**Cover Letters**

A well-written cover letter (email) establishes a connection between you, the applicant, and the recruiter by detailing the qualifications you have for a particular job. It helps the reader navigate your resume, and “fleshes-out” the “X” areas, which are exposure, expertise, experience. Simply put, an effective cover letter can get you an interview through its narrative about your resume. *In an ideal world, your* *cover letter gets read before your resume.* **A detailed cover letter/email is an essential component of the job search**, and can supplant the resume in importance when used effectively.

You won’t need a cover letter for a career fair because these letters must be specific in their construction. **You craft a letter and structure it around exact details from the job posting and/or information you find about the company and the position.**

Basic cover letter formula:

* Identify three skills the company seeks in the new hire. You’ll find them in the job posting, and they’re identifiable in your resume.
* Construct your letter solely around these three skills.
* Look for the three skills to come from typically three areas: 1) your major/core courses, and possibly concentration, or on-the-job experience; 2) tool(s) to do the job, which can be software, programming, data analysis, instrumentation, or other; 3) communication and/or leadership skills.
* Make no assertions about your work/skills that are not followed up by concrete evidence and detail.

Note: If you don’t have an actual person’s name—usually you won’t--simply address to *Dear Human Resources*, or something comparable. Do **not** use “To Whom It May Concern:” or, even worse, “Dear Sir/Madam:”. Such salutations are stiff and antique sounding.

These letters follow the typical three-paragraph business letter format. They are left-justified, with a ‘ragged’ right margin, contain no indentation, and have one space between paragraphs.

The **opening paragraph** is usually no more than two sentences, shows the reader where you found the ad or notice, the job description, and three qualifications you possess that will make you an ideal candidate to interview. This opening sets the stage, and shows your attention to detail, as well as showing you’ve read the job posting with care.

Your letter should always begin with focus on the reader—as in the use of the word ‘you’ or ‘your’—and **never** begin with the word “I.” Use of the ‘you-view’ shows respect for the time and interests of the reader. The example below shows you the formula for the first paragraph:

**Letter Opening Example I**

“Your posting on CareerBuzz for a software specialist with networking skills interests me. With my computer experience, application knowledge, and communication skills, I can serve \_\_\_ well.”

Many companies do not advertise job openings, for a variety of reasons. If you are interested in working for a company, but it has not advertised any available positions, you can try a variation on this opening. This method of job application is called “fishing,” and has proven useful for some applicants. Studies show that as much as 15 percent of all job interviews are obtained in this manner.

**Letter Opening Example II**

“Can name of company/ your company use the services of a software specialist, who has an emphasis on networking and security, and possesses proven communication skills? I am interested in working for you as a \_\_\_.” Here is where it can get tricky. You can provide a general description of the ideal job you seek with the company, but don’t be too specific. Use the three qualifications you bring with you. The details of these qualifications are critical, but don’t make them too defined.

Do **not** begin your letter with “I am seeking a position as \_\_\_,” or “I have just graduated with a degree in \_\_\_, and wondered if you had any openings for a \_\_\_,” or “I feel your company is the foremost authority on \_\_\_, and working for you would be a wonderful opportunity for me.” Recruiters don’t seek your praise for them or their company; they want to know the details of your qualifications. Neither your life story nor adulation of the company is going to get you the consideration that three relevant detailed listed skills will.

**The body paragraphs are where you do your best—and hardest--work by showing the recruiter the details of your three qualifications, when and where you acquired them, and some of the results.** Begin by careful analysis of your three selected qualifications and explain where they originated and how you have used them. “Show” your reader how you have implemented any attained knowledge, how you have been focused, dedicated, attuned to good work and marketability. *Quantify with numbers, facts, statistics, and end results of your assignment or project.* Now is not the time for false modesty. Provide hard details, and good nouns and verbs.

You began your letter with a focus on the reader; now it’s your turn. If you don’t grab your reader’s attention immediately with good, telling details, numbers, verbs, and outcomes, you run the risk of losing his or her interest. And your letter will end up at the bottom of the stack, or not even get printed out.

A cover letter is rarely longer than one page, but don’t worry about the length of your body paragraphs. The usual method of providing details about each skill is to give an instance of implementation, explaining how, why, and end result. These paragraphs must be detailed and are usually rife with numbers, jargon, percentages. You’ll find yourself beginning many/most sentences with the word ‘I,’ which is fine. You have to show yourself at work, in order for a hiring manager to know how your work will work for this company.

Your closing paragraph is formulaic as well, and where you wrap up your package and reiterate your request. Keep it pleasant, and stay focused on your request for an interview. Use the following wording:

“After you have read my resume for the details of my qualifications, I will be happy to answer any questions. Please contact me at \_\_\_\_, so we can discuss how my computer experience, abilities with networking security, and proven communication skills will benefit you at \_\_\_.”

Notice it’s a restating and reminder of those three critical skills you created your letter around, which you know that company seeks in a new hire.

If you need to hear back from the recruiter by a certain date, you may specify it, but that can easily be interpreted as too pushy, so do so judiciously.

You can contact the company two to three weeks after your letter and resume have been received, if you haven’t gotten acknowledgement. Keep your questions brief and upbeat. If your letter has been received, ask if there are any questions you can answer. Reiterate your availability. Be pleasant. A well-crafted cover letter will make all the difference, and many companies consider them to be a sort of unwritten requirement.

These letters take time to craft, especially the first one you compose. Allot enough time to get in all the details, take notes beforehand, and work from the job posting and other information as needed. The upside to this kind of work, however, is that you probably will be applying for the same kind of jobs, in the same field, so you can recycle much or most of the letter contents as many times as necessary. Be sure to change the details and recipient names and addresses.

**A powerful cover letter/email is one in which you show knowledge, energy, attention to detail, and an ability to follow through.** These are all traits a hiring manager seeks in any new-hire.