



Student Counseling and Career Services

Guide to Writing Cover Letters

Why are cover letters important?

Your **resume** details your education and experiences. The **cover letter** is your opportunity to make the connection between your experiences and *a specific position*. You are demonstrating that you are a great fit for the specific position, that you can communicate clearly, and that you have researched the organization. You are differentiating yourself from other applicants who may have similar qualifications.

What is the purpose of a cover letter? To get you to the next step – THE INTERVIEW – by:

1. **Introducing** you to the employer and clarify the position being applied for; when, where, or how you learned about the position and/or the organization; and why you are applying for the position.
2. **Highlighting** your strengths and qualifications for the position. This is not a repeat of the resume, but a select review of specific areas from your background that are relevant to the particular position.
3. **Encouraging** the next step in the application process: e.g. "I look forward to an opportunity meet and discuss in detail my qualifications." "I can be reached at (773) 555-7656 or myemail@neiu.edu."

What should the overall structure be?

Business Letter Format (see examples):

In the upper left hand corner, your name and address. Two lines down will be the date, and two lines below that will be the employer's name and address. Whenever possible, include the name of the person responsible for hiring – they may be listed in the job posting, or you may need to dig deeper into the company's website, etc. to find it. If no person can be found, you may use "Dear Hiring Manager,"

Section One (a brief paragraph):

Tell who you are, how you learned about the position, why you have an interest in the position and the organization. Be sure to indicate the specific position for which you are applying, as an employer may have several positions open at the same time. Additionally, if you have networked and have a personal contact within the organization, this is the point at which that individual's name should be mentioned, if you have that person's permission. Follow with a brief statement that you feel you are a strong candidate.

Section Two (text alone, or preferably some combination of text with a bulleted list or a table):

Describe your strengths and qualifications as they *specifically relate to this particular position*. Use the job description to identify exactly what qualifications they seek, and then describe how you are a good fit because you have many of those qualifications. Talk about what you know about the organization to enhance your argument that you are a good fit. Use the same words, terms, and phrases as they use in the job description to show that you speak their language and understand what is important to them.

Section Three (a brief paragraph):

"Let's get together" is the goal of the final paragraph. Be sure to actively pursue the next, appropriate step; leave your telephone number(s), email address, and times or methods of reaching you, ask for an interview. Remember, the primary purpose of the resume and cover letter is to obtain an interview.

Remember to accomplish these five things in your cover letter

1. Demonstrate your interest in *the specific position and organization* – why do you want to work there?
2. Highlight *two or three strengths* related to the position and reflect your unique experiences.
3. Express *your enthusiasm for the position and organization!*
4. This is not a restatement of your resume – *tell the story* of how what's on your resume makes you the best candidate.
5. *Don't include things that aren't on your resume* – if it's especially relevant to the position, find a way to add it.

Sample Job Description #1

Job Title	Elementary Teachers, Grades 1-5
Job Description	Casa Grande Elementary School District is seeking qualified applicants for Elementary Teacher, Grades 1-5, for the 2015-2016 school year. The teacher will create a positive learning environment to facilitate the personal, social and intellectual development of students. Will create and engage in events in and out of the classroom to incorporate parents and community members. In order to respond to the needs and abilities of the students, the teacher must work closely with other staff, the administration and other programs of the district. The teacher is responsible to the building principal.
Other Job Requirements	Must possess at least a Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university. Must have a valid teaching certificate or proof of eligibility. Ability to fulfill requirements to be appropriately certified and Highly Qualified under NCLB. Must have at least one year of field experience (student teaching) or approved internship. General knowledge of curriculum and instruction. Excellent organization, communication, and interpersonal skills. Must be able to work cooperatively with all members of the staff and communicate effectively with parents.
Send application materials to	Ms. Anita Sheldon, Principal Casa Grande Elementary School 2323 School Drive Chicago, IL 60640

Note how the cover letter on the next page specifically addresses the qualifications listed in the job description with detailed, concrete examples.

SAMPLE COVER LETTER #1: Paragraph Format

This letter illustrates the student's fit with the position in table format.

Shakira B. Johnson
5225 Foster Avenue
Chicago, IL 60606

October 12, 2015

Ms. Anita Sheldon
Principal
Casa Grande Elementary School
2323 School Drive
Chicago, IL 60640

Dear Ms. Sheldon:

Standard Business Letter Format

The Applicant's Name, Address, Date, Employer's Name, Title, and Address can all be removed if sending resume via email – the body of the email will be the cover letter. Alternatively, you can attach the cover letter as a separate document to the email with a brief note that your materials to apply for the specific position are attached.

If you cannot find the name of the person responsible for the hiring decisions (after checking the job description, company website, LinkedIn, etc. first), use 'Dear Hiring Manager.'

I chose to become an art teacher because I believe that art is a powerful tool that humans can use to express themselves, and I am eager to share this medium of expression with students. I am particularly interested in the available position in your elementary school for an art teacher, which I learned of from the Palatine School District website.

I will graduate from Northeastern Illinois University in December and will have an Illinois Type 10 certification in Art. I saw the article and pictures on your school's website from the recent sidewalk chalk event that was held in your community, and I would love to help expand that event in the future. My college courses have enabled me to develop my skills in using many different types of media, and I have thoroughly enjoyed putting those skills to good use during my time as a student teacher at Roosevelt Elementary School in Skokie, Illinois, where I focused on differentiated instruction to include all students in the creative process. I also volunteered as an organizer of arts and crafts projects at a local daycare that involved the children and also many local individuals and businesses, so I am prepared to help to further develop positive relationships within both the classroom and the surrounding community.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss my qualifications with you in person. I can be contacted at (312) 555-6754 or sbjohnson@neiu.edu to discuss the next steps in the hiring process.

Sincerely,

Shakira B. Johnson

Enclosure

Always close with 'Sincerely'. You do not need to add your written signature unless submitting a paper copy. 'Enclosure' is part of the standard format alerting the reader that your resume is also included.

SAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION #2

Healthcare Analyst

Position Description:

Analyst gathers insight from the industry through market research, presentations, and interviewing and networking with healthcare professionals. Manages existing software clients and provides support for business operations. This entry/mid-level position is dynamic and offers exposure to multiple departments and projects. Innovative, fast-paced, team-based environment for rapid professional development. Ideal candidate will be ambitious, personable and excited to learn. Strongly preferred background or experience in Public Health and/or not-for-profit organizations

Requirements:

- Bachelors
- 0-2 years work or internship experience
- 3.0 GPA minimum
- Excellent communication skills
- Research or phone experience
- Strong personable skills
- Exposure to healthcare industry beneficial
- Background in Public Health
- Background in not-for-profit organizations
- Willingness to travel

Organization Background:

Dorenfest & Associates supports healthcare and IT transformation initiatives for payer and provider organizations nationwide. Our experienced consultants and industry experts enable the profitability and longevity of organizations dealing with complex IT operations, federally mandated reform and intense security requirements. Primary offerings include consulting, talent management, and software.

SAMPLE COVER LETTER #2: "T" or Table Format

This letter illustrates the student's fit with the position in table format.

Mary Sanchez
9768 American Street
Chicago, Illinois 60600

July 1, 2015

Mr. Pilar Aquino
Dorenfest & Associates
9190 N. State St.
Suite 5012
Chicago, Illinois 60699

The "T" format is the same for all parts of the cover letter except for Section 2 where you connect your qualifications to the position description.

In the first section, be sure to include the official position title, as well as a statement answering the question "Why This Job?" What is it about the position, company, its mission or culture that makes you want to put the effort into applying? Why do you want this position beyond needing a job and a paycheck?

Dear Mr. Aquino:

I recently learned of a Healthcare Analyst position with Dorenfest & Associates from reviewing your website. This month I will be completing a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Justice Studies and a minor in Psychology. I am excited by the work your organization does for the community and the ways in which this position will expand upon my education and experience.

In a variety of full and part-time positions in business, military and non-profit organizations, I have acquired excellent time management, written and oral communication skills. I am extremely goal driven and motivated, as evidenced by pursuing my degree while holding full-time employment over the past several years. Below I have outlined my qualifications related to your position description:

Your Requirements

My Qualifications

Non-profit and healthcare experience	Interned for one year with the American Heart Association and served as a HealthCare Specialist for four years in the U.S. Army
Research or phone experience	Conducted extensive in person research as a part of a class project concerning socio-economic, sex, race, and education levels of youth accused of crimes between 1999 and 2001.
Strong written and oral communication skills	Successfully negotiated and resolved discrepancies or problems with defective merchandise / workmanship with customers, clients.
Gathering / analyzing data	Compiled a customer database based on demographic and income levels of prospective customers, resulting in a 25% increase in sales.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss further how my qualifications, energy, enthusiasm and willingness to learn can make a considerable contribution to Dorenfest & Associates. I can best be reached at m-sanchez4@hotmail.com or (773) 867-5309 and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Mary Sanchez
Enclosure