

BROOKHAVEN COLLEGE
CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

COVER LETTER WRITING

Your cover letter, along with your resume, is an introduction of yourself to potential employers. Your cover letter conveys who you are, what skills you possess and is valuable to the employer's decision to set up an interview to get to know you better. When sending out your resume to a potential employer **always** send a cover letter, even if you are sending your resume via e-mail. See the handout about resumes for assistance in creating a resume.

Cover Letter Functions:

"A cover letter should complement, not duplicate, your resume. Its purpose is to interpret the data-oriented, factual resume and add a personal touch. A cover letter is often your earliest written contact with a potential employer, creating a critical first impression." ¹

Structure:

Your cover letter should be in a business letter format. A business letter has the following items: your address, the date, the company's address, a greeting, the body of the letter, a salutation and your name. Remember that your signature is part of the business letter etiquette. Use the company's complete name and the addressee's complete title, **do not** use abbreviations.

Introduction (first paragraph):

Tell the employer why you are writing, what position you are applying for, how you heard about the job and describe your interest in the particular position. You want to grab the employer's attention in a way that will arouse their interest in you.

Specifics (middle paragraphs):

Inform the employers how you are qualified for the particular position. Briefly describe your academic and professional qualifications. ² Tell the employers why you are the perfect fit for the job, how you will meet their needs. Relate yourself to the company; give details about why you are the desired person for the position and how you will help benefit the company.

Closing (last paragraph):

Thank the reviewer for reading your letter. Inform them about what further action you want to occur, specifically if you want to set up a meeting to discuss in more detail your qualifications and how you will benefit the company. Tell them that you will contact them and when; you don't have to give a particular day, but a vague time frame. Be sure to repeat your daytime contact information. ²

Salary Requirements and Salary History:

Some advertisements will ask for your salary history. It is best not to give a job-by-job history; instead give them an average salary from your most recent jobs. Be truthful, because recruiters do use this information as a tool to narrow the list of applicants. Placing the information into your cover letter is appropriate. One or two sentences should suffice. If you want to avoid giving out your information, but still wish to comply with the request, you might want to do some research by going to www.salary.com. The site gives a typical salary range for most jobs, based on experience, location and the job duties. You can comment in your cover letter that you have done some research and have found that ____ is the average salary of individuals in the position for this area and that you know that XYZ Company will offer a competitive salary.

Helpful Hints for Writing a Cover Letter:

- **Keep the cover letter to one page.**
- **Do not over use the words ‘I’ or ‘my’.**
- **Tell them who you are.** Give them a little information about yourself so that the company wants to get to know you better, but do not give out information that does not relate to the job that you are applying for. Your personal life/problems should not be mentioned.
- **Be creative.** Employers read several letters a day; you want to make sure yours stands out from the rest. Boring cover letters will lose the employer’s interest before they are able to see your skills. Your creativity should not over flow so much that you lose the professional image that you want them to see.
- **Use their language.** Knowing the language used by the company or industry can be helpful, but be sure that you do not use jargon. Jargon is not usually understood by the human resource individuals who review the resumes.
- **Emphasize your experience.** Let them know how you will benefit the company. Tell them about your transferable and marketable skills. ² The company/organization does not want to know that they need to train you. They want to know how you are going to help them meet their company goals. When you have had a few jobs, or all of your jobs are in a different field, think about the tasks that you did at work and how that could be related to your new job. If you are starting out in the work field and have limited experience, think about projects that were done in class or volunteer work.
- **Avoid negative information.** Do not convey to the employers that you are not capable of doing the job because of past issues, personal problems or skills that you lack. You do not want to leave the reader with the impression that you are not suitable for the job.
- **Use strong language.** Convey your confidence in your abilities and skills. Avoid passive and weak verbs, do not use grandiose language, and keep away from phrases such as “I feel ‘, ‘I believe’ and ‘I think’”. ²
- **Set your limits.** Your letter is an introduction of yourself, not a plea for a job. Do not ask for an entry-level job; inform them about the job that you are interested in and are qualified to do. You don’t want them to think that you are hanging all your hopes on them.
- **Keep your paragraphs short.** The employers do not want to wade through details. Keep the sentences concise and to the point. Do not write to fill up the page; a short letter can have the same effect as a longer letter.
- **Make sure you ask for an interview or a meeting.** You want the reader to think that you want the job and that you will do the extra work to get the job.
- **Follow up with the employer.** Make sure you contact the employer when you say you are going to follow up. Give the employer about 10 days to two weeks to read and consider your letter and resume, then contact them.
- **Print your letter on quality bond paper.** Make sure your resume and references are on the same type of paper.
- **Check spelling and grammar.** Nothing says “I do not want a job,” like a cover letter with typing errors, grammatical errors or misspelled words.
- **Have someone else check your letter.** An extra pair of eyes is helpful; they have a fresh look at what you typed and they might spot potential problems. It is not a bad idea to have two or three people read through your letter; different people will notice different things.
- **Make sure that you keep a copy of your cover letter.** It is best to keep a record of any and all contact with any company. Any time you receive a phone call, leave a message or receive information, place it with your cover letter.
- **Create a new cover letter for each job.** Each cover letter should be personalized toward the job that you are applying for. Skills you would utilize for one job may be different from the next job that you are applying for.

1. Doyle, Alison. Resume and Cover Letter Guide; June 22, 2004, <http://jobsearch.about.com/library/resume/blindex.htm>
2. Tokay, D. ‘Effective Interviewing Strategies’; Spring 2003

Sample Cover Letter

206 Lancart Street
Farmers Branch, TX 75244

October 25, 2002

Ms. Carolyn A. Beatty
President of Corporate Accounting
Central Company
555 Corporate Way
Dallas, TX 75255

Dear Ms. Beatty:

Review of your company's college recruiting literature has piqued my interest in your Accounting Trainee Program. The idea of having rotational assignments in accounts receivable and accounts payable sounds like a perfect fit for my experience and career goals. Thus, I am interested in scheduling an interview with your firm.

I will obtain an Associate in Applied Sciences degree in Accounting in December of this year. As an outstanding student, I have been recognized for my academic achievement through the receipt of various awards and scholarships, which are detailed on my enclosed resume. In addition, I have always been industrious and hard working. This is evidenced by the fact that I have been continuously employed, either full or part-time, since the age of sixteen. In addition, I have managed to participate in several extracurricular activities that demonstrate my ability to effectively organize and plan my time to maximum advantage. With my solid academic performance, work ethic, drive, organization skills and strong interest in the accounting field, I am confident I have the elements necessary to be a valuable contribution to Central's Accounting function.

I would be pleased to have the opportunity to interview with you and hope you will give the enclosed resume favorable consideration. I will contact you the first week in November to discuss setting up an interview time. Thank you and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Margaret Temple

4538 E. 29th St. Apt 135
Bryan, TX 77802

February 10, 2004

John Cha
VCA La Mirada Animal Hospital
13914 East Rosecrans Ave.
Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670

Dear Mr. Cha:

I am replying to the job advertisement posted on careerbuilder.com on January 27, 2004 for the position of veterinary technician. I have several years of experience in the field and am looking for a new opportunity to increase my knowledge of animal care and medicine.

I am currently studying at Texas A&M University for a Bachelor of Science degree in Animal Science. I hope to one day continue my education and get my certification as a Veterinary Assistant or even continue and become a Registered Veterinary Technician. I am always looking for opportunities to expand my knowledge of animal care as I find the field fascinating and I love working with animals.

My experience over the past several years has helped me to learn much in the field of veterinary medicine. I started out working in a kennel and have advanced to veterinary technician and receptionist at various animal hospitals. My experience at many different hospitals has helped me to adapt quickly to individual doctor preference and has added to the learning experience of those I have worked with. I have picked up new duties quickly and am always looking to learn more.

I have enclosed a copy of my résumé where you will find more detail on the individual tasks for which I was responsible at my various jobs. I welcome the opportunity to speak with you in more detail about my qualifications. I can be reached at the above address, by phone at (979) 268-1643, or via e-mail at BAFrazier@hotmail.com. Thank you for your time and I look forward to talking with you. I will contact you the first week of August to discuss setting up a time to meet.

Sincerely,

Bethany Frazier

IT ALL BEGINS HERE.



Brookhaven College

DALLAS COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

Career Development Center

3939 Valley View Lane, Farmers Branch, Dallas, TX 75244-4997

Student Services Center, Building S, Room S065

bhcJobs@dccc.edu | 972-860-4894 | Fax: 972-860-4193

www.BrookhavenCollege.edu, click on "C" and select "Career Development Center"

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