

CAREER SERVICES CENTER COVER LETTER TIPS

GOAL

To demonstrate how your skills, abilities, qualifications and competencies fit the requirements, and to persuade the employer to offer an interview.

-OR-

To seal the deal when employers are deciding between a few equally qualified candidates based on résumés.

PURPOSE

- Market your skills to an employer; continue selling your brand.
- Brand sets you apart from others; it is a consistent message; carry your brand from your elevator pitch through your résumé, cover letter and interview.
- Highlight softer skills (interpersonal, leadership, teamwork).
- Use subjective language. Don't get too wordy. Business language is clear, concise and tight.

TYPES

- Application Letter
- Informational Interview Letter
- Networking Letter
- Thank You Letter – include something about your conversation to distinguish you.
*If you know a recruiter well, you can use his or her first name.

STRUCTURE

- One page only, printed on quality paper.
- Three to four paragraphs elaborating on skills, talents and strengths.
- **1st paragraph** – introduce yourself and identify job to which you are applying. The first paragraph should contain:
 - **An opening line that tells the reader why you're contacting him or her** and how you came to know about the position.
 - **Text that indicates your respect for the firm's accomplishments**, history, status, products or leaders, and how the firm's accomplishments relate to you.
 - **A last line that gives a brief synopsis of who you are and why you want the position.**

For example:

- I am a (your identifying characteristic)
- I am a (your profession)
- I have (your years of experience or education)
- I have worked in (your area of expertise)
- I am interested in (what position you're applying for)

continued

- **2nd (and possibly 3rd) paragraph** — sales pitch, why you are the best candidate; elaborate on and connect experience.
 - The **middle paragraphs allow you to make more expansive and revealing statements about who you are, what skills you bring to the job, and how you can help the firm**, to summarize facts of your job history, and to mention any connection or prior history you may have with the company.
- **3rd (or 4th) paragraph** — conclusion, reiterate interest, how you will follow up.
 - Close with “sincerely” and sign in black ink.

BEFORE YOU SEE SOM CAREER SERVICES...

- Check out cover letter templates on the CDC website (cdc.binghamton.edu).
- Bring résumé and description of job.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

- Pick one or two key points on your résumé to highlight your skills.
- Find a name to address the cover letter to. Look online, call the company or contact Bill McCarthy (bmccarth@binghamton.edu) at CDC to find out.
- **Update the date** before you send the letter.
- **Sign:** “Sincerely,” four spaces, then your name. Put your signature in the space.
- “I believe” is weak. Be proactive and aggressive, example: “my skills...”
- Read job description to get a feel for the ideal candidate for paragraphs 2 and 3. It is not about what you can gain from the job.
- **Conclusion:** tell how you are following up.
 - “I will contact you in X days to follow up.”
 - “I look forward to speaking with you Thursday at the job fair.”
- If you haven’t heard anything in two weeks, follow up.
- 80 percent of jobs are not posted online.

COMMON MISTAKES (what you shouldn’t do!)

- Not addressing a specific person
- Stating what you hope to gain
- Being too passive in closing
- Mass-producing cover letters
- Not knowing your unique selling proposition
- Having grammatical, spelling, punctuation or spacing errors
- Not editing letter for word choice (key words)