Cover Letters

Hello my name is Laura and I am a Social Work major at the University of St. Thomas.

Cover letter writing is often viewed as one of the most difficult parts of a job search, but it doesn’t need to be. A cover letter is simply a common sense, straightforward, brief letter which introduces you and your resume.

There are four purposes for a cover letter:

- To explain why you are sending your resume. (You almost never send a resume without one.)
- To introduce yourself by establishing who you are and summarizing your background.
- To show how you qualify for a particular job.
- To state your career objective.

You may ask yourself, “How do I get started writing a cover letter?”

These are a few essential tips:

- A successful cover letter should be specific and personal. Each letter should refer to a specific person at a specific company and provide a specific next step that you will be taking.
- If you have trouble getting started, try writing down what you would say if you were speaking directly to the person. Then, edit what you've written to make it more concise and businesslike.
- The most important point to remember is that you are writing to another human being. The tone of the letter should be somewhat formal and businesslike. There is no special trick to writing a cover letter; just keep in mind what the other person needs and wants to hear.
- Be brief and straightforward, it is usually more effective than being clever and gimmicky.

The following instructions will tell you what to include in a cover letter. They are to be used as guidelines for the content; it is up to you to arrange the contents in a readable, logical way.

- Use the standard layout for business correspondence
- Paragraphs should be single spaced with double spacing between each paragraph.
- Print the letter on good paper (the same weight and color as that of your resume).
- SIGN your cover letter AFTER you photocopy it, if you are copying it onto good paper.
• Be sure to check for grammatical mistakes, misspellings, and typos as your letter and resume are a company's first impression of you. Also, many companies use cover letters as an indication of your writing abilities.
• Keep the letter as brief as possible, 3-4 paragraphs, no more than one page. Be sure that all the information you are including is absolutely necessary.

A basic formula for a cover letter is as follows:

• Standard business letter address format should be used
• The contact name, title, company and address should be in the top left
• Salutation (it should be to a real person—take time to know who your target is)
• First paragraph should explain why you are writing. To meet that company’s specific needs of course!
• The second paragraph should briefly state two or three top skills, then immediately follow with the benefits these skills (and you as a person) will provide to the company.
• The third paragraph should close the sale! Not just the ending of the letter, but the “sales closer” to the letter. If you don’t hear back from the employer within reasonable time, contact them and inquire on the “position status.”

That’s it! For an example of this format, refer to the sample on the Career Development Center Web page. But remember: what is right for one person can sound canned or false for the next. Write it in your own words so that it sounds like you, not like something out of a book.

Employers are looking for knowledge, enthusiasm, and focus! Take the time to write a basic cover letter structure you feel comfortable with, and then customize it to the specific needs of the job you are applying for.

These are a few points concerning Cover Letters. If you have additional questions on this or any other career related concerns, be sure to visit the University of St. Thomas Career Development Center for additional resources or to meet with a counselor.