COVER LETTER GUIDE

WHAT IS A COVER LETTER?
The cover letter is a formal business letter that is often the first point of contact with a prospective employer. It serves as an introduction of you and your background experience. Since it is usually the first impression you make on the employer, you want it to be your best.

Many employers will not look at a resume that arrives without a cover letter. The cover letter is a marketing tool; it communicates to the employer that you are interested in their position and their company and that you have something valuable to contribute. In certain situations, a well-written cover letter can be more effective than the resume itself. Therefore, do your homework! Before writing your letter, find out as much as you can about the organization and the specific position. This research enables you to better relate your skills and qualifications to the opportunity.

Anyone who can write a grammatically correct letter can write a cover letter. However, it takes thinking and planning in order to create a cover letter that will set the stage for the employer to accept your resume as something special.

STEP 1: THE INTRODUCTION
Indicate why you’re contacting the employer, the position you are applying for, and how you became aware of this position. If you are responding to an advertisement, mention where you saw it. If an individual referred you, mention their name.

Say something very specific about why you are excited about applying for this position or this company. This shows that you have done your research. Does their product impress you? Their mission statement? The population you’ll get to work with? Take time to reflect on the question: why them for you, and why you for them?

STEP 2: THEIR NEED, YOUR EXPERIENCE
This is the most critical section. Address the hiring need and how you specifically meet their qualifications. Highlight the best evidence of your qualifications with 2-3 specific examples of experiences where you’ve already demonstrated the skills they are looking for. Convince the reader that what you have is exactly what they want. Do not copy your resume.

You may choose to incorporate a third paragraph. This is a place where you can share your qualities and characteristics with the prospective employer, giving the reader a sense of who you are and whether or not you will fit in with the company culture.

STEP 3: CONCLUSION AND CONTACT
State that you are interested in having an interview. You can include where, when, and how you can be contacted. When in a job search, one technique is to let the employer know that you will be following up in the near future.

TIP:
Don’t copy exactly what’s in your resume!
BUSINESS LETTER FORMAT
The formal business letter format is the most recommended form for the cover letter. The block-style format with all text beginning at the left margin is preferred. Paragraphs are not indented. Please refer to the sample cover letter as an example.

Address your cover letter to the individual, business function, or department most clearly related to the position for which you are applying. Always try to get the name and job title of the person who could hire you. It is okay to call the Human Resources department to find out the above information. Your cover letter and resume are more likely to be read if you are sending them to someone specific. Cover letters that are submitted to general personnel departments may not get read. However, there will be situations where you will not be able to obtain the name of a specific person, so you may want to use a title such as Personnel Director, Selection Committee, or simply stick with “To Whom It May Concern.”

ADDITIONAL TIPS

• Concentrate on “why” you desire to work in that particular organization or field.
• Focus on what you can offer the employer rather than what you can gain by working for the organization.
• Your letter should be original, brief (one page), business-like, and it should be a good example of your ability to write clearly and concisely.
• Keep your sentences ten to twenty words long.
• Limit paragraph length to five to seven sentences.
• Use powerful action phrases to describe accomplishments, qualities, and experiences.
• Try to avoid the overuse of ‘I.’
• Personalize; reflect your style by balancing professionalism with personal warmth and friendliness.
• Convey enthusiasm, commitment, and confidence.

TIP:
“Enclosure” is sometimes used at the end of a Cover Letter to signal the inclusion of a resume. This is a formal practice and is not mandatory.
January 13, 20xx

Marcia Marshon, Internship Coordinator
Electric Youth
222 N. Marengo
Pasadena, CA 91103

Dear Mx. Marshon,

I am interested in applying for the recently posted internship opportunity to work with at-risk youth as a Program Coordinator. The skills I have developed from my work experience and my academic background support my strong interest for this position. I am particularly interested in Electric Youth because of your organization’s commitment to improving children’s lives through arts education.

From my academic success in Dance and Critical Studies to applied related experience, I’ve gained a range of skills relevant to working with programs such as yours. For example, I participated in The Community Arts Partnership (CAP) program teaching Dance to at-risk youth through my institution. It is here that I fine-tuned my ability to listen and individualize instruction to students from varying socioeconomic backgrounds. Via my instruction, two young girls went from almost no participation to taking on leadership roles within the class. Additionally, I believe my ability to speak Spanish will serve me well. I am accustomed to interacting with diverse population groups and using my language skills when necessary.

I believe that there are certain personalities that are best suited to this work. I flourish when I can help people and tackle seemingly insurmountable tasks. When I tutored a fifth grade student privately for a summer and saw her grade go from a D to an A, I understood the advantages of one-on-one tutoring. I have the focus, aptitude and sense of humor to do this work.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to the opportunity to learn more about your organization and to interview for the position of Program Coordinator. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (323) 555-1234 or ssmith@alum.calarts.edu.

Sincerely,

Susan Smith