**Cover Letters: Why Should I Write One?**

Most of us are familiar with resumes – those pieces of paper that describe what you have to offer a potential employer, such as your educational background, your skills and experiences along with additional information that describes your qualifications. But a resume, in comparison to a cover letter, is the “skeleton” of what you have to offer, whereas a **cover letter allows you to personalize your approach to attaining a specific position.**

**Here are some things to think about when writing cover letters:**

**Who** sees your cover letter?

Your cover letter should be addressed to the person who will be reviewing your application. Call the company; make some effort! Taking this kind of initiative can help you stand out.

**What** should you do to make your cover letter enhance your application?

Research! Learn about the organization - read as much of their web site as you can. Include some information in your letter that **illustrates why you are genuinely interested in the position for which you are applying and for this organization in particular.** Keep your cover letter to one page. Your potential employer will likely have many applications to review, so they need to quickly get a good grasp of what YOU would bring to the position specifically and to the organization and team in general. It is best not use templates – **each cover letter should be tailored to a specific position.**

Finally, PROOFREAD a few times; typos, misspellings and other errors can quickly put your application in the “do not call” pile.

**Where** should you send it?

Most job application materials are now submitted online, so it is fine to include the context of your cover letter in the body of an e-mail message or to include it is an attachment along with your resume. Larger organizations may have online application systems that will allow you to upload your resume and cover letter. If a position posting indicates you should mail or fax your application materials, then be sure to follow these instructions.

**When** is a cover letter appropriate?

When you are applying for an internship or professional position, a cover letter is generally expected. It displays professionalism and seriousness about your desire to interview, and hopefully, be offered your preferred position. Even if a cover letter is not required, **writing a good one will put you a step above the rest!**

**Why** should I?

A cover letter displays your personality, your purpose, your knowledge, your writing capabilities, your professionalism, and expands upon the information included in your resume. You can think of it as a "pre-interview", which will hopefully lead to a real interview where you can express in person why you are the perfect person for the job.

**So now how** do I format my cover letter and get started writing?

Good question! Following is a “how to”/content example for how to create a strong cover letter.
Dear Mr./Ms. Person*: (be sure to use a colon not a comma)

It’s best if you can start with a sentence that expresses your interest and enthusiasm for the organization and/or the position for which you are applying. Then mention some strengths or background you have that makes you a great candidate for this position. If someone recommended you contact this person or suggested you apply for this position, and/or there are specific reasons why you are excited about this organization, don’t be shy – state this. This opening paragraph is a perfect place to mention something that has impressed you about this organization (e.g., something you read on their web site or in a recent news article or blurb). This shows that you’ve done your research.

The middle paragraph (or two) should focus on the skills and experiences you have that are most relevant to the job for which you are applying. (Hint: It’s a good idea to use some of the words and phrases that appear in the job posting/position description!) Be specific – describe how you have applied your skills previously and what you accomplished and contributed in your previous experiences. Next, state how you look forward to using these skills and strengths to help this organization. You can then make a reference to your enclosed resume for further information about all that you have to offer.

In your last paragraph, write about what you would like to happen next (i.e. an interview or opportunity to talk about this position further). Provide information for how you can be reached, whether it is by email, phone number, or both. Unless the job posting specifically states, “no phone calls,” you can state that you plan to follow up in a week or two. Thank them for their time and consideration. Do not forget to sign your letter!

Sincerely,

*If you can’t find the name of a specific person to whom you should address your letter, use a salutation like “Dear Hiring Manager:” or “Dear Search Committee:”

Sample cover letters are available in the Career Development Office in CA 243.