

# CAREER SERVICES *at Whitworth*

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## Cover Letters

### **What Is A Cover Letter?**

A cover letter is an accompanying letter that serves as the introduction to your resume. No resume should be sent without one. The cover letter is created separately and individually for each position. It is an extension of your resume and reflects your knowledge of the employer's needs.

### **What Is The Purpose Of The Cover Letter?**

The purpose of the cover letter is to introduce yourself to an organization, demonstrate your interest in the company or a specific vacancy, draw attention to your resume and motivate the reader to interview you. Often this letter is the first contact you have with a prospective employer. A neat, concise, well-written letter can entice the employer to read your resume with greater interest and improve your chances of getting an interview.

### **How Should Cover Letters Be Organized?**

The cover letter typically consists of three parts: **Introduction, Body and Closing**. Within these three parts you must get the following three points across:

**Why you** are specifically interested in the organization

**Why they** should be particularly interested in you

**When and how** you will contact them to follow up and schedule an appointment

**Introduction** – The beginning of your letter should capture the employer's interest, identify the position for which you are applying or your career objective, be sure to mention your source of information, and describe your interest in that particular opening.

**Body** – The body of your letter (1-2 paragraphs) should show that you understand the nature of the position by explaining how your qualifications relate to it. You should include examples of the skills and/or qualities from your resume that you believe make you a particularly strong candidate. Use this section as an opportunity to illustrate more specifically how you think your experience can contribute to the organization.

**Closing** – Since your objective is to secure an interview, you want to establish a flow of action that produces an invitation to do so. In your closing you should suggest what you

would like the reader to do or what action you plan to take to maintain contact. This may take the form of a request for an interview and/or a statement of your intent to follow up in the near future with a phone call.

### **What Are Some General Guidelines For Effective Letter Writing?**

**Use an accepted business letter format.** The most common format used today is the full-block style. There are a variety of resources on cover letters in the Career Services. Resume books often have chapters on cover letters as well. Look at different samples until you find one you feel suits your needs best.

**Personalize each letter.** You should make every attempt to be able to address each letter to a specific individual. This may require that you contact the organization to get the name and title of the appropriate person. If you cannot find a name through your research of the organization, and are unsure of how to call to make such a request, talk with a Career Services staff member.

**Use non-sexist language.** If you are answering a blind ad with no way of obtaining a specific person to whom you can direct your letter, do not use Dear Sir or Dear Madam. Dear Director of Human Resources or Dear Hiring Official are both appropriate. But only do this when it has proven impossible to get a specific name.

**Limit your letter to one page.** Clear concise writing will ensure that you say everything you need to say in as few words as possible. Cover letters should never be more than one page and usually not more than five paragraphs.

**Avoid overusing the word “I”.** For example, instead of saying “I have enclosed a copy of my resume” you can restructure sentences to use “you” more often. The result would be “Enclosed you will find a copy of my resume.” A rule of thumb is to try not to use “I” more than twice per paragraph.

**Use attention-getting action verbs and adjectives.** When describing yourself and your qualifications, use adjectives and action verbs to add flavor and arouse interest.

**Proofread, proofread, proofread.** Check and check again for spelling errors. Don’t rely on your Spell Check alone. Read your letter backwards and catch your spelling errors and typos. Check for grammatical errors by reading your letter out loud carefully from beginning to end. Have other people check for errors as well. Nothing shatters a good first impression faster than work that appears carelessly done.

### **How Can I Describe My Qualifications and Strengths?**

Resources that might be helpful include: Phrases from prior performance reviews and letters of recommendation. Current and past job descriptions and standards of performance that clearly express job expectations and responsibilities.

### **Is There Anything Else I Can Do To Make My Cover Letter Effective?**

- Attend a Career Services Resume Workshop which includes information about cover letters.
- Make an appointment with a Career Services staff member to discuss, review, and critique your letters.
- Use paper and font that matches your resume so that the two together make an attractive package.
- Keep a copy of every letter you send as part of your job search file. Besides providing you with a record of your search, you can use portions of these letters in future ones.

### **What About Follow Up?**

Follow up of your letters is essential! The success of your job search will be directly related to how well you do this. Consider preparing a script to help you make your calls. Try to make your calls between Tuesday and Thursday and either first thing in the morning (8:30-9:30) or at the end of the day (4:30-5:00). Should you reach an answering machine, leave a message with your name, that you are following up on correspondence, which you'd like a return call, and where you can be reached. If you do not hear from them within a week, try again. Your persistence will pay off.

### **Additional Cover Letter Resources & Samples:**

From Vault:

[http://www.vault.com/nr/ht\\_list.jsp?ht\\_type=9](http://www.vault.com/nr/ht_list.jsp?ht_type=9)

From Monster:

<http://content.monster.com/samples/home.aspx>

From CollegeGead:

<http://www.collegegrad.com/jobsearch/Best-College-Cover-Letters/Sample-Cover-Letter/>

From The Riley Guide:

<http://www.rileyguide.com/cover.html>

From: Career Services at Virginia Tech:

<http://www.career.vt.edu/JOBSEARC/coversamples.htm>