

COVER LETTER WRITING GUIDE

PURPOSE OF A COVER LETTER

The purpose of a cover letter is to provide an avenue for highlighting specific accomplishments that are pertinent to the job. It also provides the employer with a sample of your writing to demonstrate your written communication skills.

The cover letter is a crucial component of your job application materials. In most cases, a cover letter should accompany the resume you submit to an employer. A cover letter must be tailored specifically to each job you apply for.

This guide will provide you with some tips and examples to help you create a cover letter; however it is always helpful to have another person, such as a professional like one of our staff members at the Career Development Center, read through your cover letter to make sure that it seems to be written for the target audience and is highlighting your most relevant and significant accomplishments. If you are not a strong writer, consider having it read by a writing tutor at UCO Tutoring Central to assist you with grammar and flow.

TYPES OF COVER LETTERS

There are two types of cover letters:

- **Letter of Application** – This type of cover letter is used when you are applying for a job that has been advertised in some way, such as on the company’s website or through a job board.
- **Letter of Inquiry** – This type of cover letter is used when you are contacting a company to request employment when a position has not been advertised. This might be used when there is a company you really want to work for, but they do not currently have any opportunities posted, and you want to notify them of your skills and experience in hopes to gain future employment with that company.

GETTING STARTED

Writing a cover letter takes time and careful thought. In a resume, you list your educational and professional background. In a cover letter, however, you must describe your qualifications for and interest in a particular position or organization. A cover letter is also a better gauge of your writing skills, which is a very important skill to most employers.

To get started, obtain a job description for the desired position. The position description will probably tell you precisely what attributes the employer is seeking. Do not copy the position description word-for-word in your cover letter. Instead, use it as a guide to discuss your qualifications. Also, make sure to do some research on the organization. Try reviewing the organization’s website to learn of its “core values”, “mission”, “statement of purpose”, “customer service goals”, etc. in order to understand what traits are emphasized in that organization. Utilize social media and search engines to find current news about the organization.

STRUCTURE OF A COVER LETTER

Heading: Include your name and address. One suggestion is to use the same header you have on your resume.

Date: After the heading, include the date you will mail/send the letter.

Employer Contact Information: Write the name of the contact person at the company, his/her title, the company name, and the address of the employer.

Salutation: Never address to "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Sir or Madam." If you absolutely cannot obtain a person's name, then use the salutation "Dear Personnel Director," "Dear Director," "Dear Hiring Manager" or something similar. Make sure your spelling and punctuation are correct.

1st Paragraph: State why you are writing (what you are applying for or inquiring about) and how you learned of the organization or position. In this section, it is important to demonstrate that you have done some research about the company and/or this specific position. You can demonstrate this by producing a sentence or two at the beginning of the paragraph that explains why you would like to work for this company and/or in this position. This will also help to grab the reader's attention.

2nd and 3rd Paragraph (3rd paragraph is optional): This is where you demonstrate your ability to add value to the company and highlight your key strengths, abilities, related experience and/or education. Mention specific qualifications that make you a good fit for the employer's needs. This is where the job description will be helpful in identifying the skills the employer is looking for. Focus on what you can do for the employer, not what they can do for you. Make sure to only choose 2-3 main strengths and abilities rather than just listing off all the skills you have that relate.

Last Paragraph (3rd or 4th depending on your format): Indicate that you would appreciate an opportunity to talk with the employer to learn more about their opportunities or hiring plans. You can let the employer know that they can contact you for further information and then reiterate your contact information. Thank the employer for his or her consideration.

Closing: Use a closing such as "Sincerely" or "Respectfully." Skip a few lines and then type your name. Make sure to sign your name in ink in the space between the closing and your printed name. If you are sending your cover letter electronically, you can just type your name and do not need the space to sign. Your name should match what is on your resume and on any transcripts or other documents you are submitting with your application materials. If you have any enclosures, you can indicate that a few lines below. Typically you would only do this if you were mailing the letter.

IMPORTANT POINTS

- You want your cover letter to reflect your attitude, personality, motivation, enthusiasm, and communication skills.
- Keep it short. Three to four paragraphs tops!
- Address the cover letter to the person who is most likely to read it. If a contact person is not listed in the job advertisement, you can contact the company to ask who will be doing the hiring for the position. If that information cannot be released, address it to the human resources manager.
- Cover letters may be solicited (responding to an advertised position) or unsolicited (inquiring about possible job opportunities with an employer). Write your cover letter accordingly.

BUDDY BRONCHO

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Edmond, OK 73034
405-555-0000
bbroncho@uco.edu

March 15, 2015

John Doe
Director, Academic Advisement
University of Central Oklahoma
100 N. University Dr.
Edmond, OK 73034

Dear Mr. Doe:

The University of Central Oklahoma's transformative learning approach mirrors my own belief that higher education should be holistic by educating students beyond major specific material in order to promote self-awareness, a better understanding of the world around us, and being functional and productive members of society. This shared value, along with my interest in working with the college student population, is why I would like to be considered for the position of Academic Advisor I found posted on the University of Central Oklahoma's website.

Next month I will graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology-Human Services. Throughout this program, I have gained an understanding of what it takes to work with people from all walks of life. As part of a class project, I had an opportunity to volunteer at a homeless shelter, where I met several college students who were trying to complete coursework while struggling with issues such as having a place to sleep and food to eat. This opened my eyes to the various struggles that students may have in addition to trying to earn a degree. I believe this understanding would be very beneficial when working with the diverse population at UCO.

While in school, I have worked on campus in two positions: Resident Advisor (RA) and Career Development Center Student Assistant. In both positions I have worked closely with students of all ages as well as faculty, staff, and local employers. As an RA, I often provided guidance on utilizing resources, time management, and adjusting to college life. As a student assistant, I provide a lot of information and referrals. On average, I may answer 20 phone calls and assist 10 walk-ins during one of my shifts, which are typically around four hours. I believe that these experiences have provided me with necessary skills to succeed in an academic advising position.

I would enjoy meeting with you to further discuss this employment opportunity. I can be reached at (405) 555-0000 or bbroncho@uco.edu. Thank you greatly for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Buddy Broncho

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BUDDY BRONCHO

100 N. University Dr.

Edmond, OK 73034

(405) 555-0000

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March 6, 2015

Ms. Jane Doe
Human Resources Manager
Acme Oil and Gas
P.O. Box 26647
Oklahoma City, OK 73126

Dear Ms. Doe:

I am writing to you to inquire about possible accounting internship opportunities with your company this summer. While researching companies in the oil and gas industry, I discovered that Acme Oil and Gas supplies more than three percent of gas consumed in North America and maintains a strong balance sheet with a current ratio of 1.86, which I understand is higher than your major competitors in the Oklahoma City area. I would be honored to intern at a company with such a strong reputation in the oil and gas industry.

This semester I will be finishing my junior year in the accounting program at the University of Central Oklahoma. I expect to complete the accounting hours I need to take the CPA exam this fall. In addition, I plan to obtain my Master of Business Administration by the spring of 2016. Through the courses I have taken in accounting, I have acquired skills such as preparing journal entries and analyzing financial data, which I believe would allow me to contribute as an intern at Acme Oil and Gas.

A related accounting position posted on your website asks for employees to have integrity, a drive for results, and conflict management. My reliability and drive is shown by earning my first bachelor's degree, a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, in only four semesters after graduating high school. I did this while maintaining a 3.92 GPA and working 24 hours per week. My current and previous supervisors can confirm that my 18-21 hour school load did not affect my work ethic or quality. As a seasonal lead associate at Kirkland's, I was able to enhance my communication and problem solving skills by resolving disputes that employees had with company policies or practices. I also resolved customer issues, ensuring that every party was satisfied with the results.

I would enjoy meeting with you to further discuss possible opportunities at your company. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone at (405) 555-0000 or by email at bbroncho@uco.edu. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Buddy Broncho

Buddy Broncho