Successful Cover Letters

The purpose of your cover letter is to:
- Show how your skills/experiences MATCH the job description.
- Clearly route your resume to the right contact person for the job opening.
- Show you can communicate professionally in writing.
- Reflect your positive attitude, personality, motivation and enthusiasm.

Whenever you send a resume or application to a potential employer, you must include a cover letter if the employer requests it. It is a good idea to do it even if they have not (unless they state otherwise).

Cover letters can be put into three categories:
- Standard cover letter – matches a job description.
- Cold contact cover letter – no job exists but you write to an employer directly.
- Networking cover letter – use the name of your contact person in the first paragraph to: A) ensure that the employer will read it and, B) make a positive association between you and the job.

Each cover letter and resume that you send to an employer must be tailored to that specific job. You must deconstruct the advertisement or posting, research the company, and make some educated guesses to determine exactly what employers want. Translate your experience into their language, even using the exact words in the job description. Present yourself in their terms. It is the ONLY way an employer will recognize you as the best fit for the position.

The 4 Steps of Cover Letter Writing

**Step 1:** Read the job description carefully and look for key words/phrases throughout all parts of the job description (not just under “Required or Preferred Qualifications”). Take a moment to visualize yourself in this job.

**Step 2:** Highlight with a marker all key words or phrases that you will use to construct your sentences, OR type them directly onto a fresh clean Word document and highlight them in any color other than black. The highlighting tells you which key words came from the job description so you won’t change them.

**Step 3:** Take each word/phrase and come up with your best skill match. If they are looking for someone with good communication skills, think about a specific example you can give from your own work/personal experiences to show (not just tell) the employer you have developed “good communication skills.” Create sentences which showcase your match for every key word/phrase that you have chosen.

**Step 4:** Put those sentences into paragraphs. Your most relevant matches will go into the second paragraph, the next closest into the third and so on up to one page. You must prioritize your paragraphs according to your most relevant experiences, and how they match what the employer views as the most important functions of the job. You may have to guess at the employer’s priorities by noticing how often the job description uses similar key words.

Proofread, proofread, proofread! The number one reason employers throw out any application materials is due to spelling errors and typos!
The “How-To” of Cover Letters

My Address
My Address

Today’s Date

Company Name
Company Address
Company Address

Dear (insert the correct contact person’s name here, or if not available, use “Dear Search Committee, Hiring Manager,” etc.):

First Paragraph—Must-Haves:

- Identify the position you are applying for or the purpose of the letter if it is a cold contact/internship opportunity.
- State where you saw the job/internship advertised.
- Answer the question “Why?” Why do you want this job?
- Demonstrate your knowledge of the company by including a reference to the organization. By acknowledging their mission/reputation/accomplishments, you form a positive connection from the start.
- Relay your enthusiasm for the job.

Second Paragraph Should: (You may have more paragraphs depending on the content.)

- Give specific examples of how your strongest qualifications match the position requirements.
- Introduce and sell your relevant skills and experiences.
- Describe how you meet the needs of the employer by providing evidence of your related skills and experiences.
- Use short narrative examples and showcase how your skills and experience are an excellent match for the position.
- Reinforce qualifications presented in resume.
- Show your strong writing skills.

Closing Paragraph—2 Must-Haves:

- Last chance to highlight skills/abilities. Do not replicate your resume.
- Thank the employer for the time and consideration given to your application.
- Suggest a plan of action- only if this suits your personality (request an interview; indicate you will follow up during a specific timeframe)

Sincerely,

My Name (typed)

Your name signed in pen here if hard copy; if emailed, just eliminate these extra spaces or include electronic signature.
Boston Non-Profit Housing Association (BNHA) seeks a well-organized, self-motivated individual to help coordinate advocacy efforts as part of BNHA’s regional work. BNHA is a thirty-two-year-old membership association that focuses government policy on housing solutions for low-income people who suffer disproportionately from the housing crisis, while promoting the preservation, development, and quality management of affordable housing. The program assistant will help pass policies and programs on the local and regional level that will support the development of affordable housing.

Job Duties and Responsibilities

*Coordination/Advocacy*
- Help schedule meetings, draft agendas, take notes, and circulate information to the Housing Action Network.
- Participate in meetings and discussions with local advocacy groups to ensure connection between the regional and local work.

*Organizing/Training*
- Help coordinate regional trainings on Inclusionary Housing, Community Acceptance, Housing Elements, and other local or regional housing efforts
- Assist in organizing local support for regional efforts by attending meetings and doing some outreach around sign-on letters or hearings.

*Media / Communications*
- Provide regular updates for BNHA’s update, newsletter, and for the Housing Action Network
- Assist in the release of reports by creating an updated press list and assisting in pitching stories.

Qualifications
Bachelor’s degree required.
Experience in either organizing or campaign work helpful.

123 Amherst Avenue
Amherst, MA 01002

February 1, 2011

Ms. Mary James
Program Director
Boston Non-Profit Housing Association
100 Massachusetts Avenue
Boston, MA 02111

Dear Ms. James:

It is with enthusiasm that I apply for the Program Assistant position as seen on the University of Massachusetts Amherst Career Services website. I am passionate about and have a personal interest in advocating for affordable housing for all. I am a University of Massachusetts Amherst senior looking to relocate to Boston this spring.

Last summer I had the opportunity to intern for the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Boston, where I was exposed to a variety of advocacy efforts and campaign work. I used my strong organizational skills to schedule regional meetings, take notes and provide regular updates for the program directors. I aided in creating promotional publications, such as the monthly newsletter and circulated the information both via hard copy and internet in order to advertise our events and provide outreach to potential members. Additionally, I was the liaison for our local branch and coordinated Skype teleconferences for the five regional chapters to participate simultaneously.

I am someone with a lot of self-motivation. For the past four years I have worked during the school year at Amherst Pizza and was recently promoted to manager. This, coupled with my strong desire to make a difference for others, makes me an excellent candidate. I look forward to discussing the position with you in more detail. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Emma Good
Action Verb List: Use the verbs from the job ad first, then pick from this list.

**Communication Skills**
- Addressed
- Arranged
- Authored
- Collaborated
- Composed
- Consulted
- Contacted
- Corresponded
- Directed
- Drafted
- Edited
- Enlisted
- Expressed
- Formulated
- Furnished
- Incorporated
- Influenced
- Interacted
- Involved
- Marketed
- Mediated
- Negotiated
- Observed
- Outlined
- Promoted
- Proposed
- Publicized
- Recruited
- Solicited
- Spoke
- Summarized
- Synthesized
- Wrote

**Creative Skills**
- Acted
- Adapted
- Began
- Combined
- Composed
- Created
- Customized
- Designed
- Developed
- Directed
- Entertained
- Established
- Fashioned
- Formulated
- Founded
- Illustrated
- Initiated
- Instituted
- Integrated
- Introduced
- Invented
- Modified
- Originated
- Performed

**Financial Skills**
- Supplied
- Simplified
- Resolved
- Represented
- Resolved
- Simplified
- Supplied

**Helping Skills**
- Supported
- Volunteered

**Management Skills**
- Planned
- Revised
- Shaped
- Solved
- Financial Skills
- Administered
- Adjusted
- Allocated
- Analyzed
- Appraised
- Assessed
- Audited
- Balanced
- Budgeted
- Calculated
- Computed
- Corrected
- Determined
- Estimated
- Managed
- Marketed
- Measured
- Planned
- Prepared
- Programmed
- Projected
- Reconciled
- Reduced
- Researched

**Helping Skills**
- Adapted
- Advocated
- Aided
- Arranged
- Assessed
- Assisted
- Coached
- Collaborated
- Cooperated
- Counseled
- Demonstrated
- Diagnosed
- Educated
- Encouraged
- Ensured
- Expedited
- Facilitated
- Familiarized
- Furthered
- Guided
- Helped
- Prevented
- Provided
- Referred
- Rehabilitated
- Represented
- Resolved
- Simplified
- Supplied

**Technical Skills**
- Standardized
- Specialized
- Remodeled
- Regulated
- Repaired
- Restored
- Specialized
- Standardized
- Studied
- Upgraded
- Utilized

**Research Skills**
- Analyzed
- Collected
- Conducted
- Critiqued
- Detected
- Diagnosed
- Evaluated
- Examined
- Experimented
- Explored
- Formulated
- Gathered
- Inspected
- Invented
- Investigated
- Located
- Measured
- Reviewed
- Solved
- Summarized
- Surveyed
- Systematized
- Tested

**Teaching Skills**
- Adapted
- Advised
- Coached
- Communicated
- Conducted
- Coordinated
- Critiqued
- Developed
- Evaluated
- Explained
- Facilitated
- Focused
- Guided
- Individualized
- Informed
- Instilled
- Instructed
- Motivated
- Persuaded
- Simulated
- Taught
- Tested
- Trained
- Transmitted
- Tutored