

COVER LETTER GUIDE

Cover Letter Basics: A cover letter should answer the question – “Why should I hire you?” To do so, your cover letter (1) states your intent to apply to a position or organization; (2) highlights why you are interested in the position/organization; and (3) explains why you feel you are qualified based on your experience.

INFORMATION TO INCLUDE IN YOUR COVER LETTER:

Your address

Date

Address of person/organization to whom/which you are applying

Dear Mr./Ms. _____: (you should always try to address your letter to a specific person rather than “To Whom It May Concern.”)

FIRST PARAGRAPH: The first paragraph states why you are writing and to which position you are applying. In this first paragraph, you should also include a general statement of why you are interested in the position. This statement can range from past experience in the field, a desire to gain experience, or how you feel your education or past experience will benefit the organization. The goal is to quickly catch the reader’s attention and make him or her interested enough to continue reading. Although many cover letters you see will begin with phrases like, “I am extremely interested...” or “I am writing to express interest in...” that is oftentimes not the best approach. Instead, try to be creative and think of another way to start your cover letter. Remember, your introduction needs to entice the employer to read further!

SECOND/THIRD PARAGRAPH: The second and third paragraphs outline why you feel you are qualified for the position by highlighting specific accomplishments and experiences and then showing how those accomplishments/experiences are relevant to the position. In other words, you are not simply restating the information you have listed on your resume. Instead, you are showing the employer how you are the ideal candidate for the position – you do so by citing specific, relevant examples from your background. Remember, these examples can be drawn from classes, community service, activities and interests - along with your work experience.

Suggestions before you begin writing this part of your cover letter:

- Read through the job description and create a list of the specific skills or characteristics the employer emphasizes. The employer may be looking for an applicant with strong computer skills, research ability, analytical skills, leadership, initiative, dedication, or specific experiences. Take the time to write down those skills so you have them in front of you as you begin to write.
- Next, look at your resume and write down 1-3 examples from your background that highlight those skills you’ve just listed. These examples may be from your work/intern experience, but can also include coursework, honors/achievements or extracurricular or community service activities. If you are having difficulty identifying your skills, use Optimal Skills Assessment. For more information about this resource, refer to the CSO Guide to Online Resources or go to <http://trincoll.optimalresume.com/account/>
- By doing this small task before you begin writing, you ensure two things: One, that you highlight those skills for which the employer is looking; and two, that you use the best examples possible to illustrate how you are the ideal candidate for this position.

FINAL PARAGRAPH: The last paragraph basically states: Enclosed is my resume (and any other requested information); I look forward to meeting with you to discuss the position; Please contact me if you require further information; and Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Your Name

OPTIMAL LETTER BUILDER

All Trinity students now have access to Optimal Letter Builder – a web-based system that will help you create high-quality professional letters.

The Letter Builder offers paragraph-by-paragraph instructions and examples to help you create effective employment letters for a variety of purposes. The Letter Builder may be used to create: **Cover letters**, Application letters, Networking letters, Rejection letters, Withdrawal letters, Broadcast letters, Acceptance letters, Follow-up letters and Thank you letters.

You can build a new letter from scratch, cut and paste an existing letter into the Letter Builder, or browse and upload an existing letter. For each type of letter, view examples of effective introductory paragraphs, content paragraphs, and closing paragraphs.

To access Optimal Letter Builder, go to: <http://trincoll.optimalresume.com/account/> and click on “Get Started” to set-up an account. If you have any questions about Optimal Letter Builder, please contact Career Services.

HELPFUL HINTS

- Research the company and the position so you can tailor your letter to the needs of the organization. By researching the company, you show the employer that this position is important to you.
- Avoid using too many sentences that start with “I” or writing in the passive voice (example: “This experience enabled me to...” or “Through my internship, I was responsible for...”). Instead, make yourself the subject of each sentence and use active descriptions (example: “In this internship, I demonstrated sound judgment and problem-solving skills by...”).
- Write each cover letter separately, even if you use a common framework. Personalize the letter with a sentence or two designed to reflect your sincere interest in the specific employer.
- Spelling, grammar or punctuation mistakes are out of the question! Cover letters are a reflection of your writing skills, so make each cover letter is an example of your best work.
- Be sure to sign your letters.
- Keep your letter short and simple. This is not the time to tell your whole life’s story. Instead, select those experiences and accomplishments most relevant to the position and employer and focus on those.
- Use high quality paper that matches your resume paper and envelopes. Paper and envelopes are available in Career Services.
- Have a Career Specialist review your cover letters. Make an appointment or come in during walk-in hours.
- Keep copies of everything you send, and follow-up according to your stated intentions. However, don’t rely too heavily on cover letters to get your job. Pursue other avenues of inquiry as well.

SAMPLE COVER LETTER

32 Park Road
Scarsdale, NY 10024

July 23, 2007

Mr. Ralph Cantor
Executive Vice President
Aspen Magazine
321 Marzio Road
Mohonk, NY 12561

Dear Mr. Cantor:

As an avid skier and dedicated subscriber to *Aspen Magazine*, I have watched your magazine evolve from a seasonal magazine with a readership of 1,500 to a monthly magazine recognized throughout the industry. I believe that my experiences as a writer and editor for two magazines, coupled with my love for the outdoors, make me an ideal candidate for the Editorial Assistant position at Aspen Magazine.

Throughout my four years at Trinity College, I have been actively involved in journalism both on-campus and through off-campus internships. After working on the *Trinity Recorder* for only one month, I was promoted from Special Features Writer to Managing Editor. As Editor, I assigned stories to a staff of 15 student-writers and assisted in the lay out of the 30-page monthly magazine. Last summer as an intern at the *Hartford Advocate*, I also proofread and edited the Editorial section. I learned the importance of attention to detail and the amount of hard work and dedication required to create a high quality magazine.

In addition to my journalism background, I have a passion for the outdoors. I have been fortunate to travel and experience some of the world's best skiing locally and internationally. With my enthusiasm for journalism and the great outdoors, my strong leadership and my academic talents, I am confident I can make a significant contribution to *Aspen Magazine*.

Enclosed is a resume outlining my qualifications and achievements as well as recent personal publications. I look forward to meeting you in order to further discuss the position and my qualifications. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Christina E. Stob

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