

GUIDE TO COVER LETTER WRITING

Becker Career Center

UNION

COLLEGE

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

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 strengthens your candidacy.
 - Cite examples from the most relevant areas of your background, including your internship or employment experience, leadership roles, extra-curricular activities and coursework.
- Prepare a unique letter for each position.
 - 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 to whom you should be addressing your letter.
 - 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 submit.
 - 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 who 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 submit.
- 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 genuine interest in this particular employer and why it is a good fit for you, not how it will help you.

Your middle paragraph(s) should **highlight** examples that demonstrate your relevant experience, background, and/or coursework that will show the reader why she/he should consider you as a candidate. Be sure to connect your experiences and/or education to the position description. By using examples, show the employer that you have the necessary experience they seek.

You could include another paragraph detailing additional **experience** that will demonstrate or connect your background with the position. 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). Only say you are going to follow up if you have the contact information to do so.

Sincerely,

Sign your name (note: if sending electronically no need to include signature)

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 academic, work, extracurricular, and athletic experiences that better target the skill sets and credentials most pertinent to the specific job or internship to which you're applying. Below is a sample internship description for a position at Ticketmaster. Notice how Wesley, the student whose cover letter appears on the following 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.

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.

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 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

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 – HireU

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:

I’m writing to apply for the Marketing/Promotions Intern position at Ticketmaster, which I learned about through the Becker Career Center at Union College. After reviewing the position description and researching Ticketmaster, I believe that my skills and experience make me an excellent candidate.

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 a variety of 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 oversaw and implemented 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 MantootW@union.edu. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

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

Wesley Mantooth

Sample Cover Letter – HireU

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

Sample Job Description

Job Title Engineer
Company Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corp.
Industry Energy/Utilities
Job Function Engineering
Description Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corporation is seeking Engineers to join our team and fill positions in our Electric System Design (Substation Design, Electric System Protection, or Transmission Design) and Electric System Planning (Transmission Planning, Distribution Planning and/or Operating Engineer) Departments.

Position Responsibilities

- Perform engineering assignments relating to planning, designing, construction, operation, maintenance and performance. These may include (but are not limited to): electric substations & related facilities; overhead and underground electric transmission and distribution protective relay systems, **distribution protection systems and automatic control equipment**; distribution automation; telemetering, supervisory, and **communications systems**
- Work assignments may include (but are not limited to): **Prepare basic one line or block diagrams**; prepare requests for funding authorization, cost estimates, construction plans, designs, specifications, bills of material, material purchase requisitions and delivery schedules; **develop construction and material standards**, and standards of estimating practices and test procedures; Inspect material and performance of contractors; **conduct cost analysis** of work orders; develop capacity ratings for various components of electrical systems; investigate planning methods and procedures of the electric utility industry; develop and recommend statements of engineering practices, service standards, and equipment capability standards to be used as a basis for system reinforcement, design and operation; **analyze performance of company's electric facilities**, including malfunction or failure of equipment, and recommend remedial measures; **determine effect of new large loads on system development plans** recommending the method of supply and/or modification as required; electric reliability analysis; and storm response as required.

Identify two or three key responsibilities with which you're experienced.

Match the items in this section to your relevant skills and experience.

Qualifications

- Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical or Electrical Engineering (focus on Power is preferable)
- Strong **analytical, organizational** and **quantitative skills**
- **Ability to work individually** or as **part of a group** on special projects
- Well-developed **written/verbal communication skills**
- Valid driver's license

Contact Elliott Rosen
Alumnus: No

Sample Cover Letter – Mailed to Employer

Union College
Reamer Campus Center #123
Schenectady, NY 12308

August 23, 2015

Elliott Rosen
Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corp
284 South Avenue
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601

Dear Mr. Rosen:

Please accept this letter and the attached resume as my application for the Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corporation Engineer position. This is in response to a job posting from the Becker Career Center at Union College. As a mechanical engineering student, **I am interested in joining a company where my analytical and design skills** could be put to use. As **an industry-leading energy and technology company**, Central Hudson seems to be the perfect match.

Identify why you're interested in this company.

Introduce your relevant skills to be discussed.

Recently, **I took a thermal fluid/systems design course, with a focus on energy**, where I worked on design projects with three team members. We designed a heat recovery system for a firm to use to exhaust gases to pre-heat cold, incoming air and save on electricity costs. In addition to analyzing the design and energy requirements, we performed an economic analysis. Currently, I am **working with a team of eight students to design a robot to shoot darts, simulating a human-like motion**. These courses not only transformed my design perspective and ideas, but also taught me how to work effectively in teams.

Discuss class projects to highlight analytical and teamwork skills.

Demonstrate knowledge gained through coursework.

In the summer of 2014, I received a Davis Peace project grant of \$10,000, to use on a project I identified, lead and implemented. I gained valuable **leadership skills while overseeing a team of volunteers, setting goals, planning daily schedules, and collaborating with an NGO**. Among many extracurricular activities, I currently tutor other Union students in physics, math, and engineering. This position has enabled me to **sharpen my communication skills, as I must constantly seek the most effective way to teach concepts** to students with varying levels of skills and comprehension.

Use extracurricular activities to illustrate leadership and communication skills.

I am very interested in the Engineer position at Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corporation, and believe that I possess the skills and experience necessary to succeed in this role. I look forward to discussing my qualifications with you in greater detail. I can be reached at 518-123-4567, or swiftt@union.edu. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sign your name (note: if sending electronically no need to include signature)

Taylor Swift

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 should communicate your relevant qualifications as they fit the needs of the position, while also expressing your enthusiasm for the 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 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 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 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 (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 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 attached resume in response to the Journalism Internship recently posted on your website. Since studying in 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.

As a rising junior at Union College majoring in English my work experiences and academic coursework have further refined skills and abilities that would assist me as a Journalism Intern. Through an intensive sophomore research seminar, I conducted independent research examining the effects of ethnic identification and societal pressures on world war II German American relief efforts that culminated in a 45 page paper and presentation. This experience further honed my research, analytical, writing, and presentation skills. Working as Head Counselor at Camp Cedarbrook I developed strong teamwork and communication skills, as this position required me supervise a staff of eight organizing and coordinating activities for 125 campers. I believe the skill sets and personal attributes developed through such experiences would directly benefit the *Times Union*.

I am very interested in the Journalism Internship, and would appreciate the opportunity to discuss my background and your requirements in greater detail. 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 consideration and I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,
(Note: no need to sign if sending through email)

Robert Plant