

USM Career Services & Professional Life Development Cover Letter

PURPOSE OF A COVER LETTER

- Highlight Experience:* A cover letter accompanies a résumé being sent to an organization for a specific position. The well written cover letter highlights selective aspects of your background which best suit the employer's needs. In other words, the cover letter bridges the gap between your skills and experience and the qualifications of the position.
- Capture Attention:* A well written cover letter commands the reader's attention.
- Stimulate Interest:* It stimulates interest in you and your résumé as well as reflects your interest in the job and/or the organization.
- Gain An Interview:* The opportunity to interview is the ultimate goal of your cover letter and résumé.

CONTENT OF A COVER LETTER

A cover letter usually includes a minimum of three paragraphs. Each paragraph has a different goal.

First Paragraph. This opening paragraph explains why you are writing the letter. State your purpose, identify the position for which you are applying, and how you learned about the opening. If you are responding to an advertisement, state the name and date of the publication where you found the ad. If a well-respected person referred you to the organization, mention the person's name and connection.

Second Paragraph. It is within this paragraph that you tailor your résumé to a particular job. Here you should tell the employer why you are a strong candidate for this position. Highlight relevant achievements, skills, and/or experience, mentioning the most interesting points on your résumé. Explain how you intend to help the employer and contribute to the organization.

Third Paragraph (optional). This extra paragraph isn't always needed, but can be included if there is additional information which hasn't been mentioned on your résumé or needs to be described in more detail (for example: your cooperative education experience, or gaps in your employment history).

Closing Paragraph. This final paragraph should be action-oriented. Here you should state when and how you will contact the employer to arrange a mutually convenient time to interview. Also, be sure to state how and when they may contact you. Do not assume an employer will contact you once you have sent your cover letter and résumé. It is your responsibility to follow up. Finally, thank the individual and mention that you are looking forward to meeting him or her.



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Cover Letter

ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESS

- Use active, not passive, verbs. For example, use “arranged...,” “devised...,” “evaluated...,” instead of “was responsible for arranging...,” “...devising...,” “...evaluating...” (See **résumé** handout for an extensive list of action verbs.)
- Don’t overuse the word “I.” Starting every sentence with “I” can give the wrong impression, and you may come across as self-centered. Rather than starting with “I,” turn some of your sentences around. It’s better to give examples of how you did something than to say, “I did...” this or that.
- Your letter will be more effective when you address the letter to a specific person within the organization. If you don’t know the person’s name, title, or gender, call the organization and ask for the correct information. If you are unable to get a specific name, then using “Dear Personnel Committee” or “Dear Human Resources Department” are acceptable alternatives. When responding to a “blind ad” (A P.O. Box number in a newspaper ad) with no opportunity to address your letter to an individual or to follow-up to a specific person, you can only ask the employer to write or call you.
- Research the organization before you write the cover letter. Ideally, every cover letter is unique and targeted to a specific position. Use the information obtained through research to demonstrate that you know something about the company. Each time you submit a résumé for a specific position it should be accompanied by an original cover letter.
- A cover letter should communicate your ambition and enthusiasm. Stress your accomplishments by explaining how you have met specific employer needs. Show how previous accomplishments relate to the position for which you are applying. Also, the reader may judge you on how well you write; do your best to make the words come alive!
- Never express dissatisfaction with a present or former job or employer. Be sure to avoid discussing any negative reasons for leaving your last job.
- Be sure to use an acceptable business format (see sample). Send the original, and be sure you keep a copy of each letter for your records.
- For a polished, professional image, print your résumé and cover letter on matching white, off-white, or ivory stationery, and enclose them in a matching envelope. Stay away from fancy colored papers, pastels, or drawings.
- Keep in mind that the professional image you want to give to the prospective employer includes a neatly typed, grammatically correct and accurate letter. NO TYPOS! If you can type and have access to a computer and letter quality printer, you should use these. If you can’t type, hire someone to type your letter professionally.

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TO HELP YOU GET STARTED

Below are some opening lines to help give you some direction and ideas to start putting your cover letter together. Remember that although some of these ideas may sound great, you are the one who needs to decide how best to present yourself – not only professionally, but by writing a letter with which you are comfortable and that accurately represents you as a person.

First Paragraph

- Your advertisement in the Caribou Reindeer Express dated Sunday, May 5, indicated your need for ...
- Margaret Hamilton suggested I contact you regarding ...
- Because of my background in _____, I am applying for ...
- My professor, Dr. Philip Screwdriver, informed me about the opening ...
- I am writing to inquire about the position ...
- In view of your ongoing need for computer programmers ...

Second (and Third) Paragraph(s)

- The position of _____ would allow me to ...
- My qualifications and experience include ...
- I will graduate in May from the University of Southern Maine with a degree in ...
- The experience I have gained in the accounting field ...
- I have worked at developing ...
- My record contains other accomplishments such as ...
- I have specialized in ...
- Your company interests me because ...
- Your company's efforts to _____ have attracted me because ...

Closing Paragraph

- I look forward to discussing my experience and qualifications with you ...
- My résumé is enclosed ...
- I will be in Caribou during the week of ...
- I will be contacting you ...

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Better Letters. A Handbook of Business & Personal Correspondence. Jan Venolia; Ten Speed Press.

The Perfect Résumé. Tom Jackson; Anchor/Doubleday.

Interview for Success: A Practical Guide to Increase Job Interviews, Offers, and Salaries. Carol Rae Krannich, Ph.D.,
Ronald L. Krannich, Ph.D.; Impact Publications.

The Perfect Cover Letter. Richard H. Beatty; John Wiley & Sons.

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SAMPLE COVER LETTER

RETURN ADDRESS:

77 Sunset Strip
Portland, Maine 04103
October 14, 2006

INSIDE ADDRESS: Mr. John Hancock, President
Icicle Environmental Corporation
618 Snowy River Road
Caribou, Maine 04002

SALUTATION: Dear Mr. Hancock:

BODY: Your advertisement in the Caribou Reindeer Express, dated October 8, indicated the need for a Director for your Association. I have had an interest in environmental affairs for a long time, and the work of your organization has my respect.

As you can see from my résumé, I have had two years of experience working as Assistant Director of the Maine Audubon society and have worked as a volunteer with the Appalachian Mountain Club for the past five years. My work at the Audubon Society involves managing the day-to-day activities of the society and includes working on fundraising, editing a newsletter and publicity releases focusing on environmental issues and organization membership drives.

In addition to my jobs, I am presently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Business at the University of Southern Maine and plan to graduate in May 2007. I have found that taking courses in management while working in an administrative position provides me with an excellent balance of practical experience and educational training.

I would like very much to put my skills to work for your organization. I will call you within the next two weeks to discuss the possibility of an interview. You may reach me at (207) 780-5555 during normal business hours. Thank you for your consideration.

CLOSING:

Sincerely yours,

SIGNATURE:

Lester Wilmont

TYPED NAME:

Lester Wilmont

ENCLOSURE:

Enc: Résumé

(Note: Career Services also has books in their Resource Centers with many more examples. Stop in to see us!)

With appreciation to the Career Center at Northeastern University for development of this handout.