COVER LETTER

RESOURCE PACKET

Office of Career Services
Marylhurst University
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INTRODUCTION

Imagine launching into a presentation about you without first introducing yourself to the person you are trying to impress! That’s what happens when you DON’T include a cover letter with your resume. In today’s highly competitive job market recruiters and hiring managers sometimes spend less than ten seconds reading your resume. It’s also been said some HR professionals and recruiters don’t read cover letters. Ironically however, it is noticed when a cover letter is not included, and a lot of hiring managers still want to see a cover letter, your resume submission is not complete without one. It is better to include a carefully crafted cover letter with your resume submission than to not include one.

What is a cover letter? It’s your opportunity to succinctly create an interest in the employer so they actually want to READ your resume. The cover letter should be:

• Accomplishment oriented
• Absolutely relevant to the opportunity
• Solution oriented, how can you answer the stated need (the job description)
• Concise

You may develop a basic format template for the cover letter but you absolutely MUST craft the cover letter to the specific job description. The cover letter is truly a sales letter and the product you are selling is your ability to do the job. For every position applied to, you will write a different and new cover letter.

What can the cover letter do for you? A well-crafted cover letter tells the recruiter you put some effort into applying for the job, it shows you are literate (lots of people spend lots of money having their resume written by a resume writer; the cover letter should be your writing), it shows who you are and gives you a chance to explain circumstances your resume may not reflect, and it should be a sales letter that gives you the opportunity to show a little personality. The cover letter allows you the chance to show some enthusiasm and gratitude for the opportunity to apply. Lastly, it gives you the chance to invite a “call to action” compelling that hiring manager to read more about you in your resume!

In the cover letter you are also able to name drop the person who may have suggested you apply for the job, spotlight a particular part of your resume, point out how past experience has prepared you for this opportunity and most importantly, tell the employer how YOU will SOLVE HIS/HER PROBLEM!
SOME GENERAL BEST PRACTICE TIPS

STAY EMPLOYER-FOCUSED

A cover letter that is “I” focused is a turn off. That’s what your resume is, “I” focused. The cover letter should sell your abilities as the solution to the employer. Don’t tell the employer all the wonderful things you did, but rather how all the skills and abilities you have will fulfill their needs. To do this most effectively study the job description or job posting carefully and use the language you see to create the action statements that represent what the job entails.

RESEARCH THE ORGANIZATION

Do your homework by researching the company don’t just read the job posting, research the company. Find out who they are and tell them how you fit into the company by filling the job they’ve posted. Make sure you identify the position for which you are applying and how you learned about it. Indicate specific qualifications that reflect the top three things you saw highlighted in the job description.

Generate some interest and enthusiasm with your content and be sure to convey your excitement about working for the company and briefly why you want to work there. Finally, request an action that will prompt them to follow-up on your cover letter. Make sure the addresses, email, and phone numbers are correct for you; don’t leave a communication gap on your end!

ADDRESSING THE LETTER

How do you find the name of the hiring manager when none is listed in the job description or you are required to address the letter to an email, such as: jobposting@greatcompany.com? There are several ways to ferret out that information. The simplest is to simply call the company and ask. You might call the front desk and just inquire who manages the specific department or call the Human Resources office and ask whom to address the cover letter. You might go to LinkedIn and research the company to see if any of the executives or managers has profiles. If you know someone who works at the company call and ask if they can find out for you.

If the words NO PHONE CALLS appear in the ad, it is best to respect those three very important words. If no hiring manager is listed, the HR department may be protecting that person from receiving calls from prospective employees. Company protocols may dictate that all job applications are screened by HR before hiring managers see applications. It may also mean that the position may not have an identified supervisor as yet. That is rare, but it does happen.

In each of these cases, avoid using TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN. This is considered outdated and overly formal. You might open the letter with a simple “Hello” or avoid a salutation all together and put in a SUBJECT LINE PHRASE OR JOB NUMBER/TITLE, then begin your correspondence by getting right to the point of why you are writing.

ONLINE APPLICATIONS

What should you do when you have to submit your resume on line? There may be no way to include a cover letter. If you are able to send an email you may include a very brief snapshot of your qualifications in the email. No more than three or four lines are sufficient. Hit the high points of your qualifications based on the job description needs. Some online application systems allow you to include supporting
documentation as an attachment. Make sure one of the supporting documents is a very well written cover letter.

Remember the most important aspect of a cover letter is telling the reader how you fulfill their need. It is not “I” focused, but focused entirely on what you’ve done, that covers what they need.

EXPLAINING SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Another vital function the cover letter can fill that the resume cannot, is to explain any “blips” on the radar screen. For instance, if you have been caring for a sick family member, in school, or if you are changing careers you can address these life occurrences in a few sentences. On a resume those periods may look like employment gaps. If you are a career changer you can talk about your transferable skills more clearly than within your resume. If you have a health issue or legal issue, such as a crime conviction that may show up on an application, you can address any issues you may foresee. If you acknowledge that you have been convicted of a crime, explain it. For example: “When I was a freshman in college, I had a conviction for a DUI and an arrest for disorderly conduct. This youthful lapse in judgment has not, and will not repeat itself”. For a health issue you might say: “I took a year off from work to recover from extensive surgery, and now have a complete doctor’s release to resume work with no remaining health issues.”

If you took time off to raise children or care for a sick family member you probably gained important transferrable skills. Think through all that you’ve done and see if you can apply them to a job requirement. This is also true of volunteer work you may have done. While researching your prospective employer, find out if the company routinely volunteers for specific causes. If you have volunteered for the same non profits or for similar causes by all means include it, if not in the cover letter make sure it shows up on the resume.
COVER LETTER SAMPLES

1. Here’s a brief sample of an excellent cover letter that truly sells the candidate. The job is for a person to work in an HR capacity at a senior living facility. The letter highlights a specific successful project that stands out. It effectively incorporates the values of the hiring organization and it creates a link between the hiring organization and the potential employer.

Jane Doe, Executive Director
Gentle Winds
1213 Lovely Lane
Portland OR 97000

RE: HR Director Position Job No. 12345

Dear Ms. Doe,

My best memory of working with seniors was when I started a socialization program for the residents of a psychiatric hospital in Wilsonville.

Results were immediate, within a few sessions the seniors:

• Learned each other’s names
• Engaged in group storytelling
• Enjoyed a semblance of normalcy for the first time in many years

My name is Jane Snow and this experience reinforced why I entered my profession: I love working with seniors, giving them pleasurable and positive life experiences when their own daily lives are somewhat diminished.

As an HR Specialist (Job No. 12345) I bring a standard of professionalism and expertise that fits with the Gentle Winds philosophy: I am “family focused, compassionate, and empathetic......."
2. Here’s a sample letter with a Job Description so you can see how the needs of the employer were matched by the applicant. First the job requirements:

- Successful recruiting, hiring and on-boarding will be this position’s number one priority.
- Develop and execute recruiting plans and also coordinate and implement college recruiting activities.
- Perform day-to-day operations of the HR function and duties in employee relations, training and development, executive administration and employment, employee safety, Workers compensation, welfare, wellness, maintenance of employee files and the HR filing system, etc.

Requirements:
- Bachelor’s degree preferred; with 3+ years recruiting experience.
- Demonstrated proficiency in applicable computer software.
- Demonstrated excellence in customer/employee service; responds promptly to employee needs; solicits employee feedback to improve service.
- Demonstrated proficiency in oral and written communications.

Here’s how the letter matches the requirements:

Dear Recruiter,

In response to the advertised position of Human Resources Specialist on your website, here are highlights of some of my skills and experience offering an excellent match to the position:

Bachelor’s degree preferred; with 3+ years recruiting experience.
- I have a Masters in Human Resources Management and with 4 plus years of experience in a 400 employee firm, I have diverse experience in recruiting, employee management and have contributed to developing college recruiting programs.

Demonstrated proficiency in applicable computer software.
- I am proficient at PeopleSoft HR software — Human Resources, HCM Warehouse, HRMS Portal Pack, Employee Benefits and Compensation Modules and UltiPro Recruitment, UltiPro Onboarding software applications. With 3 years of expert level experience I also exhibit fast learning skills to get on speed with any new software.

Demonstrated excellence in customer/employee service; responds promptly to employee needs: solicits employee feedback to improve service.
- I initiated a smart employee feedback process resulting in a 10% increase in employee retention

Demonstrated proficiency in oral and written communication
- At my last position, I worked with the HR Director to revise the new edition of the Employee Handbook, taking the lead on the editorial revisions. I wrote and edited the monthly employee newsletter and I presented new employee orientation trainings quarterly. Here’s a link to other writing samples: www.linkedin/in/aceemployee

I look forward to a further review of how my qualifications match your needs during an interview. My contact information is below. I look forward to hearing from you......

Sincerely
Here’s an example of a nicely formatted letter clearly identifying and meeting the needs of the job posting. This is a strong “sales letter” by a person positioning themselves for senior management.

Suzie Jobseeker
suzie@hireme.com

1234 Example RD
Portland, OR 97001

Date

Ms Jane Manager
Director
Amazing Company
Street Address
City, ST Zip

RE: Job Code or Title Goes here

Dear Ms. Manager,

Building sustainable corporate value is my expertise with value measured in aggressive strategic marketing in present and emerging market sectors. I’ve achieved results when challenged to launch a startup of a new business unit, exceeding quarterly projections 11%. During the roll out of a new branding program of INTERESTING COMPANY NAME (ICM) signature GREAT PRODUCT, my team realized a 35% increase in click through on the web based marketing I managed.

My strengths lie in my ability to formulate and initiate strategic marketing plans that identify new market areas and negotiate strategic partnerships allowing market expansion and revenue growth. Most recently I was tasked with expanding ICM’s market reach through a diversified portfolio of new business development, advertising and the introduction of GREAT PRODUCT. By building a sense of entrepreneurial spirit and vision onto my team, we were able to capitalize our creativity and create some innovative strategies allowing us to propel our web strategies well beyond projected benchmarks. This positioning allowed accelerated revenue growth for GREAT PRODUCT moving it into its current market domination.

While I enjoy my current position, I am exploring new opportunities that will allow me to further grow my potential as a marketing executive in a progressive organization. I believe I have the strong creative and innovative leadership skills AMAZING COMPANY requires to position your products into market dominance. My resume details my experience, and when we meet, I can expand on what I’ve accomplished and the ways I will assist you in achieving significant revenue growth and market visibility for AMAZING COMPANY. I look forward to our meeting.

Cordially

Suzie Jobseeker
Enclosure: Resume
4. Here’s an example of a letter for an entry level position for someone who has more education than practical experience. This is also an example of how to start the letter when you don’t have any address information or have been unable to find out the name of the hiring manager.

ABC Company
Company Street Address
City, State, zip code

SUBJECT: RESUME OF JOHN JOBSEEKER

ABC COMPANY is one of the leaders in the electronics industry! As a recent honors graduate with a BS in Business Management from Marylhurst University, I believe my education, internship experience and practical work experience in various business settings gives me the background you require for your financial team members.

Enclosed is a copy of my resume that details my academic qualifications and practical experience gained through our demanding program. It also details the internship I completed giving me real world practical skills in project management. I am ready to begin my career as a Financial Systems Analyst.

Thank you for taking your time to review my resume. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss how my education, practical skills, and background would qualify me to be a member of the ABC Company.

Please contact me at 555-555-5555 or name@email.com to set up a time for an interview. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Ace Employee
My address
My email/phone number/LinkedIn
5. **TELLING A STORY**

Whenever you can, tell a brief story in your cover letter. A well crafted story that tells how you solved one of the job descriptions needs invites your reader to relate to you immediately, because you related to their needs! This is an effective strategy even if you have little experience. Showing that you have a clear understanding of what a company needs or does allows the reader to see you as a member of the team.

*Here’s an example of using a STORY to relate to the company needs. This job seeker is a recent college graduate, but has a life history match for the needs of the organization creating a connection.*

**Dear Mr. Specific Name**

My deep rooted passion for international travel will enable me to serve as your international consultant based in Japan. I’ve had a life-long passion for international travel and a curiosity for investigating other cultures. As a child, my grandparents filled my curiosity about the world with brightly colored postage stamps for my collection, beautiful post cards of places I vowed to one day see, and a room full of dolls dressed in various native costumes. My first overseas adventure occurred when I was 12 when I traveled with them for the summer visiting several European countries. I was an exchange student in Japan during my senior year of high school and in college I completed a three month internship with a business consulting company in Taiwan.

As a new graduate in international trade and consulting, I can offer your company expertise in meeting and exceeding your export/import needs. My superb organization skills, firm understanding of global trade regulations, and awareness of the bottom line proved highly beneficial in my recent internship with Lo Sung Imports. Additionally I bring the following experiences and skills to the position:

- Ability to manage post trade follow up on delivery, quality specification, regulatory issues, and change orders
- Experience with international travel and living abroad and collaborating with individuals from various cultures with varied communication skills, work habits, and expectations.
- Strong work ethic combined with the ability to perform in high pressure, fast paced environments with long hours.
- Fluency in Taiwanese, Japanese, and English
- Outstanding computer skills with particular expertise in Microsoft Project Manager

My Masters in International Business, previous work experience, and skills living abroad, coupled with my problem solving and action driven leadership skills make me an ideal candidate for the consulting position you are seeking. My childhood dream of global travel has transformed me into a competent professional ready to carry the mission of your company forward on the global stage. I look forward to the invitation to speak with you on how I may contribute to the success of your company. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

**Sincerely**

Jane Job Seeker
This letter works because it is concise, incorporates the story into the theme of the letter and ties it together by briefly referring back to the story in the last paragraph. Other aspects of an effective story themed cover letter should include stories that relate specific and quantifiable results. Employers like to see facts and figures. Being able to paint a picture of you succeeding on the job allows them to “see” you actually doing the job. Make sure the stories are relevant to the employers needs by identifying the problems you can solve and the outcomes you can achieve. Tell stories that are relevant and concisely make connections between the skills and qualifications the story illustrates.

The job posting will provide you the necessary story cues. Ensure that your cover letter’s story responds to the job posting intent. You’ll do this best when you incorporate the job posting’s keywords and the tasks/responsibilities you mention in your cover letter. Research the appropriate language of the prospective employer by studying the employer’s website and print publications about the company. Find the buzz words or keywords and phrases you see most and write those “back” to the employer in your cover letter. This is called language-mirroring. Employers who “hear” their words mirrored back to them assume you “get it” and more easily see you as a potential team member. In summary make sure your story based cover letters are:

• Concise
• Integrate the story theme throughout
• Provide specific and quantifiable results
• Relevant to the employers requirements and the results you can achieve
• Effectively uses the employers language and message
6. USING A TABLE

Another interesting way to showcase your qualifications as a match to employer needs is to craft a cover letter that includes a table comparing needs and qualifications. This can be tricky as you do not want to simply create your resume in table form. When you decide to showcase your talents in this way, pull out the most critical keywords or requirements and write brief bullet points about your skills that match the need. This can be a very effective way to insure that your most important qualifications are not overlooked.

A TABLE sample follows:

Dear ____________,

I am responding to job posting 1234, Event and Volunteer Program Specialist. My ten plus years in the educational event field are a great match for the needs described in the job posting:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVENTS AND EDUCATION COMPANY NEEDS</th>
<th>YOUR NAME QUALIFICATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Events and Facilities Management**                                   | • Three years producing and managing State Museum events increasing attendance 15% annually and meeting financial goals.  
• Created/produced educational public programming including content specific professional talks, educational family events, and membership enhancement events.  
• Managed all aspects of event/facility needs including vendor relations, contracts, set up/take down, volunteer coordination, technical needs such as audio/visual, off site transportation, ticket sales, crowd management. |
| **Staff and Volunteer Management**                                     | • 9 years developing/managing volunteer programs for 2 museums with an average donation of 25,000 hrs/annually.  
• 10+ years managing/training staff/volunteers in the art of exceeding visitor expectations through outstanding customer service and inquiry based experiential education.  
• Over 15 years managing from 2-200 staff/volunteers in non profit and for profit settings including science museums, retail, and radio stations. |
| **Marketing/Community Outreach**                                       | • Over 10 years experience writing/producing radio/television advertising for a variety of clients in a variety of markets.  
• Over 10 years experience producing printed collateral materials including brochures, flyers, booklets, press releases, fact sheets, talking points, media kits, position papers.  
• Collaborated with a variety of community partners to build support for programs. Partners included: City/county government offices, USFS, BLM, schools, service organizations, donors/sponsors, other nonprofit partners.  
• Proficient with a variety of social media tools including blogs, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn etc.  
• Developed and managed volunteer powered community outreach program exceeding membership sales goals by 10% |
| **Relationship building**                                              | • Developed beautification project with City initiating partnerships between Parks Dept, community volunteers, Chamber of Commerce, small businesses.  
• Solicited $25,000 in sponsorships and donations to support a variety of educational events/programs.  
• Resolved sensitive union concerns about how volunteers would be integrated into facility. |
Creating a sustainable, profitable outreach education program to further enhance the ability of Event and Education Company’s mission to provide learner driven education for the rural communities of Small County will be my goal. As my resume details I have significant experience producing and managing profitable, visitor pleasing programs. My experience managing event volunteers and working with outside vendors will allow me to manage budgets with a bottom line focus. As a long time resident of Small County, I am familiar with many of the local businesses, schools, and other organizations that work with Event and Education Company and feel confident in my ability to build on those relationships for continued success.

I look forward to talking with you about how I can move your educational event program forward. My contact information is below. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Special Note: Pay attention to the emphasis on hard numbers. You’ll notice there are percentages, dollar values, and people numbers listed frequently. Employers like to see results backed up with hard figures. Of course, only include this type of information when you can easily substantiate it.

Special Note: The table or T-Format cover letter can have a drawback, in that the writer may have less of an opportunity to showcase effective, persuasive writing styles. For some jobs, especially those that are focused on specific measurable outcomes, this style immediately calls attention to deliverables.
SUMMARY

The cover letter gives the writer an opportunity to show effective written communication abilities. If you think of the cover letter as a “sales” letter, much like the fund-raising appeal letter you no doubt have had cross your mailbox at one point or another, it becomes easier to write. You must think of yourself as the “product”. Your objective to is to generate an action, in this case for the reader to feel interested enough to want to read your resume.

Some career professionals and recruiters tell us that only cover letters included in the body of the email will be read. Others say they are less likely to open BOTH a cover letter attachment and a resume, instead they only open the resume, so some say make the cover letter the first page of the resume. The risk here however, might be having to condense your resume too much so you don’t go over two pages, or of having a recruiter see the unfamiliar format of a letter instead of a resume and toss your resume out because they didn’t see what they expected right away.

Finally, make sure your cover letter is flawless. PROOFREAD! Then proofread again. Have another person read it to make sure it conveys information clearly and concisely. Make sure you have spelled the company name correctly AND spelled the name of the hiring manager correctly. Many forgive the occasional typo, but getting the company name and company contact wrong is unforgiveable!

There are thousands of excellent resources on the internet on writing effective cover letters. You’ll even find some companies that allow you to plug in information while their software creates a nicely crafted cover letter for you. Still, it’s always best if your cover letter reflect the real you. This is the opportunity to showcase not only your skills, but your passion about the field of work you hope to do. Employers may go to your LinkedIn profile or your Facebook page to see more about you these days, but there will always be some hiring managers who get a sense for who you are from what you write!
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There are many great resources on line for crafting a great cover letter, many of the best are blogs and career services pages on university websites. Simply type in your search bar: “Cover letter examples”, or “how to write a great cover letter”, and you are on your way. Here’s a few we like:

http://www.cover-letters.com/

http://www.resumecoverletter.net/

http://jobsearch.about.com/

http://www.bridgestar.org/Library/SampleCoverLetter.aspx

http://www.pongoresume.com/blogTopics/35/cover-letters.cfm


Louise Kursmark, an award winning resume writer, widely published author in the careers field, and president of Best Impression Career Services has a free special report detailing the “ABC’s of Great Cover Letters” you’ll find it at: http://www.yourbestimpression.com/download/SpecialReport-cvrlttrs.pdf

Want to try an online cover letter builder: go here: http://www.cover-letter-now.com