COVER LETTER GUIDE

WHAT IS A COVER LETTER?
The cover letter is a formal business letter that is often the first contact with a prospective employer. It serves as an introduction of you and your background experience. Since it is usually the first impression you make on the employer, you want it to be your best.

Many employers will not look at a resume that arrives without a cover letter. The cover letter is a marketing tool; it communicates to the employer that you are interested in their position and their company and that you have something valuable to contribute. In certain situations, a well-written cover letter can be more effective than the resume itself. Therefore, do your homework! Before writing your letter, find out as much as you can about the organization and the specific position. This research enables you to better relate your skills and qualifications to the organization and the position.

Anyone who can write a grammatically correct letter can write a good cover letter. However, it takes thinking and planning in order to create a cover letter that will set the stage for the employer to accept your resume as something special.

STEP 1: THE INTRODUCTION
Indicate why you’re contacting the employer, the position you are applying for, and how you became aware of this position. If you are responding to an advertisement, mention where you saw it. If an individual referred you, mention his/her name.

Say something very specific about why you are excited about applying for this position or this company. This shows that you have done your research. Does their product impress you? Their mission statement? The population you’ll get to work with? Take time to reflect on the question: why them for you, and why you for them?

STEP 2: THEIR NEED, YOUR EXPERIENCE
This is the most critical section. Address the hiring need and how you specifically meet their qualifications. Highlight the best evidence of your qualifications with 2-3 specific examples of experiences where you’ve already demonstrated this evidence. Convince the reader that what you have is exactly what they want. Do not copy your resume.

You may choose to incorporate a third paragraph. This is a place where you can share your qualities and characteristics with the prospective employer, giving the reader a sense of who you are and whether or not you will fit in with their company’s culture.

STEP 3: CONCLUSION AND CONTACT
State that you are interested in having an interview. Include where, when, and how you can be contacted. When in a job search, one technique is to let the employer know that you will be following up in the near future.

TIP: Don’t copy your resume!
BUSINESS LETTER FORMAT
The formal business letter format is the most recommended form for the cover letter. The block-style format with all text beginning at the left margin is preferred. Paragraphs are not indented. Please refer to the sample cover letters at the end of this guide for examples.

Address your cover letter to the individual, business function, or department most clearly related to the position for which you are applying. Always try to get the name and job title of the person who could hire you. It is okay to call the Human Resource Department to find out the above information. Your letter and resume are more likely to be read if you are sending them to someone specific. Cover letters that are submitted to general personnel departments usually do not get read. However, there will be situations where you will not be able to obtain the name of a specific person, so you may want to use a title such as Personnel Director, Selection Committee, or simply stick with “To Whom It May Concern.”

ADDITIONAL TIPS

- Concentrate on “why” you desire to work in that particular organization or field.
- Focus on what you can offer the employer rather than what you can gain by working for their organization.
- Your letter should be original, brief (one page), business-like, and it should be a good example of your ability to write clearly and concisely.
- Keep your sentences ten to twenty words long.
- Limit paragraph length to five to seven sentences.
- Use powerful action phrases to describe accomplishments, qualities and experiences.
- Try to avoid the overuse of "I."
- Personalize; reflect your style by balancing professionalism with personal warmth and friendliness.
- Convey enthusiasm, commitment, and confidence.

TIP:
“Enclosure” is sometimes used at the end of a Cover Letter to signal the inclusion of a resume. This is a formal practice and is not mandatory.

NEED MORE HELP?
Come to Drop In Hours in the Career Corner (JSC) on Thursdays from 11-3 or Fridays from 12-2.
January 13, 20xx

Ms. Marcia Marshon, Internship Coordinator
Electric Youth
222 N. Marengo
Pasadena, CA 91156

Dear Ms. Marshon:

I am interested in applying for the recently posted internship opportunity to work with at-risk youth as a program coordinator. The skills I have developed from my work experience and my academic background support my strong interest for this position.

From my academic success in Sociology to applied related experience, I have a range of experience working with programs such as yours. For example, I participated in The Peer Mentor program at Occidental where I fine-tuned my ability to listen. Through my tutelage, two young girls went from almost no participation to taking on leadership roles. Additionally, I believe my minor in Spanish will serve me well. I am accustomed to interacting with diverse population groups and using my language skills when necessary.

I believe that there are certain personalities that are best suited to this work. I flourish when I can help people and tackle seemingly insurmountable tasks. When I tutored a fifth grade student privately for a summer and saw her grade go from a D to an A, I understood the advantages of one-on-one tutoring. I have the focus, aptitude and humor to do this work.

I look forward to the opportunity to learn more about your organization at that time. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (323) 555-1234 or ssmith@oxy.edu.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Susan Smith
John Jones
1600 Campus Road, Box 456
Los Angeles, CA 90041

March 20, 20xx

Mr. Mark Patterson
Section Manager
Hewlett-Packard Company
16399 W. Bennett Drive
San Diego, CA 92717

Dear Mr. Patterson:

I am applying for the position of Systems Analyst in your San Diego office that was advertised on your website. My friend, Michael Brown, is employed in the Los Angeles office and highly recommends Hewlett-Packard.

Early in my coursework in Physics and Mathematics at Occidental, I began seriously considering future employment with Hewlett-Packard Company. We use a number of your products in our laboratory work. The design, precision, and reliability of these products are impressive. More recently, I noted in a professional computing journal that you are undertaking a new project to apply microcomputers in automatic control systems.

Many of my electives were in the fields of control systems and computers, and I worked for three summers in microcomputer applications. I believe that I am well qualified to begin my career employment on your new project; I know that it is directly related to my interests.

I have enclosed my resume for your consideration. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how my education and experience would be consistent with your needs. I will contact you by phone within seven days to discuss the possibility of an interview. If you need to reach me, my phone number is (323) 555-4567 and my email is jones@oxy.edu.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

John Jones

Enclosure