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Creating an effective cover letter

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In this workshop you'll learn:

- purpose of your cover letter
- qualities of an effective cover letter
 - general, format, structure, content
- how to select and develop content for it
- how to work with Career Services on your documents



Purpose of a cover letter:

- answer the questions:
 - why you are interested in ***this employer and this position***
 - what specific skills and experiences you have that match what the employer is looking for - ***connect the dots to demonstrate your readiness to handle the position***
- distinguish and differentiate yourself from other candidates
- demonstrate your written communication skills
- provide talking points for your interview
- prompt the reader to want to speak with you further in an interview



Qualities of an effective cover letter: general

- one page, error-free, business letter written to a specific individual
- tailored to the specific position the specific employer is advertising
- presents relevant and concrete evidence of your ability to do the job or internship advertised
- varied sentence structure and length
- appropriate use of keywords (aka jargon or buzzwords)
- followed up with polite, timely follow up



Qualities of an effective cover letter: format

- length - one-page maximum
- spacing: single line
- margins – 1” all around
- font – use same as on your resume. Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri are most common since are the easiest to read.
- font size – 11 pt font (can go .5 pt higher or lower if needed)



Qualities of an effective cover letter: structure

- your return address (physical mailing address)
- date
- employer mailing address
- salutation
- introductory paragraph
- body paragraph(s)
- closing paragraph
- closing
- signatures



Qualities of an effective cover letter: content

reader clearly and quickly able to:

- identify your motivation and enthusiasm for working with the specific employer - not just any employer!
- identify where and when you've gained and used the experience, skills, interests, and characteristics that matches what the employer seeks – not all your experience, but what is relevant to the position!
- identify the next steps you'll take to connect on your interest in the position



Before you begin your letter:

- analyze the job description to identify key qualifications sought by the employer
- determine specifically where you have developed and demonstrated those qualifications
 - see following slide for details for selecting experiences
- research the employer
 - reach out to your network to determine if you know anyone who work or has worked there
 - review employer website, do a Lexis/Nexis and Google search, etc.
 - find the name of the individual(s) you should address your letter to
 - most senior individual in Human Resources, plus individual in functional area, when possible



Before you begin your letter:

- select two or three (maximum four) recent experiences that demonstrate where you have acquired and/or used the desired qualifications based on the job description and requested qualifications
 - can be classes, part-time or full-time jobs, internship (paid or unpaid, for-credit or not-for-credit), volunteer, club, leadership, or athletic experience, etc.
 - write a short narrative about each of the most relevant experiences – your evidence!
 - see the “Tell Your Story Using the STAR Model” handout under the Career Guides & Handouts section of our website for examples



Return address and date:

return address: your permanent OR school mailing address, not both

- which one you use depends on the position you're applying to and point in time
- your name should not be included here

Example:

233 Mustang Drive
Morrisville, NY 13408

date: should be written out directly below your address

Example:

December 23, 2014



Inside address:

inside address: the employer mailing address

- include even if e-mailing your cover letter
 - if e-mailing, use your cover letter as the text for your e-mail (preference for most employers) OR attach cover letter separately

- indicate name and job title of recipient, but not the social or professional title (e.g. Mr., Ms., Mrs., Dr.)

- address letter to a specific individual and title whenever possible
 - Use Director of Human Resources if you cannot find a name and title

Example:

Emma Markey
Director of Human Resources
Mirabeau Inn & Spa
851 W Genesee Street Rd
Skaneateles, NY 13512



Salutation:

salutation: Dear social or professional title (e.g. Mr., Ms., Mrs., Dr.)
then last name followed by a colon

- do not include first name
- you may need to search the website or contact the employer directly to secure the social or professional title, but it will be worth the effort!

Examples:

Dear Ms. Markey:

Dear Dr. Stokes:

Dear Director of Human Resources:



Introductory paragraph:

introductory paragraph: why you are writing

- title (and division or location, if applicable) you are applying to
- how you became aware of the opening or possibility of an opening if through a faculty or networking connection, or CCN-Morrisville
- why you are interested in this specific position in this specific organization
 - if you have an interest in working with employer, but there's no job posted, indicate you are inquiring about opportunities
 - “letter of inquiry”
- overview of your qualifications
 - why should the employer be interested in you?
- typically 2-3 sentences



Introductory paragraph: examples

#1

A junior in the Agricultural Business Development program at Morrisville State College, I am excited to submit my application for (title). I heard about your internship through (name of recruiter) who spoke in an employer information session at my college, and through (name of classmate) who interned with your company last summer. I have learned about ... both in the classroom and in my work with Morrisville Fresh LLC, a student-led business, and believe that I can quickly contribute to your team.

#2

Please accept my application for the position of Service Manager that was posted in CCN-Morrisville. Having grown up in nearby Hamilton, I am familiar with the outstanding reputation of (name of business) as (what is the employer known for) With my hands-on coursework in Morrisville's automotive management bachelor's program, and my related on and off-campus jobs in the field, I am ready, willing, and able to meet the demands of the position.



Body paragraph(s):

body paragraphs: where you provide evidence that you have the qualifications the employer is seeking

- focus on two to four specific, concrete experiences that match the requirements from the job description (see slide 8)
 - don't just say you know, are good at, or are interested in something – prove it!
- networking contacts can help you prioritize your experiences, and guide you in what to emphasize in each
- build on - but do not repeat - your resume entry for a relevant experience
- typically 1 or 2 paragraphs, 3-5 sentences each paragraph



Body paragraph: examples

#1

In my job last summer as a ... at I used many of the same skills required as an (title). I (describe how in that experience you handled similar responsibilities or demonstrated the attributes indicated in the job description). Also, as a member of the Conservation Tri-Society club at Morrisville, I ... (again, focus on the skills, attributes, etc. that the employer is requesting).

#2

I gained the desired level of proficiency in (requested skill) in several ways, most recently as..., in which I.... Before that I.... (mention the specific setting(s) in which you used the requested skill and some details as to what you did using that skill.

There are many ways you can write about where you gained and/or used your skills, so connect with Career Services for assistance.



Closing paragraph:

- thank reader for his/her attention and consideration
- request the opportunity to speak directly about your interest and qualifications
- indicate you will follow up by telephone – then do
- provide your phone and e-mail contact information
 - make sure your voice mailbox is set up, and your voice message and e-address are professional
- typically two to three sentences
- do not introduce new information here



Closing paragraph: example

Thank you for considering my application. I am eager to speak with you about my interest and qualifications, and how I can contribute in this position. I will follow up by telephone (name a day or timeframe) to confirm that you have received my application and answer any questions you may have. Until then, I can be reached at (xxx) xxx.xxxx or xxxxxxxx@morrisville.edu.



Closing and signatures:

closing: term or word to close your letter

- appropriate closings: Cordially, Sincerely, Respectfully, With appreciation

signatures: where you sign and write your name

- should be same as name on resume; for example if you used your full name on your resume, sign your full name
- signature can be electronic if e-mailed; if hard copy mailed should be in black or blue or ink



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Closing and signatures: example

Cordially,

Mickaela Mustang

Mickaela Mustang



Following up:

- contact the individual to whom you addressed your letter within a week of sending it or before the deadline, whichever is first
- ask if your application had been received, if you can provide any additional information at this time, and when you may expect to hear about an interview
- request permission to follow up by the indicated time
- send a thank you note expressing your appreciation for the information, reminding them of your interest and indicating your agreed-upon follow up



Best practices:

- always customize your cover letter for a specific position and employer
 - it may take longer for each letter, but you will write fewer!
- make sure it is clear both why you want to work for an employer AND why they should want you to work for them
 - even in an internship, you cannot focus just on how the opportunity benefits you
- reach out to individuals in the organization or industry for guidance in learning about the employer and position
 - faculty, classmates, alumni, former work colleagues, individuals in LinkedIn, etc.



More best practices:

- vary your sentence structure
 - you can't avoid using I, but too many "I am" and "I have" gets repetitive. At the same time, don't substitute we for I unless appropriate!
- have someone who is a good speller and grammarian - or better yet, someone who hires for your field of interest - proofread your document, but remember that it is **your** story to tell
 - your cover letter and resume have to sound like you will in the interview!
- follow up, follow up, and follow up again!



Career Services can assist you in:

- analyzing the job description to identify skills
- selecting the appropriate experiences to write about
- researching employers and job titles
- connecting you with alumni and others in or associated with an employer
- editing your drafts
- following up on your letter
- preparing for interviews you generate from your letters



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To connect with Career Services:

Individual 30-minute appointments:

call 315.684.6615 to find a time and day convenient to your schedule

Office hours – 15 minute sessions: no appointment required

read your e-mails and see Career Services calendar for days and times

Workshops, Guest Speakers, and Special Events

read your e-mails; see Career Services calendar for days and times

www.morrisville.edu/careerplanning

24/7 access to resources and information; Career Services calendar

308 Whipple Administration Building

315.684.6615 ▪ careerservices@morrisville.edu