

**Center for Engineering Career Development
U.Va. School of Engineering and Applied Science**

**Creating a Winning Cover Letter
Guidelines & Samples**

1. Keep It Short

The ideal cover letter is about half a page long, and never exceeds one page. A concise letter demonstrates that you are focused and have strong communication skills. Aim for two to four brief paragraphs.

2. State The Position

The recruiter who reads your letter may be hiring for several posts. While candidates who e-mail their resumes often include the job title in the subject line of their e-mails, if the recruiter prints a letter out before reading it, such information may be lost. Clearly state the job title in the first paragraph of the letter, preferably in the first sentence.

3. Explain Why You Want The Job

Candidates should always answer the question, Why do I want to do this work?. Ask yourself how the position fits into your overall career plans and what you find exciting about the particular sector. A genuine show of enthusiasm and knowledge will set you apart from those sending generic form letters.

4. Clearly Describe Ways You Will Contribute

After carefully reading the job description, write a paragraph outlining one or two specific examples of how your skills and experiences will fit the company's needs.

5. Match, But Don't Reiterate, Your Resume

This is one point many job seekers find tricky. You should never claim experience in your cover letter that isn't reflected on your resume. At the same time, your cover letter shouldn't simply restate your resume. When you explain the ways you will contribute, refer to an experience or skill on your resume to show how you will add value to the company.

6. Don't Say You're Not Qualified

Even if you think the position is out of your reach, your job is to convince the recruiter you are qualified. If the recruiter thinks you're unqualified, a confessional letter is not going to get you interview. Keep the letter positive by focusing on your transferable skills and unusual accomplishments.

7. Keep The Tone And Content Professional

Don't be a comedian, don't get really personal, and don't beg for the job.

8. Tell The Reader What You're Going To Do Next

Too many job seekers never follow up after sending a resume. Clearly explain in your letter the manner in which you will follow up and when you will do so. If the job post lists a phone number, indicate you will call within a specified time to arrange an interview. If not, consider calling anyway, unless the post specifically requests "no calls." You may also consider a follow-up e-mail if you sent your resume electronically.

9. Proofread

Again. Using a spell checker is not enough. Many recruiters will dismiss even the most qualified candidate if there is one typo in cover letter or resume. Reread your letter two or three times, then give it to someone else who knows a thing or two about good writing. Even if your letter is free of typos, poor grammar also makes a bad impression.

Cover letter Format

Your Street Address
City, State Zip Code
Telephone Number
Email Address
Month, Day, Year

Mr./Ms./Dr. FirstName LastName
Title
Name of Organization
Street or P. O. Box Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. LastName:

Opening paragraph: State why you are writing; how you learned of the organization or position, and basic information about yourself.

2nd paragraph: Mention what you are currently doing and then tell why you are interested in the employer or type of work the employer does (Simply stating that you are interested does not tell why, and can sound like a form letter). Demonstrate that you know enough about the employer or position to relate your background to the employer or position. Mention specific qualifications which make you a good fit for the employer's needs. This is an opportunity to explain in more detail relevant items in your resume. Refer to the fact that your resume is enclosed.

3rd paragraph: Indicate that you would like the opportunity to interview for a position or to talk with the employer to learn more about their opportunities or hiring plans. State what you will do to follow up, such as telephone the employer within two weeks. If you will be in the employer's location and could offer to schedule a visit, indicate when. State that you would be glad to provide the employer with any additional information needed. Thank the employer for her/his consideration.

Sincerely,

(signature)

Cover Letter Etiquette

Job seekers often spend countless hours developing their resumes and then treat their cover letters as an afterthought. This can be a critical mistake; the cover letter can help your resume get noticed.

Think of the cover letter as your resume's cheerleading section. To make the best impression, follow these etiquette rules:

Say No to the Cover Letter Cop-Out: The first rule of cover letter etiquette is to send a cover letter-always (unless you are applying through CAVLink and it does not give you that option) . It doesn't matter if the hiring manager didn't ask for it or you're too busy to write one. It's proper business etiquette to accompany a resume with a cover letter, and it gives you the opportunity to help sell yourself for the position.

Be Concise: Busy hiring managers don't have time to wade through letters that could pass for dissertations. Get to the point as expeditiously as possible, and break any paragraphs seven lines or longer into short, easily digestible ones.

When emailing your cover letter, brevity is even more important. The nature of email calls for concise communication, in part because it's harder to read on screen than on paper. However, don't fall prey to the one-line cover letter that some job seekers try to pass off. It goes something like this: "Please see attached resume, and thank you for your time and consideration." You should be able to write a convincing cover letter in a few brief paragraphs.

Keep It Professional But Friendly: While a resume is generally a formal document, cover letters give you a chance to reveal your personality. Not only do you want to show that you're a good fit for the position, but you also want the reader to like you. Appropriate use of humor, combined with a friendly and professional tone, can help endear you to the hiring manager.

Get Personal: Whenever possible, address your letter to a specific person. If a job posting doesn't include a person's name, do some research to find out who the correct person is. Try calling the employer (but do respect ads that state "no phone calls"), and ask a receptionist for the hiring manager's name. Keep the salutation professional by using "Dear Mr. Jones," not "Dear Jim."

Focus on the Employer's Needs: If every other sentence of your letter begins with "I" or "my," you need to change the focus. Research the employer and find out what types of problems managers there are facing, qualities they look for in employees and their future goals. Then use your letter to prove that you are the answer to their problems. The most compelling letters demonstrate what you can do for the employer, not what the employer can do for you.

Be Original: Your cover letter will stand out if you employ some creativity. For example, you could include a brief summary of your toughest sale or most challenging project. You could incorporate excerpts of performance reviews to highlight your record of success. Or, you could create two columns in your letter to demonstrate precisely how you meet the employer's requirements:

Your ad specifies: Five years' experience in IT.

And I deliver: Six years of superior-rated performance in network design and administration.

Proofread: Cover letters should be free of errors, so thoroughly proofread them before sending. If proofreading is not your strong suit, get help from someone with meticulous proofreading skills. If you're customizing a cover letter that you use for many positions, remove any placeholders; this will prevent embarrassing errors such as "I would be delighted to be your next ." And one last tip: whatever you do, please spell the hiring manager's name correctly.

Following cover letter etiquette can be time intensive, but the reward is worth it: More calls for interviews and a greater chance of securing a new position.

Cover Letters & Email

When emailing your resume, send a shortened version of your cover letter. The nature of email makes it important for your letter to be concise. You still need to be compelling and showcase your main selling points to prompt the hiring manager to read your resume, but you can accomplish this in a couple of paragraphs.

Kim Isaacs, Monster Resume Expert, Monstertrak 2008

(These sample letters are simply examples and are not to be used verbatim as your cover letter).

sample cover letter for full-time

583 University Avenue
Charlottesville, VA 22903
(434) 293-4233

January 17, 2010

Mr. Garret M. Hansen
Lucent Technologies Network Systems GmbH
Thurn-und-Taxis-Strasse 10
90411 Nuremberg
Germany

Dear Mr. Hansen:

I am writing to apply for Lucent's Marketing Associate position in Nuremberg, Germany. I became aware of this opportunity through the University of Virginia's Center for Engineering Career Development, and I believe I have the skills as well as the enthusiasm to work for the Customer Centre in Germany.

I am currently a fourth-year electrical engineering student, and will graduate from the University of Virginia in May of 2009. By viewing your supplementary information and Lucent's website, I learned that you are seeking candidates with strong presentation and technical abilities. I am confident that I have the background and skills you are seeking. Having a strong technical background, working for the UVA Solar Airship Program, and GE Financial Assurance, I am able to present technical information to both engineering and non-technical personnel. Academically, I have presented both my thesis proposal and my thesis technical report to my peers and my professor. With the Airship Program, I have presented formal and informal presentations not only to the team members, but also to other students and to faculty members. In addition, I have further developed my management skills as the VP of Engineering of the UVA Solar Airship Program (2007). I managed the different engineering teams and helped set the team's short and long term goals. I also worked closely with the VP of Business to determine the team's budget and helped with fundraising and advertising.

Attached is my resume for review. I hope to join your team in Germany. If you have any questions, please contact me at (434) 555-1212 or email me at 1234@virginia.edu. Thank you for your time and I look forward in meeting you in April.

Sincerely,

Jefferson Cavalier

10 Jefferson Court
Charlottesville, VA 22903

January 23, 2010

Ms. Jane Wilson
Recruiting Specialist
Company X
123 Main Street
Richmond, VA 12345

Dear Ms. Wilson:

The Center for Engineering Career Development at the University of Virginia recommended that I contact you about opportunities with (name of company). I am presently seeking information concerning summer internship positions with your company in hopes to gain hands-on experience to complement my academic background.

Currently, I am pursuing a degree in Computer Engineering at the University of Virginia, and I would like to further my understanding of engineering practices in the industry while contributing to the overall advancement of your company. The vigorous academic curriculum implemented by the faculty in the Engineering School has challenged me to enhance my analytical and technical skills to better prepare myself for the working world.

Attached, please find a copy of my resume. I will be contacting you in the next few weeks to discuss further opportunities within your company. Please feel free to contact me at (434) 555-2222 or by e-mail at thorntonh@virginia.edu if you have any questions. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Thornton A. Halls

1 Dabney Station
Charlottesville, VA 22904

January 29, 2010

John J. Employer
ABC Internet Company
1234 Main Street
Anytown, VA 33333

Dear Mr. Employer,

I received your name from the Hoosonline.com UCAN database through the School of Engineering and Applied Science at the University of Virginia. I am seeking an internship in the field of computer engineering in order to gain hands-on experience to compliment my academic background. I am very interested in this field and would greatly appreciate any suggestions or advice that you can offer me at this time

As a first year student in the School of Engineering and Applied Science at UVa, I have had the opportunity and challenge of juggling the demands of the engineering curriculum. I have learned a lot about time management, working in groups, and the general field of engineering. In addition, I have further developed my problem solving and analytical skills.

If by chance, I could have the opportunity to exchange emails with you to get your advise on careers, and how I might go about getting some quality work experience, that would great. If you wish to reach me, my number is (434) 444-1111 and my email address is m2345@virginia.edu. Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

Mary Cavalier

September 16, 2010

Mr. James Monroe
Lead Recruiter, Biotrek
2222 Lab Way
Fairfax, VA 22206

Dear Mr. Monroe:

I learned of Biotrek through online research using the CareerSearch database through the Center for Engineering Career Development at the University of Virginia where I am completing my Master's degree in Biomedical Engineering. From my research on your web site, I believe there would be a good fit between my skills and interests and your needs. I am interested in the Senior Research Engineering position upon completion of my degree in May 2009.

Currently, as a graduate student, I am involved with a research team where I have become familiar with magnetic suspension techniques, numerical solution methods, blood-biomaterial interactions, and testing protocols. My work on the this research project has also allowed me to develop proficiency working within a cross-functional team to solve complex engineering problems. I am highly self-motivated and have been given substantial latitude in developing my own engineering solutions. I believe, through my research experience and also serving as the Team Lead for my undergraduate senior design project, that I have gained extensive leadership experience and further developed my strong research and problem solving abilities. I feel these skills are an excellent match for your need for a Senior Research Engineer.

I appreciate your consideration of my qualifications for this position. I look forward to hearing from you about the possibility of being considered as a candidate for this opportunity.

Sincerely,
Erin Engineer
123 Engineers Way
Charlottesville, VA 22903
(434) 982-2556
EEngineer@virginia.edu

Resume attached as MS Word document