A Guide to Cover Letters

Cover letters are a powerful tool used to showcase experiences, interest and ability. Many job seekers question whether cover letters are consistently read by every relevant member of an organization’s hiring team. Even with all of your effort and preparation, unfortunately, the answer is no. However, as with many things in job search, err on the side of caution and, unless stated otherwise, include a cover letter as a crucial element of your application package.

What is a Cover Letter?
A Cover Letter is a written correspondence that communicates enthusiasm in and showcase skills related to a specific position, hiring area, or company. You’re likely thinking that the concept of a cover letter is not a difficult one to grasp. However, there are a few misconceptions and missteps that are easy to avoid if you are aware.

Why Send A Cover Letter?
So, assuming you read the first paragraph in this handout, you are likely saying, “Why would I waste my time writing a letter that people might read?” Here are a few points to consider:

- We could never accurately predict an organization or individual’s proclivity towards reading your entire application package. Let me encourage you to write cover letters for the people who are reading.
- By including a cover letter with your resume, you have an additional opportunity to show how your skills and experiences directly apply to the job or hiring area.
- In addition to your skills and abilities, a cover letter gives you the chance to explain just how enthusiastic you are about the opportunity. In today’s job search, enthusiasm goes quite a ways. This attempt to separate yourself from the applicant pool can be very helpful especially when you consider that you may be competing with others with very similar skill sets and comparable experiences.

General Rules of Thumb
When writing a cover letter, some make the mistake of creating a historical document that summarizes an entire professional history in paragraph form. Many of us tend to think that over-communicating better covers our bases and shows more effort than being concise. In truth, a concise cover letter that promptly introduces your interests, specifically shows why you are a good fit and genuinely communicates that you’d want to speak with an employer further can do much more than a long form letter that covers every good and professional thing you’ve done since graduating from Georgia Tech. We’ll look at specifics in the following pages.
To Whom Do I Send This Letter?

If you have ever been even the tiniest bit frustrated because you have a beautifully prepared and presented letter that you have to send to no one in particular, don’t worry. In an ideal world, you will send the cover letter to a specific person. However, if you don’t have a particular person to address, you will want to use a warm, respectful and business letter appropriate salutation. Here’s a few Do’s and Don’ts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do</th>
<th>Don’t</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dear Sir or Madam:</td>
<td>To whom it may concern,</td>
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<td>Dear Hiring Manager:</td>
<td>Dear Human Resources:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dear Mrs. Smith:</td>
<td>Dear Jane:</td>
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What Format Should I Use?

As far as the paragraphs go, cover letters generally have three or four paragraphs. Conservative business letter rules apply but there certainly are variations that are more than acceptable. Each of the three or four paragraphs has a specific responsibility. What information should you include (or not include)?

- **First Paragraph**: Introduce yourself as a potential candidate.
  - Indicate which position, department or area is of interest.
  - Mention how you found out about the opening (especially if you have a personal connection or referral).
  - Include an overview hook statement that mentions the experience you have related to the position.

- **Paragraph Two/Three**: Show the reader/company why you are good fit for the position.
  - Review the job description and pull out the key factors and your corresponding skill sets and experiences.
  - Use the body paragraphs to essentially respond to what the company has posted in their job description.
  - Avoid generalizing and including a summary of all your past experiences— In all likelihood, a new position focuses in on specific skills you’ve acquired but not everything you’ve ever done.

- **Last Paragraph**: Conclude in a way that underscores interest in the position and interest in speaking further about the position.
  - Take the opportunity to thank the person reading your cover letter and resume.
  - Express enthusiasm in the job and how you could contribute.
  - Explicitly state that you’d like to speak with the company further.

Mailed Or Emailed? With so many modes of communication these days, it is certainly realistic to ask how cover letters should be sent. Many jobs ask that you either apply online (in which case you will insert your letter into a text box some time during the application process). Some ask that you email your resume to a jobs@company.com address or even a specific contact’s email. In that case, you would either use the body of the email to send the cover letter -or- use the body of the email to briefly greet the reader and refer to an attached pdf or word version of your letter and resume.
May 1, 2014

Ms. Bobbie Buzz  
Vice President of Construction Services  
Georgia Institute of Technology  
225 North Avenue  
Atlanta, GA 30332

Dear Ms. Buzz:

I am writing to you to express interest in the Construction Project Manager position currently posted on the Georgia Tech Office of Human Resources job site. As an alumnus of Georgia Tech’s Building Construction program who has gained significant experience managing capital projects for a large construction company, I am very interested in your available position on a personal and professional level.

For the last six years, I have supervised the successful completion of multiple construction renovation projects in the education and healthcare sectors. This oversight has included managing budgets up to $3M and teams of up to 20 direct reports. I have consistently communicated with stakeholders on project status and am proud of my record of accurately estimating budgets as well as work schedules resulting in timely and on-budget project completions. In addition to direct reports, I have regularly interfaced with clients as well as external subcontractors. To be most effective in my role as Project Manager, I recently completed the requirements for and received the PMP designation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am very excited about the opportunity to return to my alma mater in my career area of choice and am confident that I can make immediate contributions in this role. I would love to have the opportunity to discuss the position with you further. If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to let me know!

Best regards,

George Burdell  
George P. Burdell, BC’06
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Best regards,

George Burdell

A moderate but warm closing appropriate across business scenarios is best. These could include: “Best regards,” “Sincerely,” and even “Respectfully,”.

Use the same heading that you use for your resume for a uniform appearance!

When you have the full contact information for the hiring manager, include name, title, employer name, and address. If you do not have this information, you may choose to include the employer name, department (if the specific department name is available) and the address.

Introduce yourself and any specific relationship you may have to the job. Include a broad hook statement that indicates the skill and experience you have related to the job. This encourages the reader to read on!

In the body paragraph(s), communicate the skills and experience you possess that specifically relate to the position (ideal) or, secondarily, the company/department where you’d like to work.

Conclude graciously by thanking the reader for spending time reading through your application materials. Express enthusiasm in both the opportunity and your qualifications. Indicate a strong interest in speaking with them further. A stronger alternative to the third sentence in this paragraph might be: I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this position with you further and will follow up in two weeks to confirm receipt of my resume.