

Writing Effective Cover Letters

A Cover Letter Should Get You Noticed

- Must make you stand out from the crowd.
- Must get your resume past the Gatekeeper.
- Should highlight several of your key qualifications.
- Should be short and concise.



The Gatekeeper



- A gatekeeper is the person who first sees the resume.
- The gatekeeper is usually not the Hiring Authority.
- The gatekeeper decides whether resume gets passed on to the Hiring Authority

Gatekeeper Realities

- Gatekeepers may receive hundreds of resumes.
- Gatekeepers may have to make decisions about resumes in a few seconds' time.
- Gatekeepers may be screening resumes for several job openings at a time.
- Gatekeepers may not know all important aspects of the job requirements.

Getting Past the Gatekeeper

- Use industry "key words" or "buzz words" from the job description in your cover letter.
- Highlight key accomplishments in your cover letter.
 - How did your actions affect company growth?
 - How did you streamline company processes?
 - What innovations did you make in previous jobs?
- Keep your cover letters short!



Length of Cover Letter

- Letter should consist of not more than 4 paragraphs.
- Each paragraph should be 4 to 6 lines.
- Do NOT write *War and Peace*. Keep it short.
- Cut out anything unnecessary.



Language Usage

- Do NOT begin every sentence with "I." Be creative.
- Use industry Key Words.
 - *event planning...*
 - *systems analysis...*
- Use phrases from the posted job description.
- Make clear, dynamic word choices.



Effective Word Choices

- Avoid bland, vague verbs.
 - *contribute*
 - *assist*
- Choose words with the clearest meaning.
 - *work* instead of *interface*
 - *affect* instead of *impact*
- Avoid obscure words. The gatekeeper won't use a dictionary.



Humor may not go over well.

Key Information to Include

- Don't just write a "laundry list" of responsibilities.
 - Illustrate key responsibilities with examples.
 - Comment on successful results.
- Highlight successful projects.
- Innovations and ways you saved the company money.
- Supervision of other employees.
- Be sure to comment on your high regard for the company and their excellent reputation

References

- If you were referred to this position, mention the referee's name in the first paragraph.
- Offer additional references.
- Be careful to select references that will be positive and complimentary.
- Speak with references ahead of time, to secure their permission.

Conclusion

- End with thanks for considering you as a candidate.
- Suggest a time for you to make a follow up call.

Sample Cover Letter

Contact's Name

Title

Department

Company

Street Address

City

Phone

Fax:

Dear Contact:

(1st Paragraph) The first paragraph tells why you are contacting this person, then mentions connection with the person or where you found out about the job. It is important that you wow them with your sincere, researched knowledge of the company. The goal is to demonstrate you are worthy to apply and hope they read further.

(2nd Paragraph) Tell about yourself very concisely. Explain why you are the perfect candidate for the position. Summarize for them why this is true. Note that a resume is included to clarify your "perfect match."

- If something important on the resume needs explaining, do it here in a sentence or another very short paragraph.

(3rd Paragraph) Thank them for their time and how much you appreciate it and that you look forward to their reply. Mention that you will call them next Tuesday in the afternoon.

Sincerely,

Bad Example

While some very creative positions might warrant a creative cover letter it is a risk. The bullets and information of this letter say “unprofessional.”

Kimberly Lee
444 Beach Street, #7
West Lakeland Park, AZ 12345
123-555-1234
klee@bamboo.com

May 13, 2001

Mr. Frank Randall, Partner
Randall, Jerneys and Calpert Inc.
101 Stratford Drive
Tempe, AZ 12345

Dear Mr. Randall,

There's a reason why:

- Friends hand me the dinner bill to divvy up
- My checkbook always balances at the end of each month
- My three kids are never late for events
- Community groups look to me to organize events

I'm a “detail person” — the kind of person you need as your administrative assistant.

For the last five years, I've handled all the scheduling, finances, and logistics for my family of five. It's time for me to get back into the corporate work force and put my organizational talents to use there.

I'll contact you in the next few days to see if you or one of your associates needs an assistant.

Thank you!

Kimberly Lee

Enclosure: resume

Poor Example

Debra J. Brown
2296 Sylvan Dr.
Norfolk, VA, 23510
(757) 555-4890

March 3, 2003

RE: Physician Assistant Position

Dr. Johnson
Vascular Surgical Associates
825 Fairfax Avenue
Norfolk, Virginia 23507

Dear Dr. Johnson:

Thank you for making my rotation **enjoyable**. As you suggested, I am enclosing my curriculum vitae for you to review.

Elaborate: how did Dr. Johnson make the rotation enjoyable specifically?

I will be ready for employment as a surgical Physician Assistant in May. I will graduate on May 1st. I structured the last months of my rotations to enhance my operating room skills, I will also be working with the Emergency Physicians of Tidewater which will help my suturing and wound care skills. I will be doing my final rotation in another surgical specialty, then in CVCT. **I will be prepared to** manage patients in the ICU and increasing OR time.

I am sure I can make an immediate contribution to your practice and am looking forward to doing so. I would welcome the opportunity to interview you.

The language in the last two paragraphs sounds arrogant and possibly naïve.

Sincerely,

Debra J. Brown

See improved version on Page 4.

Good example (Improved from Page 3)

Debra J. Brown
2296 Sylvan Dr.
Norfolk, VA, 23510
(757) 555-4890

March 3, 2003

RE: Physician Assistant Position

Dr. Johnson
Vascular Surgical Associates
825 Fairfax Avenue
Norfolk, Virginia 23507

Dear Dr. Johnson:

Thank you for making my rotation with Vascular Associates a rewarding, stimulating, and challenging experience. . As you and your partners suggested during my rotation, I am submitting my curriculum vitae for your review.

Note the thanks offered. Good strategy to remind doctor that this CV is being sent as a suggested. Good elaboration about the rotation experience.

Upon graduation in May, I seek employment as a surgical Physician Assistant. I structured these last few months of my education to enhance the skills needed to be proficient in the operating room and the intensive care unit. The next six weeks with Emergency Physicians of Tidewater will provide experience in suturing and wound care. My final rotation will be with another surgical specialty, if not in vascular surgery, then in cardiac to prepare me for managing patients in the ICU.

I believe I can make an immediate contribution to your practice. I welcome the opportunity for an interview with you at your convenience. I will call you next week. In the meantime, if you have questions, I can be reached after 3:00 p.m. daily through my pager (757-666-6666).

Again, thank you for the excellent training you provided during the rotation. I look forward to talk with you.

Much better, humbler language.
Gratitude goes far!

Sincerely,

Debra J. Brown

Enclosure: curriculum vitae

Kathy A. Student
123 Montgomery Ave.
Virginia Beach, VA 23464
(757) 227-4500 kathstu@regent.edu

Pretty good example.
Shorten if possible.

February 24, 2006

Mark D. Matthews
Hampton Commonwealth's Attorney
236 North King Street
Hampton, Virginia 23888

Dear Mr. Matthews,

I am a first year law student at Regent University School of Law interested in a Spring/Summer volunteer position with the Hampton Commonwealth Attorney's Office.

As you can see from the enclosed resume, I have had an interest in the Criminal Justice system since my Undergraduate studies at James Madison University. In addition, I am a member of the Public Interest Legal Advocates at Regent (PILAR) and Trial Advocacy. Before attending Regent, I was active duty Air Force stationed at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia. While serving on active duty, I was responsible for ensuring that warfighting units and senior leadership worldwide had up-to-date, accurate information. **I grew up in Hampton and have a direct interest in this community.**

Good recap of interests that suit her for this position. Excellent point about her familiarity and commitment to this community.

My heart is in the area of law practiced by your office. My interest in prosecutorial work and the public interest make me a good candidate for volunteering with the Hampton Commonwealth Attorney's Office. Additionally, my experiences in my studies and my natural leadership abilities demonstrate my qualifications for the position.

Needs a final paragraph, to include:

- Thanks/appreciation
- Mention follow up time, plans, or information

Sincerely,

Kathy A. Student

Enclosure

COVER LETTER AS PART OF INTERVIEWING PROCESS

Dynamics of Cover Letter

Letter is the Introduction to the Resume.

Should be short and concise

Letter should consist of not more than 4 paragraphs

Each paragraph should be 4 to 6 lines

Do NOT write “War and Peace”-be short

Do NOT flower up letter with unnecessary language

Do NOT begin every sentence with “I”-Be creative

Provide definite information

Show qualifying factors

Show special projects and results(successful)

If you saved the company or employer money , explain how

Show supervision of other employees

Use Key Words for understanding

#Recognize that the person who first sees the resume may not be Hiring Authority

#Person is known as Gatekeeper. He or she will decide whether resume gets passed on

Recognize that the “Gatekeeper “may have many resumes and will have to decide who to pass on in a few seconds time.

#Recognize that this person may be working on several job openings at a time

As a result he or she might have most facts in the job requirement but not all

Important to use key words in letter such as those written in ad for position if possible

Do not use vague words such as “contribute or assist”.

Let Gatekeeper know how you did assist in the outcome- be graphic Show accomplishments in \$\$\$ (saved company money) or how affected growth of company or streamlined a process saving company money.

Don't write a “laundry list” just listing your responsibilities- show examples and results.

Use plain language- don't use fancy words- we don't want employer to have to use a dictionary.

Example in speaking clearly and simply- Use words like “work”,”affect”, instead of words like interface, impact etc.

Use key words that are part of the field or industry where you are applying

If you have been referred for this position, please mention the referee's name in letter. First paragraph would be better.

Job searches are hard work but please remember not to use humor in your letter. It just does not go over well in employment situation

Remember you must stand out

Suggest you have references to send to employer. Clear references to make sure they are positive and complimentary

Explain in text how highly you regard the company and their excellent reputation

End letter with thanks for considering you as a candidate and suggest you will call next Tuesday in the a.m. or whatever date you pick to do so.

Key Resume Phrases and Words

The following phrases and words may help with organizing your resume statements. They convey involvement and accomplishments and make your resume more readable and effective.

Interaction with...	Acted as liaison for/between...
Established...	Formulated...
Edited...	Handled...
Initiated...	Implemented...
Managed...	Assigned territory consisting of...
Maintained...	Promoted to/from...
Instrumental in...	Recipient of...
Remained as...	Innovation resulted in...
Honored as...	...amounting to a total savings of...
Recommendations accepted by...	Administered...
Adept at...	Analyzed/Assessed...
Assisted with...	Arranged...
Coordinated...	Counseled...
Delegated...	Conducted...
Directed...	Demonstrated...
Developed...	Advised...
Consulted...	Delivered...
Budgeted...	Drafted...
Evaluated...	Gathered...
Installed...	Improved...
Instructed...	Investigated...
Negotiated...	Organized...
Planned...	Performed...
Presented...	Recommended...
Proven track record in...	Experience involved/included...
More than [] years experience...	Expertise and demonstrated skills...
Successful in/at...	Experienced in all facets/phases...
Knowledge of/experienced as...	Extensive training/involvement...
Initially employed...	Specialize in...
Proficient/competent at...	Temporarily assigned to...
Sales quota accountability...	Reported directly to...
Served/Operated as...	In charge of...
Direct/Indirect control...	Familiar with...
Assigned to...	Contracted/Subcontracted...
Provided technical assistance...	Acted/Functioned as...
...on an ongoing/regular basis...	...to ensure maximum/optimum...
Worked closely with...	Resulted in...
Accomplished...	

Additional Resume Categories

To add relevant information to your resume that focuses on special knowledge or skills, consider the following resume headings:

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS TECHNICAL SKILLS

INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE	ASSETS
ACCOMPLISHMENTS	COOPERATIVE EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS	HONORS
TRAVEL	LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES
SCHOLARSHIPS	LANGUAGES
INTERESTS	SKILLS
QUALIFICATIONS SUMMARY	PRESENTATIONS
PUBLICATIONS	REFERENCES
TRAINING	VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

Resume Writing - Power Word List

<p>A</p> <p>abated abbreviated abolished abridged absolved absorbed accelerated accentuated accommodated accomplished accounted for accrued accumulated achieved acquired acted adapted adopted added addressed adjusted administered advanced advertised advised advocated affirmed aided alerted aligned allayed alleviated allocated allotted altered amassed amended analyzed answered anticipated appeased applied appointed appraised approached appropriated approved arbitrated aroused arranged articulated</p>	<p>delivered demonstrated deployed derived described designated designed detailed detected determined developed devised diagnosed differentiated diffused directed disbursed discovered discussed dispatched dispensed displayed disposed disproved dissected disseminated dissolved distinguished distributed diversified diverted divested divided documented doubled drafted dramatized drew up drove</p> <p>E</p> <p>earned eased economized edited educated effected elaborated elected elevated elicited eliminated</p>	<p>invented inventoried invested investigated invigorated invited involved isolated issued itemized</p> <p>J</p> <p>joined judged justified</p> <p>L</p> <p>launched learned lectured led lessened leveraged licensed lifted limited linked liquidated listened litigated loaded located logged</p> <p>M</p> <p>made maintained managed mandated maneuvered manipulated manufactured mapped marked marketed mastered maximized measured mediated memorized mentored merged</p>	<p>rehabilitated reinforced reiterated related released relied relieved remained remodeled rendered renegotiated renewed reorganized repaired replaced replied replicated reported represented reproduced requested researched reserved resolved responded restored restructured retained retooled retrieved returned revamped reversed reviewed revised revitalized revolutionized rewarded risked rotated routed</p> <p>S</p> <p>safeguarded salvaged saved scanned scheduled screened sculptured searched secured</p>
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<p>ascertained aspired assembled assessed assigned assimilated assisted assured attained attended audited augmented authored authorized automated averted avoided awarded</p> <p>B</p> <p>balanced began benchmarked benefited bid billed blended blocked bolstered boosted bought branded bridged broadened brought budgeted built</p> <p>C</p> <p>calculated calibrated capitalized captured cared for carried carved categorized catalogued caught cautioned cemented certified chaired challenged championed</p>	<p>embraced emphasized empowered enabled encouraged ended enforced engaged engineered enhanced enlisted enriched enrolled ensured entered entertained enticed equipped established estimated evaluated examined exceeded executed exercised exhibited expanded expedited experienced experimented explained explored expressed extended extracted</p> <p>E</p> <p>fabricated facilitated factored familiarized fashioned fielded filed filled finalized financed fine tuned finished fixed focused followed forecasted forged formalized</p>	<p>merited met minimized mobilized modeled moderated modified molded monitored monopolized motivated mounted moved multiplied</p> <p>N</p> <p>named narrated navigated negotiated netted neutralized nominated normalized notified nurtured</p> <p>O</p> <p>observed obtained offered officiated offset opened operated optimized orchestrated ordered organized oriented originated outdistanced outlined outperformed overcame overhauled oversaw owned</p> <p>P</p> <p>paced packaged packed pared participated</p>	<p>seized selected sent separated sequenced served serviced set up settled shaped shared sharpened shipped shortened showed signed simplified simulated sketched slashed smoothed solicited sold solidified solved sorted sourced sparked spearheaded specialized specified speculated spent spoke sponsored spurred staffed standardized started steered stimulated streamlined strengthened stretched structured studied submitted succeeded suggested summarized supervised supplied supported surpassed surveyed</p>
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<p> changed charged charted checked chose chronicled circulated circumvented cited clarified classified cleaned cleared closed coached coded collaborated collated collected combined commanded commended commenced commissioned communicated compared compiled complemented completed complied composed compounded computed conceived concentrated conceptualized condensed conducted conferred configured confirmed confronted connected conserved considered consolidated constructed consulted consummated contacted continued contracted contributed controlled converted </p>	<p> formed formulated fortified forwarded fostered fought found founded framed fulfilled functioned as funded furnished furthered </p> <p style="text-align: center;">G</p> <p> gained garnered gathered gauged gave generated governed graduated grasped greeted grew grouped guaranteed guided </p> <p style="text-align: center;">H</p> <p> halted halved handled headed heightened held helped hired honed hosted hypnotized hypothesized </p> <p style="text-align: center;">I</p> <p> identified ignited illustrated implemented imported improved improvised incited included </p>	<p> partnered passed penetrated perceived perfected performed persuaded photographed piloted pinpointed pioneered placed planned played praised predicted prepared prescribed presented preserved presided prevailed prevented printed prioritized processed procured produced profiled programmed progressed projected promoted proofread proposed protected proved provided pruned publicized purchased pursued </p> <p style="text-align: center;">Q</p> <p> quadrupled qualified quantified queried questioned quoted </p> <p style="text-align: center;">R</p> <p> raised rallied ranked </p>	<p> swayed swept symbolized synthesized systemized </p> <p style="text-align: center;">T</p> <p> tabulated tackled talked tallied targeted tasted taught teamed tempered tended terminated tested testified tied took topped totaled traced tracked trained transcribed transformed transitioned translated transmitted traveled treated trimmed tripled troubleshoot turned tutored typed </p> <p style="text-align: center;">U</p> <p> uncovered underlined underscored undertook underwrote unearthed unified united updated upgraded upheld urged used </p>
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<p>conveyed convinced cooperated coordinated copied corrected corresponded counseled created critiqued cultivated customized cut</p> <p><u>D</u></p> <p>dealt debated debugged decided decoded decreased dedicated defined delegated delineated</p>	<p>incorporated increased indicated individualized indoctrinated induced influenced informed infused initiated innovated inspected inspired installed instilled instituted instructed insured integrated intensified interacted interceded interpreted intervened interviewed</p>	<p>rated reached read realigned realized rearranged reasoned rebuilt received recognized recommended reconciled reconstructed recorded recovered recruited rectified redesigned redirected reduced re-engineered referred refocused registered regulated</p>	<p>utilized</p> <p><u>V</u></p> <p>validated valued vaulted verbalized verified viewed visualized voiced volunteered</p> <p><u>W</u></p> <p>weathered weighed widened withstood won worked wove wrote</p> <p><u>Y</u></p> <p>yielded</p>
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Cover Letters

Please give us your [feedback](#).