



Writing the Cover Letter

What are the objectives of a cover letter?

A good cover letter puts your résumé in context and persuades the prospective employer that you are a *good match* for the position in question. If your cover letter does its job, the prospective employer will begin to consider your candidacy and go on to review your résumé in detail.

Your cover letter also serves as a sample of your organizational and communication skills. For this reason, it's essential to spend time writing and organizing the content, and to proofread it carefully. The time and care that you devote to constructing and writing your cover letter and résumé will demonstrate to the prospective employer that you're capable of producing high quality work.

Finally, your cover letter expresses your interest in the particular position or particular organization. Cover letters should be individually tailored for each job prospect. Your letter should convey to each prospective employer that you have an understanding of the job, and that you've done some thinking about how you could fit in to the organization and contribute to its goals.

How should I approach the writing task?

Your cover letter is your opportunity to market those aspects of your skills, abilities, education, training, background, and experience which are most relevant to the position you're seeking. This means that you will need to begin by doing some thinking about your skills and background and how these relate to the position for which you're applying. (For more information about skills, visit the [English Advising Career Page](#).) Your cover letter should reflect your individuality, but remember that you are "introducing yourself" for the first time to a stranger: it's best to err on the side of professionalism.

Read the job announcement carefully. What are the most important qualifications being sought? How can you best demonstrate that you have them? Try to put yourself in the prospective employer's position: What would you want to know about a candidate for this particular job? What information would be most important to you? *Include only the most relevant attributes and experiences you possess which specifically match the job for which you're applying.*

Research the company or organization: What does the employing organization do? What are its goals? What is its history? How does it fit in to its industry? What characterizes the organization's culture (e.g., is it casual, conservative, highly structured, diverse, traditional, modern, fast-paced, etc.)? Some information, such as the organization's mission, purpose, clients, partners, and a sense of its "style" can be found on its website (if it has one). There are also industry and employer directories available on the web, in the libraries, and at [UW Career Center](#) in 134 Mary Gates Hall. Local and national newspapers, industry-related publications and journals, and the [Washington Occupational Information System](#) are also good resources.

Address the letter to a specific individual. As with all writing, it's important to identify your audience. Taking the time to find out the hiring party's name and correct title is another way to demonstrate your interest in the position.

How should I format my cover letter?

Your cover letter should be three to four paragraphs in length and limited to one page. Like an essay, its content can usually be divided up into three parts:

The introduction states the position you're seeking, explains how you learned about the position, and indicates your interest. It often also contains a brief statement of your qualifications (education, experience, and skills).

The body highlights *the most important qualities you can offer to this particular employer*, related to the position that you're seeking. Because you will be attaching your résumé, this is not the place to go into great detail. What you are attempting to do is to get the employer's attention and interest him/her in your candidacy. This is also the place to present other relevant information about your characteristics or background that may not be evident from your résumé. You might provide the employer with some specific examples of how you've demonstrated particular key skills or how you fulfill the most important qualifications listed in the job announcement.

The conclusion should summarize your qualifications and your interest in the position. Be sure to close your letter with a request for action or an indication that you'll be following up. This might include a request for an interview, a statement of your intent to call the employer on a specific date, or the dates you'll be in town for an interview. Finally, always thank the employer for considering your application.

Sample Cover Letters

Mary Martin
221 Peachtree Street

Seattle, WA 98105
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mlmartin@aol.net

April 22, 2013

Ms Stephanie Everly
Managing Editor
Dickinson Press
12 Main Street
Amherst, MA 11001

Re: Editorial assistant position

Dear Ms Everly:

I am writing to express my keen interest in the editorial assistant position you advertised with the University of Washington's Career Center. I will be receiving my bachelor of arts degree in English in June 2012, and I am eager to join a small publishing house where I can use my skills in writing, editing, proofreading, research, and critical analysis. Based on my knowledge of Dickinson Press publications and objectives, I believe that my educational background and abilities would be an excellent match for the editorial position.

Through my academic work in English language, literature, and writing, I am prepared to make meaningful contributions to editorial discussions and to function as a member of your editorial team. In addition to my university training, I have held editorial positions with *Bricolage*, the University of Washington's undergraduate literary journal, and with Steubing Press, a small publishing house specializing in non fiction and regional publications in the Pacific Northwest. These intern positions have provided me with experience in editing, proofreading, fact checking, production scheduling, working with off-site vendors, sales, marketing, and customer service. My positions with a small publication and a small press have taught me to manage my time effectively, adapt readily to new responsibilities, work as a team member, and function well under pressure. The writing skills I developed through my background as an English major have been further refined in both of these positions, where I learned to write concise, persuasive prose for press releases, catalog statements, and website content. Both positions afforded me an in-depth understanding of the important and varied behind-the-scenes work involved in book publishing.

I hope you'll agree that the combination of my academic training and my internship work in publishing has provided me with excellent preparation for the demands of a literary editorial position with Dickinson Press. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to meeting with you to discuss this opportunity in greater detail.

Sincerely,

Mary L. Martin

Encl: résumé

Mary Martin
221 Peachtree Street
Seattle, WA 98105
(206) 555-5555
mlmartin@aol.net

April 22, 2013

Keeshia Rodell
Marketing Director
Echomedia Marketing Group
123 Avery Place
Seattle, WA 98111

Dear Ms Rodell:

John Bingham of Hemming Communications tells me that you are seeking a marketing assistant at the Echomedia Marketing Group, and he suggested that I send you my résumé. I am particularly interested in the public relations work that Echomedia has

done in the non profit sector, and I hope you'll agree that my academic background in English along with my promotions internship with the Experience Music Project make me a good candidate for this position.

In June, I will be receiving my BA in English and Communications. My background includes relevant course work in mass media communications, concepts of new media, media structure, and cross-cultural communications. I have also developed strong writing, persuasive, and critical analysis skills through my major in English.

In the course of my internship in promotions, I gained practical skills in managing media campaigns, doing press work, and planning promotional events. One of my tasks with the EMP was to prepare promotional materials for upcoming museum events and to distribute these materials to the local media. Because there was often very little lead time, I learned to obtain information quickly and assimilate it into a persuasive set of ad materials in short order. At the end of the internship, I was commended by my supervisor, Marion King, for producing high quality work on a strict timeline. I am diligent, creative, and flexible, and I work well as a member of a marketing team.

I look forward to speaking with you about the suitability of my English and marketing background for this position with Echomedia. I will telephone you within a week in the hope that we can set up a meeting soon. Thank you for considering my application.

Sincerely,

Mary L. Martin

Encl: résumé

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