are valuable for a company.
- Don't be shy when listing your achievements and qualifications, competencies and accomplishments. Use figures and numbers as much as possible.
- Avoid phrases with «I». Use another word to start the sentence or change a structure of the sentence so that it wouldn't contain «I».

Some more do's and dont's

DO Send an Original Letter	DONT Use Wordy Phrases
 	 
<p>Do send an original & unique letter to each employer without duplication.</p>	<p>Don't use pleonasm that tough to understand, which also waste space.</p>
	
<p>Use some power words, it will let employer's mind focus on your letter.</p>	<p>You can use your cover letter to highlight the aspects of your resume.</p>
	
<p>Do create a personalized cover letter for every company and position.</p>	<p>Don't use a sexist salutation, such as "Gentlemen" when answering a blind ad.</p>

General Cover Letter

Your Street Address

City, State Zip Code

Telephone Number

Email Address

Month, Day, Year

Mr./Ms./Dr. FirstName LastName

Title

Name of Organization

Street or P. O. Box Address

City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. LastName:

Opening paragraph: State why you are writing; how you learned of the organization or position, and basic information about yourself.

2nd paragraph: Tell why you are interested in the employer or type of work the employer does (Simply stating that you are interested does not tell why, and can sound like a form letter). Demonstrate that you know enough about the employer or position to relate your background to the employer or position. Mention specific qualifications which make you a good fit for the employer's needs. (Focus on what you can do for the employer, not what the employer can do for you.) This is an opportunity to explain in more detail relevant items in your resume. Refer to the fact that your resume is enclosed. Mention other enclosures if such are required to apply for a position.

3rd paragraph: Indicate that you would like the opportunity to interview for a position or to talk with the employer to learn more about their opportunities or hiring plans. State what you will do to follow up, such as telephone the employer within two weeks. If you will be in the employer's location and could offer to schedule a visit, indicate when. State that you would be glad to provide the employer with any additional information needed. Thank the employer for her/his consideration.

Sincerely,

(Your handwritten signature)

Your name typed

(You should scan the document with your signature and email it. You should still have a signature on an electronic copy.)

Enclosure(s) (refers to resume, etc.)

Letter of application, email version

Subject line: (logical to recipient!) Application for Sales Representative for Mid-Atlantic area

April 14, 20XY

Mr. William Jackson
Employment Manager
Acme Pharmaceutical Corporation
13764 Jefferson Parkway
Roanoke, VA 24019
jackson@acmepharmaceutical.com

Dear Mr. Jackson:

From the Acme web site I learned about your need for a sales representative for the Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina areas. I am very interested in this position with Acme Pharmaceuticals, and believe that my education and employment background are appropriate for the position.

You indicate that a requirement for the position is a track record of success in meeting sales goals. I have done this. After completion of my B.S. in biology, and prior to beginning my master's degree in marketing, I worked for two years as a sales representative with a regional whole foods company. My efforts yielded success in new business development, and my sales volume consistently met or exceeded company goals. I would like to repeat that success in the pharmaceutical industry, using my academic background in science and business. I will complete my M.S. in marketing in mid-May and will be available to begin employment in early June.

Attached is a copy of my resume, which more fully details my qualifications for the position.

I look forward to talking with you regarding sales opportunities with Acme Pharmaceuticals. Within the next week I will contact you to confirm that you received my email and resume and to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you very kindly for your consideration.

Sincerely,

(Handwritten signature)

Layne A. Johnson

5542 Hunt Club Lane, #1

Blacksburg, VA 24060

(540) 555-8082

lajohnson@vt.edu

Resume attached as PDF (assuming company web site instructed applicants to do this)

Letter of application, (hard copy version)

1000 Terrace View Apts.
Blacksburg, VA 24060
(540) 555-4523
stevemason@vt.edu

March 25, 20XY

Ms. Janice Wilson
Personnel Director
Anderson Construction Company
3507 Rockville Pike
Rockville, MD 20895

Dear Ms. Wilson:

I read in the March 24th Washington Post classified section of your need for a Civil Engineer or Building Construction graduate for one of your Washington, DC area sites. I will be returning to the Washington area after graduation in May and believe that I have the necessary credentials for the project.

Every summer for the last five years I have worked at various levels in the construction industry. As indicated on my enclosed resume, I have worked as a general laborer, and moved up to skilled carpentry work, and last summer served as assistant construction manager on a two million dollar residential construction project.

In addition to this practical experience, I will complete requirements for my B.S. in Building Construction in May. As you may know, Virginia Tech is one of the few universities in the country that offers such a specialized degree for the construction industry. I am confident that my degree, along with my years of construction industry experience, makes me an excellent candidate for your job.

The Anderson Construction Company projects are familiar to me, and my aspiration is to work for a company that has your excellent reputation. I would welcome the opportunity to interview with you. I will be in the Washington area during the week of April 12th and would be available to speak with you at that time. In the next week to ten days I will contact you to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
(handwritten signature)
Jesse Mason

Enclosure

Letter of inquiry about employment possibilities, (Email)

Subject: (logical to recipient!) Inquiry about software engineering position after completion of M.S. in computer engineering

December 12, 20XY

Mr. Robert Burns
President, Template Division
MEGATEK Corporation
9845 Technical Way
Arlington, VA 22207
burns@megatek.com

Dear Mr. Burns:

Via online research in Hokies4Hire through Career Services at Virginia Tech, I learned of MEGATEK. Next May I will complete my master of science in computer engineering. From my research on your web site, I am a good fit based on the skills I have and the interests and needs of your company. I am interested in a software engineering position upon completion of my degree.

As a graduate student, I am one of six members on a software development team in which we are writing a computer-aided aircraft design program for NASA. My responsibilities include designing, coding, and testing of a graphical portion of the program which requires the use of ZX-WWG for graphics input and output. I have a strong background in CAD, software development, and engineering, and believe that these skills would benefit the designing and manufacturing aspects of template software. Enclosed is my resume with further background information.

My qualifications equip me to make a contribution to the project areas in which your division of MEGATEK is expanding efforts. I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss a position with you, and will contact you in a week or ten days to answer any questions you may have and to see if you need any other information from me. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

(Handwritten signature)

Morgan Stevens
123 Ascot Lane
Blacksburg, VA 24060
(540) 555-2556
mstevens@vt.edu

Resume attached as PDF

Letter of inquiry about internship opportunities (Hard Copy)

2343 Blankinship Road
Blacksburg, VA 24060
(540) 555-2233
StacyLeeGimble@vt.edu

January 12, 20XY

Ms. Sylvia Range
Special Programs Assistant
Marion County Family Court Wilderness Challenge
303 Center Street
Marion, VA 24560

Subj: Wilderness Challenge internship position

Dear Ms. Range:

This semester I am a junior at Virginia Tech, working toward my bachelor's degree in family and child development. I am seeking an internship for this summer 20XY, and while researching opportunities in the field of criminal justice and law, I found that your program works with juvenile delinquents. I am writing to inquire about possible internship opportunities with the Marion County Family Court Wilderness Challenge.

My work background and coursework have supplied me with many skills and an understanding of working with the adolescent community; for example:

I have worked ten hours per week as a volunteer hotline assistant for a local intervention center. After a 50-hour training program, I counseled teenagers about personal concerns and referred them, when necessary, to appropriate professional services for additional help.

I was residence hall assistant in my residence hall, which requires me to establish rapport with fifty residents and advise them on personal matters, as well as university policies. In addition, I develop social and educational programs and activities each semester for up to 200 participants.

My enclosed resume provides additional details about my background.

I will be in the Marion area during my spring break, March 6-10, 20XY. I will call you next week to see if it would be possible to meet with you in early March to discuss your program.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

(handwritten signature)

Stacy Lee Gimble

Encl.

Information seeking letter

23 Roanoke Street
Blacksburg, VA 24060
(540) 555-1123
K.Walker@vt.edu

October 23, 20XY

Mr. James G. Webb
Delon Hampton & Associates
800 K Street, N.W., Suite 720
Washington, DC 20001-8000

Dear Mr. Webb:

Next May I will complete my bachelor's degree in Architecture at Virginia Tech, and am researching employment opportunities in the Washington area. I obtained your name from Professor (lastname) who teaches my professional seminar class this semester. S/he indicated that you had volunteered to provide highly motivated graduating students with career advice, and I hope that your schedule will permit you to allow me to ask for some of your time and advice. I am particularly interested in historic preservation and have done research on the DHA website to learn that your firm does work in this area. I am also interested in learning how the architects in your firm began their careers. My resume is enclosed simply to give you some information about my background and project work.

Within two weeks I will call you to arrange a time to speak to you by telephone or perhaps visit your office if that would be convenient. I will be in the Washington area during the week of November 22. I very much appreciate your time and consideration of my request, and I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

(handwritten signature)

Kristen Walker

Encl.