



COVER LETTER

A cover letter is a formal business letter introducing your application, explaining who you are, what you're applying for, and why. Unless otherwise stated by the prospective employer, a cover letter is always mandatory as part of a job application. That said, it should not be lengthy (one page only), autobiographical, or a mere repeat of what's on your résumé. Perhaps most importantly, every cover letter you send out must be customized to the specific firm/organization and position you're applying to. This of course involves research.

Most firms have web sites; visit them. Learn about the types of projects they do. Read their mission statement, and use this information to your advantage. Make reference to it in your letter; communicate to them that you have made the effort to do some research on them. This initiative should impress them. Do, however, make sure that any references you make are concrete. Empty, flowery praise, may not accomplish anything. Keep the focus on you and your accomplishments/skills and what, specifically, you can do for the company.

Heading

- Your name, complete mailing address, phone number, email address ... identical to your résumé.
 - Keep it simple. You do not need to write "Email: firstname.lastname@the-bac.edu" or "Phone: 617-555-5555."
 - List one phone number, the one you'd want prospective employers to reach you at. Answer it professionally, and be sure you have a professional outgoing voicemail message.
 - Use a professional email address, e.g. BAC email. Remove all hyperlinks throughout all documents.
- Company name, complete mailing address
- Address the letter appropriately. Having a contact name is best: "Dear Mr. Smith" or "Dear Ms. Smith" (Never "Miss Smith" or "Mrs. Smith"). If you don't have a contact name, or they ask you to email a generic address: "To Whom it May Concern" or "Dear Sir/Madam" ... are acceptable.

Paragraph 1

Introduce yourself and your application to your prospective employer by answering the following questions:

- What are you applying for?
- How did you find out about the position?
- Who are you?
- Why are you applying for the position?

"I am applying for the position of Office Person / Entry Level Drafter listed on the Boston Society of Architects website. I am currently pursuing my master's degree in architecture at the Boston Architectural College, and have completed design studios as well as coursework in drawing, drafting, AutoCAD, model building, and design principles. Additionally, I have two years of experience working as an administrative assistant in a fast-paced, professional environment. I believe that my academic and professional experience make me an excellent candidate for this position."

Paragraphs 2 - 3

The most important part of your letter: this is where you sell yourself to your prospective employer. While a résumé provides a general overview of your skills, in a cover letter you get the chance to drive home your qualifications. Don't just repeat what you say in the résumé: elaborate further. Provide more details and anecdotes that show you have the appropriate skills and accomplishments:

- Expand on your design and professional skills.
- Discuss ways in which those skills are appropriate for the position.
- Discuss ways (two or more) in which you are a good match for the firm... be specific: WHY?
- This is the part of the cover letter you must customize for each job application.

“In my previous position as an Administrative Assistant at Becker & Holmes, I refined my administrative and communication skills. I answered phones, greeted visitors, confirmed meetings, typed correspondence, and prepared materials for meetings and conferences. I was also involved in researching, designing, and creating various client presentations using PowerPoint. I am accustomed to working in a professional, fast-paced environment that has an emphasis on client support.

I am also very interested in your firm's growing emphasis on projects that have a focus on historic preservation, as it is a field that I am interested in learning more about. I have an undergraduate degree in archaeology, as well as experience working in Boston University's archaeological restoration laboratory, that would allow me to contribute a unique perspective to historic renovation projects.”

Structurally, make sure you have strong topic sentences. Start off a paragraph by clearly identifying a skill you have to offer. Then as you go deeper into the paragraph elaborate further on that skill and/or additional ones. Readers see the first and last sentences of a paragraph the most clearly, so make sure your most important information is located there.

In addition, try to focus your paragraphs around a central topic, perhaps a particular skill or set of skills. Some students have one paragraph that focuses on their professional design experience, while the second focuses more on their academic background. Others focus one paragraph on their design skills and the second on their office and communication skills. Regardless of how you organize it, make sure that the ideas in a given paragraph hang together. This letter is a form of communication to a prospective employer. If it is scattered, the prospective employer's first impression of you is as a scattered person. Needless to say, this probably won't get you an interview.

Lastly, many cover letters mention work the firm has done. This can and should be done. However, don't just praise them for the sake of praising. Instead of just writing about how cool their work is, describe how your background and/or interests are aligned with said cool work. Meaningless regurgitation of online content tends to annoy prospective employers as much (or more) than evidence of no research at all.

Conclusion

Add a couple of brief closing sentences thanking the person, express a desire to learn more about the position, and indicating the best way to reach you to further discuss the position. Sign off with “Sincerely” or “Best regards,” your signature, and your printed name.

“I would value the opportunity to learn more about the Office Person/Entry Level Drafter position and how I might contribute to your company. You may contact me by phone or email at the contact information above. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

(signature; signed by hand in hardcopy, embedded as JPEG digitally)

Name”

Remember, every document must be 100% free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. Once you have a résumé drafted, make an appointment with the Learning Resource Center (writingcenter@the-bac.edu).