COLLEGE OF BEHAVIORAL & SOCIAL SCIENCES
FELLER CENTER

GUIDE FOR COVER LETTERS

The cover letter is simply a "letter" that accompanies your résumé and serves as an introduction to your qualifications. Its main purpose is to attract employers to review your résumé. The cover letter, therefore, is extremely important and MUST communicate how you can contribute to the organization in a meaningful way. Employers are primarily interested in how your skills can fulfill *their* needs. Remember, a cover letter is a sample of your writing, so a well-written cover letter highlights your writing abilities!

TIPS

- Each cover letter should be addressed to a specific person. If after doing some research you find no appropriate name, list a generic title (e.g., Dear Search Committee or Hiring Manager for X position) followed by a colon.
- Avoid flowery phrases about personal growth, challenge, advancement, etc.
- Be short and concise, no longer than four or five paragraphs. Do not exceed one page in length.
- Avoid repeatedly using the word "I".
- Always end the cover letter with "Sincerely" and your name.
- The cover letter is an extension of your résumé. Both should be on the same kind of paper, have the same margins, and have the same font style and size.

MAKE YOUR COVER LETTER STAND OUT

Customize your cover letter. Provide three concrete examples of how you meet the requirements listed for the position. Each example should be mentioned in your resume and be no longer than a couple of sentences. This strategy will make it easy for the employer to see that you have the skills they are seeking.

Demonstrate a targeted interest. Tell the employer why you are interested in their organization or position by mentioning something specific (i.e. I was impressed to see organization xyz made the top 10 list of the Best Federal Agencies," or "I am specifically interested in the xyz internship program because it is one of the few in the DC area that works with the xyz population."

Use power statements. The first sentence in each paragraph is most often read, so make it powerful by highlighting your skills (e.g., "I have excellent communication, analytical, and problem solving skills. During my last internship I..." *provide a concrete example for each*). End with a fit statement. The last paragraph is your chance to mention additional skills, not previously mentioned, that address the position requirements (e.g., "I feel confident that my ability to work in teams, organizational skills and penchant for working with details would make me a great fit for the position").

DIGITAL COVER LETTERS

If you are emailing your cover letter:

- Include a descriptive subject line like "Application for the [*name here*] position".
- Address the email to the recipient followed by a colon (e.g., Ms. Smith:). There is no need to list the mailing address, etc., as you would at the beginning of a printed cover letter.
- Paste your cover letter in the body of the email.
- Consider also attaching a Word or PDF version of your cover letter to the email to ensure the appearance of the cover letter remains intact when printed. This will also make your application easier for employers to share with the hiring committee or upload to an applicant tracking system, if needed.
- If you are uploading or attaching your cover letter to an email/application system, ensure the file is labeled descriptively (e.g. Application for xx position- Your Name).

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SAMPLE FORMAT FOR DIGITAL COVER LETTER

Jason Vincent
123 Elm Street, College Park, MD 20740 ▪ 240-222-2226 ▪ JVIN28@umd.edu

April 1, 20XX

Nicole Thomas
Director, Quality Control
Merck & Company, Inc.

Dear Ms. Thomas:

State what you are applying for. State where you heard about the open position. This information helps the employer know where to continue to advertise. The information is especially helpful to include when a prominent person has recommended you for the position, so include his or her name/title. Discuss why you are interested in the position by focusing on what you learned about the company through your research. Mention why you think the company is unique (i.e. awards they have received, their work environment, or their values/goals). Write about who you are, but keep it short. Mention your degree, anticipated graduation date, etc.

If you are applying for an advertised position, discuss two to three qualifications and/or skills that the employer is seeking. State that you have the skills and provide a concrete example of a time when you obtained or used the skill (that is also mentioned on your resume). You could use one experience to highlight three skills or discuss three different experiences to highlight three skills.

Alternatively, some employers prefer a story line of how your interests evolved interwoven with information about your background, experiences, and education. This is especially helpful if you are changing career direction. Some applicants prefer this style of writing, so choose the style that best fits you.

Devise a statement that summarizes two or three skills that you have not mentioned yet and conclude that they will make you an excellent candidate for the position. Acknowledge what the next step will be: You will wait to hear from the employer or you will contact the employer. If you choose the second choice, provide a general date of contact. Thank the employer for reviewing your résumé, and note that you are looking forward to an interview. Provide your contact information such as an email address and phone number.

Sincerely,

Jason Vincent
B.A. Economics
University of Maryland