

Cover Letters and Letters to Employers:

Making a Lasting Impression

WHAT IS A COVER LETTER?

A cover letter is a standard business letter that accompanies your resume when applying for a job or an internship. It is used to introduce yourself and demonstrate your interest in the company or a specific vacancy. By expanding on your experiences, skills, and abilities, the cover letter draws attention to your resume, and motivates the reader to interview you.

WHO? WHAT? WHERE?

Your cover letter should address the following:

- ◆ Why are you interested in the position?
- ◆ What can you contribute to the organization?
- ◆ How do your abilities and skills fit with the advertised position?
- ◆ Why do you want to work for the organization?



IN A NUTSHELL

The cover letter is an integral part of the job/internship application process. It is typically the first contact you have with a prospective employer. A well-written cover letter presents you as a qualified candidate for the position, improving your chances of getting an interview.

HOW TO WRITE A COVER LETTER

Keep in mind the following steps as you begin to write your cover letter:

- 1. Look at the position description.**
 - ◆ Read the position description carefully to understand the organization's expectations and requirements.
 - ◆ You might want to consider printing out the job description to review while writing your letter so you do not miss a detail.
- 2. Highlight the skills you feel are important to the position.**
 - ◆ Focus on the qualities that the employer is looking for and listed within the job description.
- 3. Think about your prior experiences as examples of what you can do for the organization.**
 - ◆ You can draw from experiences at previous jobs/internships, volunteer work, participation in group or class projects, or involvement in sports or campus activities.
 - ◆ When describing your prior experience, focus on answering: "How does this experience show an employer what you can contribute to the company and/or the position?"
- 4. Research the company.**
 - ◆ Take some time to investigate the company and its mission to make sure that your background and interests fits with the company culture.
 - ◆ Tailor your cover letter to the company and the available position by including details from your past experiences that match the qualifications the company listed in the job posting.

COVER LETTER FORMAT

Your Return address (without your name)

City, ST, Zip

Today's Date

Mr./Ms./Dr. Name

Job Title

Name of Organization

Address

City, ST, Zip

Use a specific contact whenever possible. Check the job description. If you do not have a name, call the company's Human Resources to find out to whom you should address in the letter. If all else fails, use "Dear Hiring Manager:" or "Dear Search Committee:"

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

Opening Paragraph

- ◆ Why you are writing and how you became aware of the position
- ◆ Demonstrate enthusiasm: why this position and organization are of strong interest – use your research about mission statements to help you
- ◆ Mention point of contact if there is a connection to the organization

(approximately 3-5 sentences)

Qualifications and Interest in Organization (2nd paragraph)

- ◆ Evidence of your qualifications, i.e., specific examples of how your experience, skills, and knowledge relate to the position and its requirements
- ◆ Why the organization's activities and mission are a great fit for your interests and job/career goals
- ◆ Focus on how you can help the organization meet its needs, not what the organization can do for you

(approximately 5-8 sentences)

(Optional) Elaborating on Prior Work Experience (3rd paragraph)

- ◆ Elaborate on skills learned from a past internship, part-time job, or campus activity that can be relevant to the posted position. Answer the following question: How would these skills translate to the position you are applying for?

(approximately 3-5 sentences)

Your Desire for an Interview (Closing Paragraph)

- ◆ Reiterate your interest in the position and desire for an interview
- ◆ Willingness to provide additional information/materials (e.g., references, writing sample, portfolio, etc.)
- ◆ Include a **closing statement**:
 - ◆ Thanking the employer for his/her time and consideration of your qualifications
 - ◆ Expressing anticipation of upcoming contact

(approximately 4-5 sentences)

Sincerely,

Signature

Your Full Name

Enclosure(s): (List documents you intend to include with your cover letter)

Consult with a CUA career counselor for advice on how to target your cover letter or request a critique of your current letter.

Helpful Wording Examples

Opening Paragraph

- ◆ At the Catholic University Career Fair, I spoke with a representative from [Company Name] and learned about an opportunity with [enter name of position or program].
- ◆ With the enclosed resume, I am applying for the [position name] position in the [Company Name].
- ◆ With my educational background in [Area of Study] I have a strong understanding of [enter industry]. In addition, my on-the-job training has given me hands-on knowledge of [enter job areas] and further developed my [enter relevant personal skills]. I look forward to applying my skills and experiences at [Company Name].

Qualifications and Interest in Organization (2nd paragraph)

- ◆ My educational qualifications include my [Degree Title] in [Major] and my most current work experience with [Company Name].
- ◆ In my most recent position as [Job Title] at [Company Name], I had the opportunity to develop the skills and experience necessary to succeed in your [Job Title] role. Examples of my relevant experience include [enter two or three responsibilities similar to job posting information]. I facilitated the accomplishment of [enter result] by supporting the [enter project similar to job posting information].
- ◆ In my previous role as [Job Title] at [Company Name], I was responsible for [areas of job responsibility]. Furthermore, my track record of [major accomplishment] resulted in [type improvement]. I am certain that my qualifications and history of success make me a great fit for your new [Job Title] at [Company Name].

(Optional) Elaborating on Prior Work Experience (3rd paragraph)

- ◆ As a successful [Job Title], I [include daily job actions]. In this role, I further developed my [enter skill] and [enter skill] abilities. ... [Further explain the learned skills, and tie them to the job posting]... I believe that my core skills and unique qualifications would make me a valuable addition to your team.
- ◆ As an active member of [campus organization], I was able to incorporate my interest in [why did you get involved]
- ◆ During my study-abroad experience at [Location], I was exposed to a vibrant culture where I was able to improve my language skills by interacting with the local population.

Your Desire for an Interview (Closing Paragraph/Statement)

- ◆ I have enclosed my resume for additional details regarding my experience and accomplishments.
- ◆ I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the position and how my credentials and experience can add substantial value your company.
- ◆ I look forward to meeting with you soon to discuss my potential contributions at the [Company Name].

We are here to help!

Contact Career Services for assistance on your cover letter. We provide two ways to assist you:

Schedule a **1-on-1 appointment** to meet with a professional career counselor. Call (202-319-5623) or drop by the Office (Pryzbyla 127) to schedule an appointment. **No email requests, please.**

Stop by for **Walk-In Hours**. Check the Career Services website (<http://careers.cua.edu/AboutUs/CareerServicesStaff.cfm>) for the time and days.

SAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION—FULL TIME POSITION

Research Associate—Washington, DC

The Z-Agency Consulting Firm is a non-profit, bipartisan public policy organization that has a long tradition of contributing to the national discourse about issues in education, welfare, and social justice.

Through research, advocacy, and publication, we study trends to find solutions to the most pressing challenges that face our society today.

Our firm is seeking a research associate to work in collaboration with a team on research studies focusing on the use of media outreach including social media management. The candidate must be self-motivated, detail-orientated individual with excellent communication and organizational skills. He/she must also have an ability to work independently with minimal supervision.

Use the company's mission statement as a tie-in to why you are interested in applying for the position. If the mission statement is not included with the job description, make sure to research the company's mission statement.

Companies tend to indicate the characteristics of the "ideal" candidate. When reading a job description, highlight what the company is looking for. As you write your cover letter, focus on showing that you have those sought-after qualities using examples from your prior work (paid or unpaid), leadership, or school experiences.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- Engage in professional research, analysis, and writing for publication
- Monitor, analyze, and report on the performance of social media engagement efforts; make recommendations for ongoing refinement based on results
- Track media hits, while developing and maintaining a comprehensive media list
- Draft and edit reports about latest social trends and research findings
- Maintain all project records and documents
- Prepare and assemble briefing materials as directed
- Other duties as assigned

Review this list closely. You will need to show in your cover letter that you would be able to carry out these required responsibilities and tasks. Highlight prior experiences to show that you completed similar tasks in the past, and will be able to perform them competently in the new job as well.

Qualified candidates should apply on our website, and submit a resume and cover letter with their online application.

Read the job description to the end! This is where employers typically list what they want you to submit and how to submit the material in order to review your candidacy. Even if you are the "perfect" candidate for the posted job, the employer will not likely consider you for the position if you do not submit all of the requested material or if you did not submit them in the manner that was directed.



After carefully reviewing the job description, consider the following:

- ◆ How many of the listed requirements/qualifications do you meet? Will you be able to show how your educational background and prior experiences prepared you to perform the job duties?
- ◆ Beyond the job title, does this look like a job that you would be happy doing? Employers often list the duties/responsibilities in a descending order of relevance and importance.
- ◆ Consider the skillsets you developed through academics (group projects or research), part-time jobs and internships. Through these skillsets, decide if you are interested in applying for this position.

SAMPLE COVER LETTER—FULL TIME POSITION

ROBIN MAHONEY

Local Address:
620 Michigan Avenue
Washington, DC 20064

Permanent Address:
1234 McCormick Ave
Philadelphia, PA 19118

mahoney22@cardinalmail.cua.edu ♦ www.linkedin.com/robinmahoney

If space permits, consider using the same letterhead you used in your resume. It could be part of your “professional brand”.

May 12, 2015

Ms. Annabeth Grayson
Sample Company
1000 Nineteenth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20064

ALWAYS try to address the letter to a specific individual.

Dear Ms. Grayson:

It is with great enthusiasm that I submit my resume in consideration for the Government Relations Officer position available at [Company Name]. With my educational background in politics, I am developing a strong understanding of how our government operates. Furthermore, my on-the-job training has given me hands-on knowledge of political awareness and further developed my communication skills. I look forward to applying my skills and experiences at [Company Name].

Summarize your interest in the position, and your current qualifications within the first paragraph.

While I was a student at Catholic University, I had the opportunity to develop my writing and organizational skills, which are needed for the position. As the project lead for a senior seminar in American Politics, I set deadlines for the completion of each section of the research assignment and followed up with team members. I combined the individual sections into a single paper, editing as needed. The project was completed several days ahead of the deadline, which earned our group special recognition from the professor.

Use specific examples from prior experiences (from CUA or work) to highlight the skills you know and need for the position.

During my internship on Capitol Hill with Representative John Adams, I was responsible for the daily operations of a busy congressional office. In this role, I further developed my communication skills and customer service abilities. Each day, I balanced greeting visitors, handling a large volume of inquiries, and answering three phone lines, all while addressing constituent concerns that were submitted via email, phone, and in person. I believe that my core skills and unique qualifications would make me a valuable addition to your team.

Highlight ONE specific example that could be relevant to the position, and make the connection between what you did and what you are expected to do at the new position.

I have attached my resume for your consideration. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss how I can make a positive contribution to your organization. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Robin Mahoney

Robin Mahoney

Enclosure: Resume

Remain professional as you end the letter, without becoming “pushy”.

SAMPLE COVER LETTER—INTERNSHIP

WILLIAM MICHAELS

202-319-5000

56michaels@cardinalmail.cua.edu ♦ www.linkedin.com/WilliamMichaels

Local Address:
620 Michigan Avenue
Washington, DC 20064

Permanent Address:
1234 Fairfax Blvd
Arlington, VA 22201

If space permits, consider using the same letterhead you used in your resume. It could be part of your “professional brand”.

May 12, 2015

Ms. Stephanie Jackson
Administrative Director
Sample Company
1000 Nineteenth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20064

ALWAYS try to address the letter to a specific individual.

Dear Ms. Jackson:

I am writing in response to your recent internship posting on the Catholic University’s job posting system for a Program Assistant. As a third year media studies major with a dedication to environmental causes, I was particularly intrigued by your organization’s focus on solving environmental problems using a multi-disciplinary approach. With my strong commitment to protecting our environment, I am eager to make a daily impact on the critical work that the Sample Company oversees.

Indicate why you are applying for the internship. Try to highlight your interest in the organization and its mission.

Two years ago, as vice president of Catholic University’s Green Club, I managed a committee that conceptualized, organized and held our campus’s inaugural “Environment First” day. The following year, we increased participation in that event by 200 percent through a focused publicity campaign and enhanced student outreach. As the author of 12 essays and articles on the environment that were published in the undergraduate newspaper, I have developed a clear, insightful writing style. I also chose to volunteer for the successful re-election campaign of U.S. Representative John Hill, in large part because of the 100% grade he received for his voting record on the environment.

Use specific examples from prior experiences (including from paid or unpaid jobs, community service, or class projects) to highlight your skills. Showcase your passion for the organization’s mission and cause.

I believe that my determination, strong work ethic, and deep commitment to your mission make me a strong candidate for your internship. I look forward to meeting with you to discuss this opportunity and what I can contribute to your organization. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Summarize your qualifications and skills as the final “sales pitch” to why you are the best candidate for the position.

Sincerely,

William Michaels

William Michaels

Enclosure: Resume

THANK-YOU LETTERS

Post-Interview & Networking Contact



Sending a Thank-You letter (or email) is proper business etiquette. This simple matter of courtesy can make you stand out from other candidates competing for the same position, AND the employer is likely to retain a more favorable image of you if you take the time to send a letter of thanks.

A Thank-You letter after an interview should do three things:

- ◆ Thank the employer for taking time to meet with you.
- ◆ Reiterate your interest in the position.
- ◆ Re-state or mention any additional skills you have that are relevant to the position.

It is also helpful to mention facts or information from your interview that will demonstrate your interest in the job to the employer. Commenting on insights you gained during the meeting or pertinent facts that came to your attention during the meeting are also ideas that can be incorporated into a Thank-You letter.

KEEP IN MIND!

- ⇒ **Send a Thank-You letter within 24 hours of your interview.**
- ⇒ **If you met with more than one person at the organization, do NOT send the same message to everyone you have met. Each person should receive a personalized Thank-You letter.**

Thanking a Networking Contact

Besides sending a Thank-You letter to potential employers, you should also send a Thank-You letter to anyone who helps you locate a job or meets with you to discuss a career field that interests you. The contents of this Thank-You will be a bit different from the one to an employer after an interview, but it is important to thank anyone who assists you. This will not only help you build and strengthen your network, but it will also improve your personal brand and public image.

SAMPLE THANK-YOU LETTER—EMPLOYER

890 1st Street
Great Neck, NY 11023

June 12, 2015

Ms. Cassandra Wilson, Case Manager
Altara Cares
4848 East-West Highway, Suite 209
Bethesda, MD 20187

Dear Ms. Wilson:

Thank you for our conversation yesterday to discuss the Outreach Social Worker position. I enjoyed learning more about the work you and your colleagues do at Altara Cares, and I want to reiterate my interest in the position. Altara Cares' commitment to serving the homeless matches my own values, and I am confident that my skills would further the mission of your organization.

If you have any additional questions or require more information, please feel free to call me at 201-555-6666 or send an e-mail to 02pecosta@cardinalmail.cua.edu. Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Patricia Costa

Patricia Costa

SAMPLE THANK-YOU LETTER—NETWORKING CONTACT

620 Michigan Avenue, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20064

April 19, 2015

Mr. Thomas Brown, Associate V.P. of Communications
Bar-None Agency
226 Sunset Dragon Road
Los Angeles, CA 92899

Dear Mr. Brown:

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to talk with me about your position and the field of advertising. Your advice on the importance of completing internships during college was invaluable, and I am currently applying to several summer internships in marketing. Thank you also for allowing me to use your name when I reach out to Ms. Marshall and Mr. Kaplan for further information about opportunities in advertising and what might be happening in that industry in the future. I'll keep you updated as to the outcome.

Again, many thanks for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jane Smith

Jane Smith

Letter Declining Job Offer

You may find that more than one employer offers you a job during your search. Once you have decided which position to accept, you must politely notify the other employer of your decision.

NOTE: Always be polite in these letters. Many employers in a given field know each other, and a mis-step here could get back to your current employer or tarnish your public image and personal brand.

SAMPLE LETTER DECLINING JOB OFFER

289 Main Street
Springfield, CA 22212

May 10, 2015

Mr. John Doe, Senior Manager
Anderson Corporation
1234 John F. Kennedy Rd.
Springfield, CA 22212

Dear Mr. Doe:

Thank you for the opportunity to join the Anderson Corporation as a junior analyst. I enjoyed meeting with you and learning more about your organization. However, I have decided to accept another position that is a better fit with my career pursuits at this time.

Again, I appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Anthony Garcia

Anthony Garcia