

Writing cover letters can be more challenging than perfecting a résumé. The narrative style inherent to a cover letter is less formal than the template-driven look and feel of a résumé. The cover letter provides more freedom of expression and the opportunity for the reader to get to know you, but there is also a greater chance of making a mistake. This document will outline a few steps that can help you write the perfect companion piece to your résumé.

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### ESSENTIAL COVER LETTER ELEMENTS

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While there are different types of cover letters with specific purposes, there is some basic information that all cover letters must convey.

#### **Explain why you are sending a résumé**

Don't make the reader guess what you are asking for; be clear. If you are not applying for a specific position, be sure to let the reader know why you are sending your résumé. Do you want a summer internship opportunity or a permanent position after graduation? Are you inquiring about future employment possibilities?

#### **State how you learned about the position or the organization**

Not only does this give context to your story, but it also helps the organization better understand which recruiting efforts are more effective. Did you learn about the position on a campus hosted site or via social media? Maybe it was a family friend who works at the organization? It is appropriate to mention the name of someone who suggested that you write.

#### **Reflect your attitude**

The cover letter should give the reader a glimpse of who you are, what you are about, and introduce your communication style. Why are you interested in the position or organization? What do you hope to achieve through this opportunity?

#### **Provide or refer to any specifically requested information**

If the job advertisement requests information that might not be covered in your résumé, such as your availability date or a writing sample, make sure to provide the information or note that it is enclosed with the letter/email.

#### **Close with a request**

Be clear about what it is that you want. While you don't want to be too forward, you do need to be positive in your outlook. For example, "thank you for your consideration" is a civil, appropriate close, but "thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to speaking with you soon" shows more confidence without seeming arrogant.

#### **Choose your font carefully**

Just like in your résumé, use a reasonable font. 10-12 pt. Arial, Times New Roman, or Palatino Linotype are easy to read and allow your letter to be remembered for content, not just style.

\*The content for this document and sample cover letters below come from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University's "Career Services" webpage ed. 2013.

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## SAMPLE COVER LETTERS AND FORMAT GUIDELINES

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*For hard copy cover letters, include your contact information at the top. Your address and the date can be left justified or centered.*

Your Street Address  
City, State Zip Code  
Telephone Number  
E-mail Address

Month, Day, Year

Mr./Ms./Dr. FirstName LastName  
Title  
Name of Organization  
Street or P. O. Box Address  
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. LastName:

**Opening paragraph:** State why you are writing, how you learned of the organization or position, and basic information about yourself.

**2nd paragraph:** Explain why you are interested in the employer or type of work the employer does. Simply stating that you are interested does not tell the reader why. Demonstrate that you know enough about the employer or position to relate your background to the employer or position. Mention specific qualifications which make you a good fit for the employer's needs. (Focus on what you can do for the employer, not what the employer can do for you.) This is an opportunity to explain in more detail relevant items in your résumé. Refer to the fact that your résumé is enclosed. Mention other enclosures if such are required to apply for a position.

**3rd paragraph:** Indicate that you would like the opportunity to interview for a position or to talk with the employer to learn more about their opportunities or hiring plans. State what you will do to follow up, such as telephone the employer within two weeks. If you will be in the employer's location and could offer to schedule a visit, indicate when. State that you would be glad to provide the employer with any additional information needed. Thank the employer for his or her consideration.

Sincerely,

Your handwritten signature (on hard copy)

Your name typed

Include enclosure(s): Résumé, writing sample, etc.

(Note: the contents of your letter might best be arranged into four paragraphs. Consider what you need to say and use good writing style. See the following examples for variations in organization and layout.)

**Letter of Application, E-mail Version**

*Make sure the subject line is logical to the recipient.*

Subject line: Application for sales representative for mid-Atlantic area

April 14, 2013

Mr. William Jackson  
Employment Manager  
Acme Pharmaceutical Corporation  
13764 Jefferson Parkway  
Roanoke, VA 24019  
jackson@acmepharmaceutical.com

Dear Mr. Jackson:

From the Acme web site I learned about your need for a sales representative for the Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina areas. I am very interested in this position with Acme Pharmaceuticals, and I believe that my education and employment background are appropriate for the position.

You indicate that a requirement for the position is a track record of success in meeting sales goals. I have done this. After completion of my B.S. in biology, and prior to beginning my master's degree in marketing, I worked for two years as a sales representative with a regional whole foods company. My efforts yielded success in new business development, and my sales volume consistently met or exceeded company goals. I would like to repeat that success in the pharmaceutical industry, using my academic background in science and business. I will complete my M.S. in marketing in mid-May and will be available to begin employment in early June.

Attached is a copy of my résumé, which more fully details my qualifications for the position.

I look forward to talking with you regarding sales opportunities with Acme Pharmaceuticals. Within the next week I will contact you to confirm that you received my e-mail and résumé and to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you very kindly for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Layne A. Johnson  
5542 Hunt Club Lane, #1  
Blacksburg, VA 24060  
(540) 555-8082  
lajohnson@vt.edu

Résumé attached as MS Word document (*assuming company web site instructed applicants to do this*).

**Letter of Inquiry about Employment Possibilities, E-mail Version**

Subject: Inquiry about software engineering position after completion of M.S. in computer engineering

December 12, 2012

Mr. Robert Burns  
President, Template Division  
MEGATEK Corporation  
9845 Technical Way  
Arlington, VA 22207  
burns@megatek.com

Dear Mr. Burns:

Via online research in Hokies4Hire through Career Services at Virginia Tech, I learned of MEGATEK. Next May I will complete my master of science in computer engineering. From my research on your web site, I believe there would be a good fit between my skills and interests and your needs. I am interested in a software engineering position upon completion of my degree.

As a graduate student, I am one of six members on a software development team in which we are writing a computer-aided aircraft design program for NASA. My responsibilities include designing, coding, and testing of a graphical portion of the program which requires the use of ZX-WWG for graphics input and output. I have a strong background in CAD, software development, and engineering, and believe that these skills would benefit the designing and manufacturing aspects of template software. Enclosed is my résumé with further background information.

My qualifications equip me to make a contribution to the project areas in which your division of MEGATEK is expanding efforts. I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss a position with you, and will contact you in a week or ten days to answer any questions you may have and to see if you need any other information from me. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Morgan Stevens  
123 Ascot Lane  
Blacksburg, VA 24060  
(540) 555-2556  
mstevens@vt.edu

Résumé attached as MS Word document.

**Letter of Inquiry about Internship Opportunities, Hard Copy Version**

2343 Blankinship Road  
Blacksburg, VA 24060  
(540) 555-2233  
StacyLeeGimble@vt.edu

January 12, 2013

Ms. Sylvia Range  
Special Programs Assistant  
Marion County Family Court Wilderness Challenge  
303 Center Street  
Marion, VA 24560

Subj: Wilderness Challenge internship position

Dear Ms. Range:

This semester I am a junior at Virginia Tech, working toward my bachelor's degree in family and child development. I am seeking an internship for this summer 2013, and while researching opportunities in the field of criminal justice and law, I found that your program works with juvenile delinquents. I am writing to inquire about possible internship opportunities with the Marion County Family Court Wilderness Challenge.

My work background and coursework have supplied me with many skills and an understanding of dealing with the adolescent community; for example:

- 10 hours per week as a volunteer hotline assistant for a local intervention center. After a 50-hour training program, I counseled teenagers about personal concerns and referred them, when necessary, to appropriate professional services for additional help.
- Residence hall assistant in my residence hall, which requires me to establish rapport with fifty residents and advise them on personal matters, as well as university policies. In addition, I develop social and educational programs and activities each semester for up to 200 participants.

My enclosed résumé provides additional details about my background.

I will be in the Marion area during my spring break, March 6-10. I will call you next week to see if it would be possible to meet with you in early March to discuss your program.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

(Handwritten signature)

Stacy Lee Gimble