COVER LETTER TIP SHEET

This document may be helpful when creating your professional cover letter. It is not a comprehensive document. If you have any questions or would like additional support, please reach out. We're here to help.

WHAT IS A COVER LETTER?

The key function of a cover letter is to show prospective employers *why* and *how* you are qualified for the position you are applying for. It is an opportunity to demonstrate your suitability for a position to a potential employer.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR HUMANITIES STUDENTS:

The skills developed through a Humanities degree include the ability to:
- Think critically and solve problems
- Communicate effectively and comprehend information presented in a variety of formats
- Manage data using appropriate technology and information systems
- Work with others to achieve goals
- Manage projects in a timely and organized manner
- Work well under pressure
- Demonstrate adaptability and respond constructively to change
- Use technology

SITUATION / ACTION / RESULT (SAR) STATEMENTS:

You can highlight these skills and more in your cover letter by using SAR statements. SAR statements (or the Situation Action Result formula) help contextualize how your experience and education translate into job success.

Here is the formula:
Situation: a task or experience from previous employment, placement, or education
Action: how you solved a problem or what you did to perform a task
Result: the outcome of your action

Here is an example a skill statement that you might see in a cover letter:
"I have strong research and analytical skills."

Now, the same skill statement is re-worded using the SAR formula, where:
Situation: I gathered and analyzed project data for my seminar course
Action: I used quantitative methods to identify trends in the data
Result: I authored a well-written paper which received an A grade

The end result is:
"Demonstrated ability to gather and analyze data using quantitative methods resulting in high academic achievement"

FORMATTING FOR SUCCESS

Unlike a resume, there is a typical format that should be followed when writing a professional cover letter.

Letter Format and Your Contact Information

Your header should match the one on your resume. Think of it as your own personal letterhead. Include your name and contact information (telephone and email) so that an employer knows how best to reach you. Be sure to list a professional email address and where possible, include your LinkedIn profile URL.

Always list the name and address of the employer. If the employer's name and address is not listed on the posting, you should try finding it online. Include the date and the job ID for the position that you are applying for. If an employer is hiring for more than one position, it will ensure that they know which position you are interested in.

Here is how you can format the first portion of your cover letter:

Greeting

Address your cover letter to a specific person and where possible, ensure that you are using the proper pronoun/title. If you are not sure about the hiring manager's title or pronouns, try

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looking them up on LinkedIn or on the company's website. If it is not possible to list a particular person, you can address your letter to the "hiring manager".

Opening Paragraph

Potential employers can tell if you have tailored your application for their position from the very first paragraph. Create interest with your opening sentence and describe why you are a suitable candidate for the job (i.e. your thesis). Keep the following tips in mind:
- Mention the organization by name and express interest in their goals and/or mission
- If you are being referred to the position by someone you know, mention them by name
- Use one or two keywords that appear in the job description
- At the end of the paragraph, try to mention an accomplishment that relates directly to the position description or job duties

Body

A good practice for deciding what to include in the body of your cover letter is to highlight the job requirements listed in the job posting and then list how you meet those qualifications. Use clear and concrete examples to show employers why they should hire *you* using the SAR formula.

For example: a job posting for a marketing and communications position may ask for a candidate that is deadline-driven and able to manage shifting priorities. In your cover letter, you might explain that through your studies, you have developed the ability to *work well under pressure* and *manage multiple projects in a timely manner*. Always add your own anecdotes to personalize when and how you used your essential skills.

Here are some additional tips for the body of your cover letter:
- Show you have done your research -- reference the specific requirements and goals outlined in the job posting
- Numbers 1-10 are written in full (e.g. one, five, ten), 10+ in numerical form
- Limit the use of "I" and abbreviations

Closing

Your closing paragraph should be just a few sentences in length. In your closing, you should:
- Reiterate your interest in the position
- Thank the employer for their consideration
- Sign off using a professional option, such as "Sincerely" or "Best Regards"

PRO-TIPS:
- Use consistent formatting for both your cover letter and resume (e.g. use the same header, font, font size, etc.)
- A cover letter is typically one (1) page in length, single-spaced in an accessible 12-point font (e.g. Arial, Calibri)

- Have your cover letter reviewed for spelling and grammar
- Make sure you edit for tone - your cover letter should be written in a professional voice
- Choose your keywords wisely – many employers use Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) that automatically scan for buzzwords often mentioned in the job posting
- Saving and submitting your cover letter in .PDF will diminish formatting glitches that can occur when you are submitting your application online

NEXT STEPS

Once you have created or revised your cover letter, we encourage you to request an appointment for a one-to-one resume critique with your Faculty career support staff.

You can request an appointment by completing our online request form.

Please contact Cristina Foley with any questions.