



# The Cover Letter

## WHAT IS A COVER LETTER?

### A cover letter IS...

- A chance to make a case for yourself and your candidacy so the employer brings you in for an interview to learn more
- A targeted introduction to your application that relates specifically to the position
- An opportunity to make connections between your education, experience, and skills and the qualifications sought by an employer.
- A sample of your writing skills

### A cover letter IS NOT...

- A general introduction to your application
- A list of accomplishments
- A summary of your resume
- Something to write quickly and without thought
- Less important than your resume
- Something you should skip. Even if the employer does not request a cover letter, we recommend you write one.

## WHY IS THE COVER LETTER IMPORTANT?

When employers scan your resume, they are interpreting your skills and experiences through their own lens, and as much as you try to target your resume to a specific position, the employer may not understand what you have to offer the same way you do. The cover letter is your chance to connect the dots between your qualifications and what the employer wants or needs. You know exactly why you're qualified for the position, but the employer may need help understanding what makes you such a unique, strong candidate. In a cover letter, you can spell this out for them!

## DEVELOPING YOUR COVER LETTER

Each cover letter you write should be distinct as you target it to a specific job with its own set of responsibilities and qualifications in a specific organization with its own culture and mission. For this reason, writing a cover letter takes time. Do not rush the process. Before you even start to write the letter, spend time doing the following:

- **Read the job description** and highlight skills you have and may want to address.
- **Do research on the organization** to get a sense of the culture, what they value, and what they might be looking for in candidates that is not explicitly mentioned in the posting. If you want guidance on how and where to do research, see the Employer Research page of the Career Services website.

- **List the skills and qualities** you think the employer is looking for based on the posting and your research.
- **Identify relevant past and present experiences or accomplishments.** The goal is to demonstrate specifically how you have developed skills or qualities that qualify you for this new position. The skills and qualities do NOT have to be directly related to the internship but should be relevant to the skills the employer is seeking. For instance, if you are applying for a scientific research position, but do not have direct experience, think about other positions in which you have developed your attention to detail, ability to work with others, additional research skills or scientific knowledge, etc.
- **Select two or three** specific concrete examples of experiences or accomplishments that you think are most relevant or important to highlight in your letter.
- **Use the \*STAR\* method** to flesh out your examples with details. The idea is to *show* how you developed the skills, not just to tell the employer you have them.
  - **S**ituation – Give background that will help provide context, i.e. title, organization, department, project, timeframe.
  - **T**ask – Describe what was expected or asked of you in terms of responsibilities OR the challenges or obstacles you had to overcome.
  - **A**ction – Detail the specific action steps that you took to handle the tasks or address the obstacle.
  - **R**esult – What impact did you have on the situation? What was the outcome or what did you learn? Quantify or qualify your results if you can. (E.g. Initiated a program that was attended by more than half the dormitory residents, far exceeding expectations.)

### **For example...**

[S] This past summer I was a Teaching and Residential Faculty Intern at Philip Exeter’s Summer Academy. [T] I had the assignment of co-teaching a Neuropsychology course – a subject I knew absolutely nothing about. Taking the challenge head on, [A] I worked with my co-teacher to develop a method of teaching where she taught basic concepts while I researched and shared the ways the concepts applied in the real world. For example, I found an engaging article about scientists who successfully implanted false memories in mice. I divided the students into two groups and had them debate the pros, cons, and future implications. [R] By having the students focus on the ethical side of the subject, I was able to keep all of them actively participating and excited about the complex subject of Neuropsychology. I fully plan to bring this innovative way of thinking to any collaborative work with my fellow peers as we strive to improve the products produced by Curriculum Associates, Inc.

## **WRITING & STRUCTURING YOUR COVER LETTER**

Cover letters should follow standard business format and should not be longer than three to four paragraphs. Use 10-12 font but nothing smaller. Once you have completed a draft of your letter, meet with a Peer Advisor or career advisor for review and feedback. Career Services offers drop-in hours M-F from 1:00 - 4:00 pm in Goodell. Ask a friend to proofread and edit for grammar and spelling. See the next page for information about how to structure your letter.