

MOUNT HOLYOKE
CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER
Phone 413-538-2080/Fax 413-538-2081

30-Second Scan for Cover Letters

A cover letter should accompany every resume you send to a prospective employer. It is designed to introduce your resume and intrigue the reader so she or he will want to read it. The letter should be brief and personal, address the needs of the specific employer, and reflect your enthusiasm about the opportunity for which you are applying. Employers usually spend less than 30 seconds initially examining your cover letter. The decision to consider your qualifications can depend on how well written, concise, and interesting your cover letter is. If your cover letter does not catch the attention of the reader, she or he may not even look at your resume.

Use the following checklist to ensure that your cover letter is in its optimal shape.

- Length**
One page of three or four brief paragraphs
- Paper Quality**
20-25% bond paper that matches your resume in white, off-white, or ivory
- Letter Quality**
Font Style: Match your resume with Times New Roman, Garamond (avoid serif for scannable resumes), Arial, Helvetica
Font Size: 10 to 12 point
Presentation: Laser printed with watermark up and facing the right direction
- Balanced Page - Spacing and Placement of Information**
Center the letter on the page; use standard business letter format with margins of 1 inch
- Address and Salutation**
Avoid addressing your letter to "Dear Sir or Madam" or "To Whom it May Concern." Address it to the hiring authority using his or her name and title. Verify the spelling of the person's name, title, company name, and mailing address
- Opening Paragraph**
Introduce yourself, stating clearly your reason for writing. Identify the position for which you would like to be considered, mentioning how you learned about it. Make note of a referral if applicable. Explain your interest in the company
- Body Paragraph(s)**
Briefly describe your strongest qualifications for the position by using examples from your internships, employment, coursework, and co-curricular activities. Highlight particularly relevant experience without repeating your resume. Be positive about your abilities and their relevance to the position
- Closing Paragraph**
End your letter actively rather than passively. Avoid saying "I will wait to hear from you." State your follow-up action, which may include calling on a specific date to arrange a convenient time for an interview. Remind the employer how you can be reached. Express your appreciation
- Signature and Enclosure**
Sign the letter, preferably in black ink. Add "enclosure(s)" at the end of the letter.
Include resume or other documents such as transcripts, writing samples, or references.
- Spelling, Punctuation, and Writing Style:** Proofread! Proofread! Proofread!

Cover Letter Writing Action Plan

The next thing I need to do to improve my cover letter is...

Cover Letter Preparation Tips

Target each cover letter to a specific position or function within an organization. Address your correspondence to the person with hiring authority, using his or her name and title. Tailor your letter to the specific needs and characteristics of each organization. A "form" cover letter is never appropriate.

Be simple and brief. Say what you mean without verbosity. Keep your paragraphs to four or five sentences. Vary the sentence structure to limit the use of the words "I" and "My" to begin sentences. Use terminology of the career field to display your familiarity with the profession.

Use the first sentence of each paragraph strategically. Your reader may skim the letter and only read the first sentence. Be sure your message gets conveyed.

Identify yourself as a good solution to the employer's needs. Answer the employer's question, "What's in it for me?" Relate your strengths to the requirements of the position and explain how you meet the qualifications. Be employer-centered, not self-centered by stressing what you can contribute to the position, not what you want out of it.

Highlight important aspects of your resume. Use key phrases to bring your reader's attention to the major achievements and talent that make you a good candidate. Use specific examples to sell your skills.

Don't highlight any weaknesses in your qualifications. If you do not have experience in one aspect, don't make excuses; state that you look forward to the challenge of learning. Always represent yourself in a positive way.

Read the letter aloud to several other people to see if it sounds natural, sincere, and professional.

A resume will usually accompany your cover letter. The resume is your marketing tool and is designed to get you an interview. See the CDC handouts *Resume Writing* and *30-Second Scan for Resumes* for tips.

Key Descriptive Words

adept	energetic	productive
assertively	enterprising	quick
ambitious	exceptional	readily
analytical	extensively	realistic
artful	foresight	reliable
astute	highly	repeatedly
broad	imaginative	resourceful
competent	increasingly	responsible
concerned	initiative	responsive
conscientious	innovative	sensitive
creative	instrumental	significantly
dependable	logical	sophisticated
diplomatic	mastery	strong
disciplined	objective	tactful
diverse	outgoing	trained
dynamic	outstanding	uncommon
effectively	penetrating	unique
efficient	perceptive	versatile
empathetic	pioneering	vigorous

