TIPS FOR A STANDOUT COVER LETTER

The purpose of a cover letter is to briefly introduce yourself and highlight your qualifications for the position to which you are applying. You do not want to repeat specific content on resume, but peak the employer’s interest to read it more closely. Always include a cover letter whenever you submit a resume, even if it is not specifically requested.

CONTENT

- A cover letter should be written specifically for each position. Employers need to know that you want their job, not just any job.
- Research the employer and the organization before you start writing your cover letter. Conducting an informational interview with an alumna/us (using the LinkedIn general search or the Career Community Groups on LinkedIn) is a great way to take online research to the next level and distinguish you from other candidates. (See the CEO handout on informational interviewing).
- Utilize this information and the specific contact's name in your letter to explain why you are interested in that particular company.
- When writing your cover letter, always open with why YOU would be an ideal candidate for the specific job.
- Describe courses, experiences and skills, which make you a good fit for the position. Use the job description to help guide your letter, addressing specifically how you can meet the requirements of the position. You need to make the connection between you and the position clear. Be sure to include details from the job description or your research to show your preparation.
- Again, do not restate your resume (most importantly, do not use exact phrases). Explain how you used your skills or tell a story about your experiences.
- Some employers specifically state that they will not accept phone calls. Making a follow-up phone call (if acceptable) can be a great way to distinguish yourself from other candidates. State that you will call to make sure your cover letter was received; learn about your status, and arrange an interview in your closing paragraph. If you write this, be sure you do it!

FORMAT & STYLE

- Keep your cover letter to one page, so it is quick and easy to read.
- Avoid lengthy paragraphs in your cover letter, three to five simple sentences per paragraph is best.
- Bulleted lists are one way to make specific qualifications prominent.
- Vary sentence structures as you write in first person. Starting all sentences with “I” or “my” is not very interesting.
- Be aware that cover letters submitted electronically may have problems with formatting (indents, bold type, italics, etc.) so be sure to keep the formatting simple. Convert the letter to a PDF to ensure the formatting remains consistent.
- Typos in a cover letter are easily missed, so be sure to proofread and have someone else look at it too. The staff at the CEO would be happy to review your cover letter. Come to Drop-In Hours or schedule an appointment.
- If you email the resume, write a brief note in the email, then attach your cover letter and resume as separate PDF documents.

BASIC OUTLINE

- **Header:** You could format as a traditional business letter, as Marie’s letter shows. Another option is to use the same header as your resume, as Jordan’s letter shows, so that it is clear the documents go together.
- **Address & Salutation:** Address the letter to the person managing the hiring process or making the hiring decision. Check the organizations’ website or Linked In to find the appropriate person’s name and title. You could also call the organization to do this. As a last resort you can address to “Hiring Manager” or “Human Resource Representative.”
- **Opening Paragraph:** Hook the reader with an interesting opening that clearly articulates why you want to work for that organization. Identify the specific position to which you are applying and how you learned of it. Mention any referral if applicable.
- **Body Paragraph(s):** Briefly describe your strongest qualifications by using examples from your internships, employment, coursework, and co-curricular activities, as it relates to the position description. Highlight particularly relevant experience without repeating your resume. Interject your own style and personality into the letter by discussing your skills. Utilize wording used by the employer in the position description.
- **Closing Paragraph:** End your letter with your follow up action plan including when you will contact the employer. Express your appreciation.
- **Signature and Attachment:** You can sign and scan the letter, add an electronic version of your signature, or simply type your name. Adding attachment indicates that the reader should know there is an additional document(s) for their review.

For other tips & questions, contact the CEO at 410-337-6191 or visit the CEO website at [www.goucher.edu/CEO](http://www.goucher.edu/CEO)

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