

Career Development Center

CONSTRUCTING A COVER LETTER/ INQUIRY LETTER

KEY ELEMENTS

Writing a cover letter/inquiry is like writing a brief persuasive essay. With the cover letter, you are able to write about your skills and qualifications as they directly relate to a position to which you are applying. In an inquiry letter, you are speaking to your experiences and skills but in a more general sense with the intent of demonstrating your fit, match, and/or candidacy for a possible future opening with a company or organization. In either of these documents, you will make a thesis statement or a claim about something, back up that claim with evidence and then draw it to a close. Once again, the key elements are your:

1. **Thesis statement**

In this case, it would be that you are an excellent candidate for a given opportunity (i.e. job description of your choice) because of your specific skills, abilities, experience.

2. **Evidence**

Support your thesis statement with brief, specific examples of relevant skills, abilities or experiences that make you an excellent candidate.

3. **Closing statement**

Affirm your interest in the opportunity, request an interview or say when and how you will follow-up, and thank the employer for considering your application.

Remember that cover/inquiry letters build a bridge between your resume and the opportunity at hand. Focus on the most relevant, strongest skills you bring to the employer.

Both standard and common examples of cover letters are provided on pages three and four of this packet.

GUIDELINES

- **Be simple and brief.** Say what you mean without verbosity. Keep it to one page, 3-5 paragraphs long consisting of 2-5 sentences each. You should use terminology and buzzwords of the career field to display your familiarity with the profession, but do not overdo it.
- **Only make statements that can be verified.** You should be able to cite specific examples that demonstrate your skills.
- **Identify yourself as a good solution to the employer's needs.** Relate your strengths to the requirements of the position and explain how you meet the qualifications. Stress 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 talents that make you a good candidate.

- **Research the company before you write.** Review websites, brochures, and conduct an internet search to glean pertinent information that can inform your approach to the letter.
- **Use active, descriptive words.** The following page is a list of dynamic active and descriptive words to help you develop your cover letter.

MOST COMMON ERRORS

- **Sending a generic letter to all employers.** Tailor each letter to the specific needs and characteristics of each organization. Try to create an industry-specific cover/inquiry letter that is easily adaptable so you do not have to completely rewrite each time.
- **Neglecting to double (and triple) check that the person/company to whom you have addressed the letter is the same as the person/company to whom you refer in the body of the letter.** Be sure to change all references to match each employer's name, organization, and type of business or the position involved.
- **Writing to negate your “weaknesses” instead of focusing on your strengths.** Focus on matching your skills to the job description and/or the organization/company's vision. Avoid beginning sentences with “although.”
- **Stating that you are willing or able to do “any or every job.”** Instead, show that you have direction and are self-aware by being specific in what you want to do and for whom (i.e. the company or organization to which you are applying).
- **Using superficial or flowery terms** such as: “hardworking,” “loyal,” “love,” “perfect,” or “passionate.”
- **Submitting the document with errors and/or typos.** Do not rely solely on the computer's spell-check function. Proofread and edit thoroughly. Ask a friend, relative or CDC staff member to do the same.
- **Letters sent by email need not be signed.** However, if you are sending a hardcopy or faxed letter, be sure you sign it.

DYNAMIC WORDS FOR RESUME & COVER LETTER PREPARATION

Active Words

accomplished	conducted	expanded	modified	revamped
achieved	consolidated	explored	monitored	reviewed
acquired	constructed	facilitated	motivated	revised
adapted	contacted	financed	negotiated	scheduled
adjusted	controlled	forecasted	observed	searched
administered	conveyed	formulated	operated	selected
advised	coordinated	fostered	organized	served
advocated	corresponded	functioned	oversaw	shaped
allocated	counseled	generated	participated	simplified
analyzed	created	governed	performed	sold
applied	critiqued	guided	persuaded	solicited
appraised	decided	identified	planned	solved
approved	delegated	illustrated	predicted	specified
arranged	demonstrated	implemented	prepared	staged
assembled	designed	improved	presented	stimulated
assessed	determined	increased	presided	studied
assigned	developed	influenced	processed	succeeded
assisted	devised	informed	produced	suggested
attained	diagnosed	initiated	promoted	supervised
budgeted	directed	inspected	proposed	surveyed
built	discovered	instructed	proved	synthesized
calculated	displayed	interpreted	provided	systematized
catalogued	distributed	interviewed	published	taught
categorized	drafted	introduced	raised profits	tested
chaired	dramatized	investigated	recommended	trained
changed	earned	judged	recorded	translated
coached	edited	lectured	recruited	tutored
collaborated	elicited	led	reduced costs	updated
collected	eliminated	located	regulated	utilized
communicated	employed	maintained	reorganized	verified
compiled	enlarged	managed	reported	wrote
completed	equipped	marketed	researched	
composed	established	mastered	resolved	
computed	evaluated	measured	restored	
conceived	examined	mediated	retained	

Descriptive Words

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

FORMAL COVER LETTER EXAMPLE

Your name

Current Address
City, State, Zipcode

Date

Mr./Ms./Dr. Name

Title _____ →

Organization/Company Name

Street Address

City, State, Zipcode

Make a phone call or two to find out the correct name, spelling, and title, of the individual you should contact if it is unclear in the job posting to whom you should address the letter. If no name is provided, use *Human Resources, Search Committee, or Hiring Manager.*

Dear Ms./Mr./Dr. Last Name:

1st Paragraph- State why you are writing. Name the position or the type of work for which you are applying. Mention how you heard about the job opening. Make a claim as to why you are an excellent candidate for the position (Hint: This is your thesis statement for the letter).

2nd Paragraph or 2nd and 3rd Paragraph- This is where you will elaborate on your thesis. Do not directly repeat information from your resume. Highlight the skills or areas of expertise you will bring to the position, i.e., your educational credentials, employment experience, and personal **attributes that qualify you for the position** by including specific examples from your experiences. Also, think about who the reader is: what skills are valued in this particular field? What are some of the issues or trends this employer might be facing? How can you make a contribution to this organization? If you've "done your homework" you'll already be aware of some of the answers as well as some terminology of the field. Reflect this awareness and knowledge in your letter.

Closing paragraph- Refer the reader to the enclosed resume. State that additional information concerning your background and interests will gladly be furnished upon request (this includes your references). State that you will contact them (usually in a week) to see if you might set up a mutually convenient time to meet, or that you may be contacted at either your email address or phone. Include both your phone number and email address because neither appears above. In the event of an on-campus interview or previously agreed upon action, state that you look forward to talking with the employer about the opportunity in the near future. Thank the reader for their time and consideration of your application.

Sincerely,

(Space for your signature)

Typed Name

Enclosure

If you are asked to send your resume and cover letter via U.S. Mail, use quality stationary and envelopes that match as well as heavier paper such as cardstock. Presentation will be critical in setting yourself apart from the rest of the candidates.

COMMON COVER LETTER EXAMPLE

Your Name
Current Address, City, State, Zipcode
Email address and Phone Number



Date

Mr./Ms./Dr. Name
Title
Organization/Company Name
Street Address
City, State, Zipcode

This format mimics that of your resume. If you are sending this cover letter via email, placing your name at the top in the same format as your resume (such as the one used in this example) helps the employer keep all of your documents together during the hiring process. It also looks more professional and organized.

Dear Ms./Mr./Dr. Last Name:

1st Paragraph- State why you are writing. Name the position or the type of work for which you are applying. Mention how you heard about the job opening. Make a claim as to why you are an excellent candidate for the position (Hint: This is your thesis statement for the letter).

2nd Paragraph or 2nd and 3rd Paragraph- This is where you will elaborate on your thesis. Do not directly repeat information from your resume. Highlight the skills or areas of expertise you will bring to the position, i.e., your educational credentials, employment experience, and personal **attributes that qualify you for the position** by including specific examples from your experiences. Some significant skills employers always seek are leadership, decision-making, and communication. Include these if you have the experience to support such claims. Also, think about who the reader is: what skills are valued in this particular field? What are some of the issues or trends this employer might be facing? How can you make a contribution to this organization? If you've "done your homework" you'll already be aware of some of the answers as well as some terminology of the field of choice. Reflect this awareness and knowledge in your letter. This paragraph is the key to differentiating yourself from the next candidate.

Closing paragraph- Refer the reader to the enclosed resume. State that additional information concerning your background and interests will gladly be furnished upon request (this includes your references). State that you will contact them (usually in a week) to see if you might set up a mutually convenient time to meet, or that you may be contacted at either your email address or phone. Include both your phone number and email address because neither appears above. In the event of an on-campus interview or previously agreed upon action, state that you look forward to talking with the employer about the opportunity in the near future. Thank the reader for their time and consideration of your application.

Sincerely,

(Space for your signature)

Typed Name

Enclosure

Remember to make a phone call or two to find out the correct name, spelling, and title, of the individual you should contact if it is unclear in the job posting to whom you should address the letter. If no name is provided, use *Human Resources, Search Committee, or Hiring Manager*.

INTRODUCTORY EMAIL/ INQUIRY LETTER EXAMPLE

If you are seeking a career mentorship, self-developed, or potential full-time job opportunity, then the sample, suggestions and feedback for doing so explained below will be helpful to you.

You will want to keep the email and/or inquiry letter to two or three short paragraphs. This type of email should generally be shorter than a regular cover letter and the inquiry letter is usually somewhere in between and definitely more formal than an email. No matter what type of letter or inquiry you are sending, be sure to always be professional, polite, and direct about what you are seeking or what you would like to gain from this interaction.

Date _____ →

Include if you are sending an actual letter out to someone via mail or are attaching this document to an email

Dear Ms./Mr./Dr./Professor _____,

1st paragraph:

- Introduce yourself - name, Mount Holyoke student, class year, major/minor or in consideration
- State how you found this person –example mentoring program in LifeNet, X organization, or X interests
 - Consider putting something unique and very brief about you that will interest or excite this person, your background, your passions, academic topics of interest, your home city/country
 - You want to catch their attention to show them that you have thought about this connection you are trying to make with them and your career interests/opportunity.

2nd/3rd paragraph(s):

- Mention one or two specific questions or topics which you are seeking advice AND/OR ask whether they would be willing to X (Your purpose – job shadow, in-person 30 minute meeting, phone conversation, etc) over X period of time (be flexible).
- You may also discuss your ability to assist the company/person/lab/organization in achieving a specific goal or completing a specific project.
- Provide examples of the skills and experience you already bring to the table and how you might be able to contribute. In this way, you will be building a case for yourself to the employer or point of contact so they can get to know you a bit and understand what time of work, position, or opportunity you are seeking.

3rd/4th paragraph:

- Thank them for their time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Full Name 'Class Year

This is optional here as you may want to put this information in the first paragraph when you introduce yourself.

Email address

Phone number

This information could be embedded in the text you write in your concluding paragraph after you thank them for their time and considering. You may suggest that they contact you at either of these contacts.