

Cover Letter On-line Workshop Series Transcript

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Welcome to the online workshop series on cover letter development. In almost all cases resumes are accompanied by a cover letter. This letter of application and introduction gives you the opportunity to expand the information you are providing to the employer. It gives you a chance to let the employer know why you are applying for a position in their organization and lets you give them examples of how you have used your skills and experience. Lets get started...

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Many times writing a cover letter can be an intimidating task at first. You may ask... "Is a cover letter necessary?" "What do I write?" or "How long does it have to be?" This online workshop will answer all of those questions and give you an example of how to get started. And while we realize that writing a cover letter may never be the way that you want to spend all your free time, hopefully after this online workshop you will be comfortable with the basics of writing a cover letter.

Your cover letter is part of your application package and like your resume, it should market your skills and abilities as they relate to the position for which you are applying. And the goal of the cover letter combined with your resume is to get you an interview. There are a variety of formats for cover letters and you can find many examples online and in the career services library.

Cover letters should not be more than one page and should be printed on the same kind of paper as your resume. On the following slides, we will outline a step-by-step process for cover letter success.

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Step 1 is to find a job opening. This may be a newspaper posting, an online listing or a position that you hear about from someone in your network. Some postings will be clear and very descriptive, some postings will be very brief, and sometimes you may not have access to the posting at all. So if the ad is brief or if you do not have access to a posting, look for similar position descriptions to determine the skills employers may be looking for. If you have trouble finding a position

description, make an educated guess and look online at similar job descriptions. Compile a list of qualities and skills you would be looking for if you were the employer. Pay close attention to the key words in descriptions provided – this will help during step 2.

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Step 2 is to brainstorm the skills and abilities you have that are related to the position. These skills can be technical (like knowledge of accounts payable, or ability to use Microsoft excel) and they can be personal (like your ability to effectively communicate or manage multiple projects). For each skill, think of an example of a time you demonstrated that skill either in work, school, volunteer settings or your internship. Write these examples down in brief paragraph format. Don't explain every detail, just the situation in which you used the skill. Keep in mind that you will use some of these examples later to help you write your cover letter and if you don't use them in the cover letter, you may have an opportunity to use the examples in an interview.

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Step 3 is to research the company. With the internet, this is usually very simple to do. Go to Google.com or any other search engine and do a search on the company name. Surf their website paying special attention to what they do, their mission and recent news articles about the company. Again this will help you to write your cover letter and will be a great tool in the interview. Take notes or print off pages to save for reference.

If you cannot find the company online, check library resources or visit career services for assistance. If you do not know the company name because the job posting doesn't give you that information, that's ok, you will just write about your qualifications.

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Step 4: now it is time to draft a cover letter. Look at both your brainstorm list and your company research and determine which things are most important from each list. On your brainstorm list, which examples are most helpful in showing the employer what you can do for them? On your company research list, what are the few things you find most interesting about the company. Once you have prioritized, begin writing...

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A cover letter should begin with the date you are sending the letter. It should also be addressed to the individual responsible for hiring or the human resources recruiter. If you are responding to an advertisement with a phone number, call the company and ask them to whom the letter should be addressed and be sure to get the correct spelling. If the number is not available and you cannot get a name, you can address it to the Human Resources Director or hiring manager.

In your first paragraph, you will let them know what position you are applying for and how you found out about this position and express your interest in working for their organization. Remember that they read many letters for each position, so yours should be action packed and professional. And begin giving them an overview of your skills.

In the middle of the letter (sometimes the second or second and third paragraphs), explain your qualifications. Don't repeat your resume, but add some extras from your brainstorm list.

In your final paragraph, close by expressing your interest in an interview and let them know how they can contact you. Then type "Sincerely," leave a space to sign your name, and when the letter is printed, sign your name in the blank space.

The cover letter shown above was for a position description that listed qualifications such as project management, volunteer recruitment, managing multiple tasks and travel and weekend work. As you can see, the applicant has addressed all of these within her cover letter.

Please note that because of space constraints on the slide, the margins are not in the proper scale. You should have one inch margins around your document.

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In addition to the traditional cover letter we have just outlined, you can submit prospecting letters to organizations you would like to work for as well. With a prospecting letter, you are writing to submit your application even though there are no positions posted or available at the time. The prospecting letter is similar to the cover letter in all aspects except you are writing a more general letter to highlight your skills and express and interest in working for that particular

organization. You will also want to spend a little more time explaining why you are especially interested in working for this particular organization.

Remember that 60 to 80% of available jobs are never listed in the paper or online and if a company does not have an opening today, they may have one 2 weeks from now. So the more companies that have your resume, the more opportunities you will have to secure interviews!

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In closing, make sure that you have someone proofread your letters before they are sent. And keep a copy of the resume and letter that you send attached to the position description you responded to and your brainstorm and research pages. This record keeping will be helpful when you are called for an interview. Because you will probably be sending out numerous resumes and cover letters finding a system of organization that works for you will be important. For more helpful hints on the job search and staying organized, check out the job search and networking online seminar.

And remember, taking the time to prepare a strong resume and cover letter will ultimately lead to securing a great job!

For more sample cover letters, or to get help with writing a cover letter, contact Career Services.