

COVER LETTERS 101



ENGL 308
Northern Illinois University
Prof. K. Kaiser Lee

WHAT CAN COVER LETTERS DO?

The cover letter lets you tell your story.

It shows your writing abilities (compared to the bulleted list that is the resume).

It lets you show off things about yourself that may not show up on a resume.



WRITING THE COVER LETTER

COVER LETTER ORGANIZATION

- ⦿ Heading (your name & contact info - email & cell only is good)
- ⦿ Date
- ⦿ Potential employer's name, address
- ⦿ Salutation
- ⦿ Introductory paragraph
- ⦿ One-Two persuasive paragraphs
- ⦿ Final paragraph
- ⦿ Closing

If your resume has this style header, use the same style for the letter

Look how amazing this looks!

It's like your own personal stationery!

Kate Gerrigan

4539 North Abby Lane • Austin, KY 60001
347.840.3439 • kate@aol.com

March 21, 2006

BBC Label Group
23889 Reynolds
Atlanta, GA 29293

Dear Mr. Jones:

As an administrative/operational guru, and as someone passionate about Christian music, I'm extremely intrigued by the Executive Assistant position within the BBC Label Group.

I'm one of those people who simply loves getting things done. Whether it's everyday administrative tasks, coordinating work for large groups, or planning and executing events and projects, I truly thrive in a fast-paced environment.

I also am practically addicted to Christian music. I'm a street rep on my campus for several labels, and have coordinated music at retreats throughout the country. In fact my friends describe me as a Christian music junkie!

I genuinely hope to have the opportunity to speak with you more about this Executive Assistant position, and I will plan to contact you in a week.

Regards,

Kate Gerrigan

ADDRESSING THE LETTER

Sending your employment documents to a specific person increases the chances that they will be seriously reviewed by the company.

ADDRESSING THE LETTER

If you must, you may address your letter to “hiring professionals” - such as “Dear Hiring Professionals” “Dear Human Resource Professionals”

NOT “To Whom it May Concern” or “Dear Sir or Madam” !!

**Two Options:
A Formula
or
A Story**

OPTION ONE:

**FOUR PARAGRAPH COVER LETTER
FORMULA**

COVER LETTER FORMULA

Opening - in the first paragraph explain why are you writing, who are you, which job or ad are you responding to; this paragraph can be brief.

Be confident! “I am writing to apply for...”

not “I read with interest your advertisement...”



First Paragraph:

Dear Mr. Hagrid:

I am writing to apply for the Assistant Game Keeper job you recently advertised in the *Daily Prophet*. I am a sixth-year student at the Durmstrang Institute where I have studied care of magical creatures in depth. My experience with these creatures makes me a strong candidate for this position.

COVER LETTER ORGANIZATION

2nd & 3rd paragraphs explain your qualifications in more detail than your resume lets you.

2ND PARAGRAPH:

“At Durmstrang I passed the Ordinary Wizarding Level in “Care of Magical Creatures” with a rating of Outstanding, and am on track to complete the Nastily Exhausting Wizards Test on the subject next year.”

3RD PARAGRAPH:

“I have also completed an internship with with Gringots Bank, where I learned goblin accounting practices, while also tending to the red dragon that guards the underground vaults there. By the end of my internship, I was fully responsible for the dragon’s daily care.”

COVER LETTER ORGANIZATION

Ways to close, choose at least one:

- Say you will contact them on a certain date
- Ask that they contact you
- Restate your specific interest in the position

Always thank them for their time, consideration

CLOSING PARAGRAPH MODEL

“My resume is included along with this letter. I will send my owl to your place of business within a fortnight to request a response. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Antonin Dolohov”



Option Two: Tell A Story About Yourself

Another approach to writing a cover letter is to do something unusual or unexpected.

something unusual or unexpected

Dear [Hiring Manager],

I knew that I was destined for greatness when I was slimed on Nickelodeon. Nothing like being covered in green goo to help you realize your potential. “How does this apply to the open internship at Airbnb?” you may be wondering.

Because I am collaborative, creative, and tenacious enough to get a bunch of smelly slime dumped on me and still keep smiling.

Example above from Grammarly’s “Six Captivating Cover Letters and Why they Work” - [Link](#)

- ⦿ USE THIS APPROACH WITH CAUTION
- ⦿ When I am hiring someone, the number of applicants is overwhelming.
- ⦿ I just want to know if the applicant can write, and understands the job.
- ⦿ I teach writing so you would think these creative approaches would be effective on me - but they aren't.
- ⦿ That doesn't mean other people won't like them!
- ⦿ Remember, employment documents are personal, and you should listen to your gut when composing them. Do what feels right for you.

What NOT To Do in Your Cover Letter

The following discusses
examples of what NOT
to do

Read Carefully

EXAMPLES OF clichés - AVOID THESE!

Rhetorical questions

- “Are you looking for the best person to hire?” (Duh)

○ In-Your-Face

- “Let's cut to the chase. You need someone like me who can help you turn a shoddy operation into a well-oiled machine, not one spurting along on watered-down diesel fuel, but one running on high-octane jet fuel” (irritating to work with)

DON'T FOCUS ON YOUR NEEDS

- ⦿ Do *not* focus on your needs
- ⦿ Focus on the employer's needs
- ⦿ DO NOT:
 - “Your position suits me perfectly, so I’m sending my resume for consideration. I enjoyed studying basketweaving while I was working on my degree...”
 - “I will use your job as a stepping-stone to further my career...”

EXAMPLES OF CLICHÉ APPROACHES TO AVOID:

⊙ In Your Face

“Let's cut to the chase. You need someone like me who can help you turn a shoddy operation into a well-oiled machine, not one spurting along on watered-down diesel fuel, but one running on high-octane jet fuel”

- See <http://gawker.com/5883684/the-awful-cover-letter-all-of-wall-street-is-laughing-about>

Be careful when using the word “love” in these documents



To me, it seems off-putting to talk about how you feel about someone close to you personally and the workplace.

Brainstorm to come up with other ways to show your deep interest in the job (other than the words “interest” and “interesting”, if possible) –

“I have been a fan of underwater basketweaving since I was 10 and I have been on three competitive underwater basketweaving teams...”

**Proofread twice and
have someone else
proofread for you**



General formatting of business letters

MICHELLE HLOOM

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

(315) 434-7878 - mhloom.com - www.hloom.com

Re: Fundraising Officer #A22714

Today's Date
Mr. Gill Cooper
DeAID
123 Main Street
New York, NY 1001

I wish to apply for the post of Fundraising Officer which I saw advertised on the Oxford University Careers Service website. I am in my final year of Oxford University, studying Mathematics. I have a long-standing interest in charity work and believe that I have the qualities and experience required to be a successful fundraiser.

My enthusiasm for pursuing a career in this area stems from my interest in working with disadvantaged young people, and my desire to make full use of my skills in motivating people to make a difference. DeAID has established its credentials working in some of the most challenging areas of social aid and the government funding recently awarded to the organization is recognition of the success of its philosophy. After my experiences with Jacaril, I am attracted by the opportunity to help other young people and to develop my fundraising skills in such an environment.

Motivating people to work with me towards a common, worthwhile goal is something that I find hugely enjoyable and rewarding. As Marketing and Publicity Officer for the College Ball last year I was extremely pleased that we had more applicants for tickets than ever before. I believe that the marketing pack that I put together for potential sponsors played its part in attracting record levels of sponsorship.

One of the most rewarding aspects of being at Oxford has been the work I have done with Jacaril. During my time on the committee the number of volunteers involved in the project has increased by 30% and I have enjoyed both the challenge of raising the profile of the society and my work with young people themselves.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my application with you and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,
Your name

Single-space

Don't indent paragraphs

Blank line space between paragraphs

Left-aligned

GREAT COVER LETTER



LET'S SET UP AN INTERVIEW

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