

## 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--you can schedule an appointment in Handshake.
- 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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410-337-xxxx

Today's date

Ms. Mary Jones  
Managing Editor  
Baltimore Sun  
Xxxxxx Street  
Baltimore, MD 21204

Dear Ms. Jones:

My morning is not complete without a cup of coffee and the Baltimore Sun. I'm particularly drawn to the concise writing style of City Hall reporter Julie Scharper. Having spoken with Education reporter Liz Bowie last week, I've learned about the newsroom and the Sun's philosophy on reporting, which only solidified my desire to work at the Sun. In addition to my love for all things Baltimore, my strong writing and editing background make me an asset to my hometown paper. Please accept this letter as my application for the reporter position at the Baltimore Sun, which was recently advertised on Handshake.

My writing and editing experience has been developed and honed in a variety of settings. As both a staff writer for the Goucher newspaper and a staff assistant for the Baltimore City Paper, I organized, analyzed and prioritized information quickly to provide a clear story to the reader and consistently met deadlines. Attention to detail, concentration, grammar and research skills enabled me to effectively edit and accurately check facts. Having coordinated the production of a 100-page campus yearbook, I've developed a keen eye for layout and visually representing a story.

Strong organizational, computer, and leadership are other skills I can bring to the Sun. Whether supervising a floor of student residents or organizing a fundraising event attended by over 200, I'm able to manage multiple projects independently and execute them effectively. I am proficient with MS Word, Excel, Access, and Publisher.

The combination of my skills and experiences, as well as my knowledge of the area, make me a definite asset to the Baltimore Sun. I look forward to speaking to you soon to discuss this position and my application further. Thank you in advance for considering my application.

Sincerely,

Goucher Q. Graduate

Enclosure

## Header

You could format as a traditional business letter, shown here. Another option is to use the same header as your resume, so that it's clear the documents go together.

## Address & Salutation

Address the letter to the person managing the hiring process or making the hiring decision. Contact the organization to inquire and verify spelling of hiring manager's name, title, company, and address, unless they state no phone calls please. 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 Enclosure

Sign the letter with a good pen. Add "enclosure" (if sent via USPS) or "attachment" (if emailed) at the end of the letter. Remember to include resume or other required documents such as transcripts or writing samples.