UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

COVER LETTER GUIDE

FIVE STEPS TO WRITING A COVER LETTER

1. FORMAT YOUR LETTER
2. DETERMINE YOUR MOST RELATED SKILLS
3. WRITE YOUR OPENING PARAGRAPH
4. WRITE THE BODY PARAGRAPHS
5. CLOSE

COVER LETTERS

The cover letter accompanying your resume is the first impression the organization will have of you. Just like your resume, your cover letter should be tailored to your desired position. Employers view a cover letter as an example of your written work, so it should be flawless. Here are the steps to creating a great cover letter.

STEP 1: FORMAT YOUR LETTER

- Limit your cover letter to **one page in length**. Also, construct your letter in a way that it attracts attention, entices the recipient into reading your resume, and encourages the recipient to invite you for an interview.
- Use standard business letter formatting when writing a cover letter. Start at the top of the page with **your mailing address**. Then skip a line and include the date on which you are sending the letter. Skip another line and then list the **contact information for your recipient**. This should include the name of the individual who will read the letter plus any appropriate honorific (for example, Dr.), the individual's job title, the name of the company and the mailing address of that company. Skip another line and begin the letter with a formal greeting.
- Address the **greeting** of your cover letter to a specific person by last name and include the appropriate honorific with his/her name– for example: "Dear Dr. Parker" Always end your greeting with a colon. If you are uncertain of the recipient's gender, you may use both first and last name, for example "Dear Taylor Parker:" If you are unsure of the recipient's name, you may call the company to find out who is managing the hiring for the position for which you are applying. If you cannot find out the name, skip the greeting as a last resort.
- Cover letters should be laser printed on high-quality bond paper that matches your resume. If you include a cover letter with an email, either upload the entire document as an attachment or paste the entire document, including mailing addresses and the date, into the body of the email. Additionally, do not write in informal or texting language when sending the cover letter as an email. Always use professional business language. Convert your letter to a PDF before attaching it to an email or uploading it to a website.

STEP 2: DETERMINE YOUR MOST RELATED SKILLS

- Review your skills and experiences listed on your resume. **Expand** upon entries that relate to the position for which you are applying. For example, if you had an internship, job or volunteer experience where you worked on a special project or went beyond your duties, this is the place to highlight those experiences in your cover letter. Be sure to emphasize soft skills (communication, teamwork, courteousness, etc.) that may be listed in the job description.

STEP 3: WRITE YOUR OPENING PARAGRAPH

- Cover letters generally have four main paragraphs. Additional paragraphs can be added as necessary. Skip lines between the greeting and the first paragraph, between paragraphs within the body of the letter, and between the final paragraph and the closing.
- The **first paragraph** should grab the prospective employer's attention. In this paragraph, explain why you are writing by identifying the position for which you are applying and how you learned about the job opening. Additionally, summarize your strongest qualifications for the position, such as your educational background or an interest in the services or mission of the organization.

STEP 4: WRITE THE BODY PARAGRAPHS

- The **second paragraph** should describe your strongest qualifications in more detail. If possible, use a copy of the job description or advertisement to write this paragraph and match your qualifications to the position's requirements.
- Use key words from the job description whenever possible. If a job description is not provided, think about what responsibilities the job might entail and what specific qualifications a well-qualified candidate would possess.
- Use specific examples of your work experience or educational background as evidence of your qualifications and refer to your enclosed resume. **Avoid simply repeating your resume content**.
- In the **third paragraph**, show company knowledge. Match your values and goals to the company's values and goals. Include more information about personal characteristics that are relevant to the job and would make you a strong candidate. Motivation and time management are good examples of personal qualities to include when applying for positions.

STEP 5: CLOSE

- In the **final paragraph**, the conclusion of your letter, request an interview and provide information regarding how and when you may be contacted. Thank the recipient for considering you for the position.
- Finally, include a professional **closing** such as "Sincerely." Skip three lines and then type **your name** on the fourth line. If you print your cover letter, this will leave space in which to sign your name. If you are not printing, you can choose to add a digital signature.

SAMPLE COVER LETTER

Tom Tiger
1234 Someplace Street
Memphis, TN 38152

July 16, 2020

Dr. Jane Doe
Manager, Marketing Department
Jones Media Services
5678 Corporate Lane
Metrocity, US 11110

Dear Dr. Jane Doe,

I am writing to express my interest in the position as a social media intern for Jones Media Services. I learned about the position through your TigerLink powered by Handshake posting on the University of Memphis website. This position aligns well with my background working in various capacities on social media campaigns, as well as my ability to learn new systems quickly.

As my resume indicates, my background includes various marketing experiences. As a part-time sales representative for *The Daily Helmsman* at the University of Memphis, I handled accounts for numerous departments on campus. In addition, I was responsible for advertising two major fundraising campaigns for Special Olympics and the Red Cross, using digital marketing to reach younger donors in an effective manner. Finally, after interning for the *Memphis Flyer* last year, I acquired additional advertising/marketing skills while assisting in developing both new and existing advertising revenue. To keep my skills current, I have taken several courses that focused on social media tools. I am also proficient with Adobe Creative Suite.

Jones Media Services is one of the largest and most highly esteemed media companies in the industry. A recent article in the June 25 issue of *Business Week* indicated that your company continues to lead the industry in the use of social media and web-based marketing. I am excited about the position at Jones Media Services and believe that with my education and experience in marketing, I can reach your inactive advertisers and help develop your new business categories. You will find my excellent work ethic, dependability, initiative and drive to be valuable to the overall mission of your company.

I welcome the opportunity to interview at your convenience. In the meantime, please feel free to contact me at 555.123.4567 or tomtiger@memphis.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Tom Tiger

COVER LETTER **CHECKLIST**

FORMATTING & GENERAL INFORMATION

- ☐ Keep cover letter to one page in length.
- ☐ Proofread your cover letter to make sure it is free of grammatical errors.
- ☐ Write in professional business language even when emailing. Do not use texting language or abbreviations.
- ☐ Use only appropriate fonts (Times, Arial, Verdana, etc.).
- ☐ Keep font sizes 10, 11 or 12 pt. for text. Font size should be consistent throughout the cover letter.
- ☐ Set margins to approximately 1 inch on all sides.
- ☐ Start the cover letter with your physical address; below it, include the date.
- ☐ Single space the letter, but leave blank lines between your contact information, date, company's contact information, greeting, each paragraph and closing.
- ☐ Make sure your cover letter is personalized to each position and company.
- ☐ Sign your letter, particularly if you are submitting a printed copy. Use a signature file rather than a script font for electronic signatures.
- ☐ Print your cover letter on high-quality paper, just like your resume.
- ☐ When including a cover letter with an email, either upload the entire document as an attachment or paste the entire document, including mailing addresses and date, into the body of the email.

CONTACT INFORMATION OF THE RECIPIENT

- ☐ Include the name of a specific person, with appropriate prefix if known (Dr., Mr., Ms., Mrs., Rev., The Honorable).
- ☐ Make certain that you have the correct spelling of the person's name and title.
- ☐ Include recipient's job title. On the next line, include the name of the company followed by its physical mailing address.

GREETING

- ☐ Address the letter to a specific person.
- ☐ If appropriate prefix is known, use it in the greeting (ex. Dear Mr. Parker). If appropriate prefix is not known, list person's first and second names (Dear Taylor Parker).
- ☐ End greeting with a colon (:), not a comma.

FIRST PARAGRAPH

- ☐ Show interest in the company.
- ☐ Identify the position to which you are applying and state how you learned about the job opening.

SECOND PARAGRAPH

- ☐ Use a copy of the job advertisement or description to write this paragraph.
- ☐ Describe your qualifications in more detail, and show how your qualifications, experience, and abilities match the needs of the company.
- ☐ Use specific examples as evidence of your qualifications and refer to your enclosed resume, but do NOT duplicate content from your resume word for word.

THIRD PARAGRAPH

- ☐ Show company knowledge.
- ☐ Match your values and goals to the company's values and goals.
- ☐ Include more information about personal characteristics relevant to the job and show that you are the best candidate.

FOURTH PARAGRAPH

- ☐ Request an interview.
- ☐ Provide information regarding how and when you can be contacted.
- ☐ Thank the recipient for considering you for the available position.

CLOSING & SIGNATURE

- ☐ Include an appropriately professional closing, such as "Sincerely."
- ☐ If you print you cover letter, sign it in the space between your closing and your typed name.

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