Cover Letters That Work

Craft Your Future - A Professional Development Series

Career and Community Engagement Center

Victoria Wolff

Associate Director for Career Coaching and Education

Cover Letters - Purpose

The purposes of a cover letter include:

- To *inform* the employer what type of position you are seeking
- To *impress* the employer by showcasing your knowledge about the company and why you are interested in becoming a part of the team - *also think about their mission & values and why you want to be part of that culture!*
- To *show* the employer how well you can communicate in writing
- To *compel* the employer to learn more about you by reading your resume

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Cover Letters - Typical Format

Aim at the right target!

- Research the hiring manager's name to personalize your introduction
- Use LinkedIn or the "About Us" or "Staff" sections of the company's website to find out who the hiring manager is
- Avoid "To Whom It May Concern"

Cover Letters - Typical Format

Opening Paragraph:
- Create a **"Hook"**. What is **your STORY?** Why are you the right person for this position? Communicate why you are specifically qualified and a good fit for this position and the organization. This may include soft skills and personal traits.
- Tell the reader the position for which you are applying and consider including some information about the company.
- Let the reader know how you learned of the position, identifying your contact if applicable.

Cover Letters - Tell A Story

BAD Example (Does NOT Tell a Story!)

I am writing to apply for the position of NPR Fall Intern. I believe that my strong interest in education topics and background in research qualify me for this internship. My undergraduate and postgraduate academic careers have taught me to critically analyze and synthesize large amounts of data quickly. I also have experience conducting research in corporate and office settings.

Cover Letters - Tell A Story

GOOD Example (Tells a Story!)

The first time I ever went on live television, I was in Lahore, Pakistan. By the time I ended up in Pakistan this past January, being on camera wasn't new to me. I had several years of on-camera experience under my belt traveling around the world with an educational travel show for kids. When I lived in Los Angeles, I spent my hard-earned bartending money on TV hosting classes for a year.

Cover Letters - Don't Bury The Lede

"We're always afraid that, hidden down below, somewhere after that awful first paragraph, there's a fascinating person with great ideas. And we might not ever find out. It's a basic lesson of journalistic writing: **Put the good stuff right up there at the top. Grab us and hold us and keep us reading.**"

-Steve Drummond & Elissa Nadworny, NPR

https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/02/27/502445571/hey-students-5-things-that-are-wrong-with-your-cover-letter

Cover Letters - Typical Format

Middle Paragraphs:
- Identify <u>no more</u> than three skills you possess that are listed in the job description and communicate how you have used them successfully in the past.
- Do not state, "As you will see in my resume…" ; it is a waste of space
- Do not regurgitate your resume.
- Communicate **how the employer will benefit from hiring you**.
- Communicate knowledge of the company or industry (show you've done research) and how you are a fit.

Cover Letters - What Will You Do For Them?

Don't tell them what you'll get out of the internship/job, but what you can do <u>for them.</u>

Here's what you **should avoid**:

- *As a recent college graduate in the humanities, I believe I stand to benefit from the development of skills and career direction which an XXX internship provides.*
- *I believe that XXX is the ideal internship for me as the position will allow me to explore ...*

Cover Letters - Typical Format

Closing Paragraph: Select One

- State what you will do next (call to discuss meeting and your qualifications) listing a specific time when you will call or email to arrange a meeting. (If you say you are going to follow up, do so!)
- Sate what you would like the reader to do next, asking for an interview and writing "Do not hesitate to contact me at xyz email or xyz phone number."

Cover Letters - Typical Format

The End:

- Type "Sincerely" or "regards", enter four blank lines and type your name.

Let's Look At Some Samples

- **Sample job description (SCA position in the CCEC):** https://docs.google.com/document/d/19gVE9VOi3pIL0blJjSS92rxxK3liz6LrIz8Lkj_d8nI/edit?usp=sharing
- **Corresponding cover letters:** https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NdM4DVRWUZUMcLYFtCs34_N_maXzOMGGqM-x_2q9xcw/edit?usp=sharing
- **Three paragraph cover letter:** https://www.whitman.edu/documents/life-at-whitman/Student-Affairs/Student%20Engagement/Career%20Development/CoverLetterSample2018.pdf

Practice - The STAR Approach

SITUATION: Describe the situation that you were in. This should be the context, or setting for your story.

TASK: Describe the task that you needed to accomplish. Use a specific event or situation or event that you encountered, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past..

ACTION YOU TOOK: Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even when you are discussing a group project effort, describe what you did - not the efforts of the team.

RESULTS YOU ACHIEVED: Explain what happened. Describe the event outcome, what you ACHIEVED: accomplished, and what you learned. Use specific examples to measure your results.

Your time to practice . . .

Select 1 specific skill you gained in your most recent experience (e.g. in an internship, job, research experience) and **create bullet points** using the **STAR approach**.

Pair up and share results with your partner. Partners are encouraged to **ask questions**, and encourage the presenter to get more specific.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bQkAyN03eUEpBo5CAeKSzoHxN57MRyHI/view?usp=sharing

Questions?

Reach out to <u>Victoria Wolff '12</u>, Associate Director for Career Coaching and Education, in the Career and Community Engagement Center (<u>wolffv@whitman.edu</u>) or talk to a <u>Student Career Advisor</u> to learn more. You can schedule a meeting with them <u>via Handshake</u>!