

GUIDE TO COVER LETTER WRITING

Becker Career Center



Contact us: 518-388-6176
www.union.edu/BeckerCareerCenter

Cover Letter Writing

A cover letter is a marketing tool intended to generate interest in you and get the reader excited about reviewing your accompanying resume. The cover letter should succinctly articulate your interest and enthusiasm for both the company and specific position, and demonstrates how your unique background, skills and experiences make you an excellent fit for both the position and organization to which you are applying.

General Tips

- Make connections between what is on your resume and the position requirements; don't just repeat what's on your resume.
 - Describe specific accomplishments, experiences and skills that demonstrate how you fit the position. Provide examples to support claims; doing so supports your candidacy and makes you a stronger candidate.
 - Cite examples from the most relevant areas of your background, including your internship or employment experience, leadership, extra-curricular activities and coursework.
- Prepare a unique letter for each position you apply to.
 - Nothing looks worse than a generic cover letter; make sure your cover letter highlights skill sets and credentials consistent with those of the job posting.
 - Customize the employer's information on each individual letter; specify why you are interested in working in this position at this company.
- Address each cover letter to the appropriate person.
 - Use "Dear Mr. or Ms. Last Name". Do not use phrases such as "To whom it may concern" or "Dear Sir or Madam". If the name is unisex (e.g., Pat Brown), use "Dear First & Last Name".
 - Call the Human Resources office or Hiring Manager of each organization to find out who you should be addressing your letter to.
 - If you cannot identify the appropriate person, address your cover letter to "Hiring Manager" or "Human Resources Director".
- Keep a copy of every letter you send out.
 - Designate a folder on your computer to save each cover letter you send out. Use the dates on each cover letter as a reference.
 - If you do not hear from the employer within two weeks, follow up on the status of your application.
- Make it perfect.
 - Typographical errors, misspellings and poor word choice will earn your cover letter and resume a one-way ticket to the "no pile".
 - Have someone proofread your letter before sending it out.
- Enthusiasm Sells.
 - Employers want candidates that want to work for them. Show them that you've researched their organization and make a convincing case for why you want to work for them.
 - Be professional and courteous, but let your personality come through.

Formatting Tips

- Use 8½" X 11" quality bond paper – the same kind you used for your resume.
- Keep it to one page, single spaced.
- Use 10-12 point font and choose the same style you chose for your resume.
- Remember to sign your name at the bottom of each hard copy letter you send out.
- Use a Block Style Format, and align names, dates and paragraphs along the left-hand margin.
- Use 1" margins all around the page.

COVER LETTER OUTLINE

Your Street Address
City, ST Zip
Today's Date

Mr./Ms. First and Last Name of Contact
Title of Employer
Company/Organization
Street Address
City, ST Zip

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name of Contact:

Your opening paragraph tells **why you are writing** and notes where you learned about the position or if someone referred you. When referring to the position, use the title used by the employer. If someone referred you and no specific title is known, be as specific as possible about the kind of position for which you are applying. Do some research on the organization so that you can state your interest in this particular employer.

Your middle paragraph(s) should **highlight your qualifications**. Give details of your background that will show the reader why she/he should consider you as a candidate. If you have had relevant experience or related education, be sure to link your experiences and/or education to the position. By using examples, show the employer that you have the necessary skills they seek.

You could include another paragraph detailing additional **experience** that will highlight your qualifications. For a concluding sentence, summarize the skills and personal traits that you would bring to the job for which you are applying. Also, remember that the reader will view your letter as an example of your writing skills.

In your closing paragraph, **reiterate your interest in the position, thank the employer for his/her consideration, provide your contact information, and indicate the follow-up action**. State what you want the recipient of the letter to do next (such as contacting you to further discuss the available position) or what you will do next (such as calling to follow-up on the status of your application). If you say that you're going to follow up on the status of your application, **REMEMBER TO FOLLOW-UP!**

Sincerely,

(sign your name)

Your name (typed)
Enclosure

When writing a cover letter, you want to market your experiences, background and skill set *to the specific position to which you're applying*. Depending on the position, you may pull from different areas of your own background, and choose to highlight experiences that better target the skill sets and credentials most pertinent to the specific job or internship you're applying to. Below is a sample internship description for a position at Ticketmaster. Notice how Wesley, the student whose cover letter appears on the proceeding page, draws a clear link between the skills/experiences detailed in the job description and his own academic background, skill set and campus involvement. In doing so, Wesley makes a clear case for his candidacy.

Sample Job Description

Job Title Marketing/Promotions Intern
Company Ticketmaster
Industry Arts & Entertainment – Other, Retail/Merchandising
Job Function Marketing
Description

As a *marketing* intern for Ticketmaster, you can expect to learn *sales and marketing practices* of the ticketing industry in the world of entertainment. The internship will allow you to enhance your *writing, presentation* and *research skills* as well as learn how to *develop and maintain client relationships*. By the completion of the internship you should know how to determine via *research* what *marketing techniques* to apply to various projects, online placement, discounting, promotions and more. This internship will give you insight and vast general knowledge of *marketing* in live entertainment ticketing; concerts, sports, arts and family events.

Position Responsibilities:

- Track event data and present findings.
- Develop recap materials at the conclusion of a promotion.
- Support product-related initiatives.
- Contribute to website content and the creation of custom webpages.
- Monitor that the Ticketmaster brand is properly represented in client and promotional partners advertisements.
- Assist with customized *marketing/promotional* presentations.
- Run quality assurance tests.

Qualifications:

- Student pursuing a BA/BS degree in related area from an accredited institution.
- Must have a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0.
- Excellent *organizational, verbal and written communication skills* are essential.
- *Creativity* and strong attention to detail required.
- Proficiency with Microsoft Word/Excel/Power Point and the Internet required.
- Must be able to work in a *team environment* and able to meet deadlines.

Additional Information:

- Scheduling office hours is negotiable per applicant.
- Length of internship: minimum 15 hours per week for 10 weeks.

Contact Rosalyn Leiva – East Regional Recruiter
 Alumnus: No

Look for keywords – descriptive action verbs and adjectives defining the main responsibilities and qualifications of the position – in the job description and try to use them in the body of your cover letter.

Notice the skill sets that the position highlights. Key terms are bolded and italicized for emphasis.

Tip – Print out the job description for the position you're applying to, then identify and highlight keywords from the posting. This will help you better "target" your cover letter.

Sample Cover Letter – e-Recruiting

Ms. Rosalyn Leiva
East Regional Recruiter
Ticketmaster

First Paragraph – Cite the position you're applying to and reference where you found out about the opportunity (corporate website, personal referral, etc.). Try to display your enthusiasm for the position and/or line of work by stating WHY you want to work for the particular organization.

Dear Ms. Leiva:

In response to your posting for the Marketing/Promotions Intern, attached is my resume for your consideration. I learned of this position through the Becker Career Center at Union College. After reviewing the position description and researching Ticketmaster, I believe this internship represents an ideal opportunity.

Highlight skills and pieces of your background consistent with the job posting. Wes does a good job of linking his own skill set with the needs of the specific position.

As a sophomore at Union College, I have undertaken a number of courses and extra-curricular engagements that prepared me for this internship. The study of economics has helped develop my **research, analytical and creative thinking skills**, as it has allowed me to contemplate the relationships between human behavior and economical, environmental and cultural factors. As part of my sophomore research project, I am currently **researching** how companies effectively utilize branding strategies and catchy logos to increase their client base and better capture their target markets. I believe this on-going **analysis** of corporate markets and the knowledge I am gaining regarding effective **marketing** strategies will directly benefit the Marketing/Promotions department.

Body Paragraphs – Notice how Wesley specifically highlights some of the broader skill sets outlined in the job description, uses keywords that are consistent with the job posting and cites examples to support his statements.

I've complemented my academic background with strong extra-curricular involvement. As Publicity and Promotions Co-Chair for U-Program, I was responsible for overseeing and implementing a **marketing plan** for campus concerts, comedic performances and novelty acts. This required **strong teamwork, organizational and interpersonal abilities** as I interfaced with campus administrators, student organizations and other U-Program members in executing the marketing plan.

Notice how Wes uses this paragraph to highlight his campus leadership experiences.

I believe I would be a strong asset to the Marketing/Promotions team at Ticketmaster and would greatly appreciate the opportunity to further discuss my qualifications with you. I can be reached at 518-333-6565 or via e-mail at MantootW@union.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Closing Paragraph – Thank the employer for their time and reiterate your interest in the position.

Wesley Mantooth

Sample Cover Letter – e-Recruiting

NOTE – All keywords on this cover letter are bolded and italicized for emphasis. Refrain from doing so on your own cover letter or resume.

Cover Letter Sentence Starters

As stated earlier, the purpose of the cover letter is to get the reader excited about your candidacy and make them want to read your resume. As such, you want to communicate your relevant qualifications as they fit the needs of the position while also expressing your enthusiasm towards a particular company and/or career field. Because knowing what to say in a cover letter can be difficult, we've listed a number of "sentence starters" to aid you in matching your unique background, skill set and qualifications to the needs of the position and employer. Use these sentence starters as examples when drafting the three parts of your cover letter: the introduction, the body and the closing paragraph.

INTRODUCTION

- It is with great interest that I am applying for the position of _____.
- (Name of contact) provided me with your name and suggested I contact you in reference to the _____ position.
- As a recent graduate of Union College with a degree in _____ and an avid (reader, writer, sports enthusiast, etc.), I believe I am a strong applicant for the position of _____.
- As a (marketing, research, congressional, etc.) intern with (name of organization) I have gained valuable experience in _____ that makes me an ideal candidate for the position of _____.
- I am eager to apply for the position of _____ because I believe I have the _____ that it takes to be successful in the position.
- Thank you for speaking with me on (date) and discussing the _____ position. I am very interested in _____.
- Your recent advertisement in the (eRecruiting system, paper, etc.) for the _____ position is a wonderful match for my talents and _____.
- Your organization impresses me because of (the performance of your product, the integrity of your support staff, its customer satisfaction, etc.).

BODY

- My experience as a _____ will help me to contribute _____.
- Throughout my four years of undergraduate studies I have demonstrated skills and abilities that are exactly what the position of _____ demands.

- I can contribute to your organization's effectiveness by_____.
- My previous success in_____ has proven my ability to _____.
- To highlight some of my accomplishments I have _____.
- Working with _____ has strengthened and improved my already strong (analytical, research, interpersonal, organizational, etc.) and (analytical, research, interpersonal, organizational, etc.) skills.
- I am confident that I can be a valuable asset to your organization because_____.

CLOSING

- I am eager to learn more about_____ and would like to discuss my qualifications and interests with you.
- I am interested in the position and would appreciate the opportunity to discuss my background and your requirements in greater detail.
- I feel that my _____ and _____ make me a strong candidate for this position and therefore look forward to the possibility of employment with (name of organization).
- I would appreciate the opportunity to further discuss my qualifications with you. I can be reached at (phone number) or by email at _____.
- I will contact you within (10 days, 1 week, etc.) to (verify my application materials are in order, introduce myself, inquire as to the next steps, etc.).

SENTENCES THAT CAN BE USED IN MULTIPLE PARAGRAPHS

- I would like the opportunity to put my skills, drive and enthusiasm to work as a _____for_____.
- Being (a team player, results driven, a quick learner, etc.) who loves challenges, I will_____.
- My career goal is to _____. Therefore I welcome the opportunity to make a contribution to (organization name here).
- The_____ position described in_____ sounds exactly like the opportunity I'm looking for.

Sample Cover Letter – E-Mail Body

Dear Mr. Drummer:

Please accept this letter and enclosed resume in response to the Journalism Internship recently posted on your website. Since moving to the Capital District, I have been very impressed by the quality of stories and content of your newspaper, and believe my educational background and journalism experience could be of use to your organization.

As a contributing writer to the *Newstime Daily* high school newspaper, I explored issues affecting the school and surrounding community in a thought provoking and engaging weekly opinion article titled “Plant This”. This experience taught me how to effectively research unfamiliar topic areas, cite and quote sources, write to specific word lengths (ranging from 150 - 600 words), and construct strong stories.

My work experiences and academic coursework have further refined skills and abilities that would assist me as a Journalism Intern. Working as a Sales Attendant at TJ Maxx I developed strong teamwork and communication skills, as this position required me to speak to my supervisor about customer problems and recommend strategies for amending store issues. I also honed my research, writing and analytical skills through intensive research projects at Union College. I believe the skill sets developed through such experiences would directly benefit the *Times Union*.

I am very interested in the position and would appreciate the opportunity to discuss my background and your requirements in greater detail. I will follow up with you by the end of the week to confirm receipt of my application. If you wish to contact me in the meantime, I can be reached at 276.555.0201 or PlantR@union.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Robert Plant