

# Cover Letters



**Boston University** Center for Career Development  
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## **WHAT IS A COVER LETTER?**

A personalized, 1-page, 3-4 paragraph letter that should accompany each resume

### **Its purpose:**

- To clarify for the employer your reason for contacting them.
- To make the connection between your skills, interests, academic background, and the needs of the employer (as stated in the advertisement and/or determined through your research on the company).
- To serve as your “sales pitch” to the employer, clarifying through specific examples what you can contribute to the company/organization.

## **PREPARING TO WRITE A COVER LETTER**

1. **Research the employer.** See how your skills and background meet the organization’s needs, and how well your values match those promoted by the organization. (Visit their website, perform a Google search, and/or talk with professors or other professionals in the field who may have information about the organization).
2. **Analyze the job description.** Identify the job responsibilities and qualifications required. If there is no description, or if it is vague or unclear, research similar jobs to infer what skills and background would be required.
3. **Review and analyze your background.** Think about your background in relation to the job’s responsibilities and qualifications. Consider courses taken, academic projects, past work and internship experiences, summer jobs, volunteer experiences, and extracurricular involvement.

## **WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR COVER LETTER**

1. **State why you are writing**, indicate what position you are interested in, the source and date of the advertisement or what you are interested in doing in the company/organization if you have sent your resume to inquire about possible job openings. If you have been referred by someone, name the person at the beginning of the letter.
2. **Demonstrate that you have some knowledge about the employer** which sparks your interest in that employer and leads you to believe that this would be a good fit.
3. **Focus specifically on your RELEVANT skills, work and internship experiences, interests, courses, projects, accomplishments, and personal qualities** that match with the position. Do not merely repeat what is on your resume. Select ONLY those details that will be of greatest interest to the employer. If responding to an advertisement, incorporate words from the advertisement that refer to skills and qualifications that the employer is seeking.

## **TIPS**

- Every resume you send, fax, or e-mail needs its own personalized cover letter.
- Each letter should be unique and addressed to a specific individual if at all possible. “To Whom It May Concern” is an acceptable alternative if the name is not available.
- Focus on the positive! Do not refer to areas where you are lacking in experience or qualifications.
- All letters should be single spaced, flush left, with each paragraph followed by a blank line.

- Proofread your letter carefully to make sure that there are no typos or grammatical errors (DO NOT RELY ON SPELLCHECK!).
- Keep a copy of all correspondence.

### **SENDING YOUR COVER LETTER VIA EMAIL**

Recruiters' preferences vary on what format they prefer to receive your cover letter. Some prefer a word attachment and others prefer the letter to be the body of the email. However most seem to agree that when receiving a cover letter and resume as an attachment, they prefer it as one document.

- Maintain a professional/formal tone as if you were mailing the letter.
- Include the cover letter in the body of the email and attach the resume.
- Include the title of the position you are applying for in the subject line.

### **THANK YOU LETTERS – THE BASICS**

- **Always send a thank you letter** after your interview! It is an additional sales piece which serves to keep the “product”, YOU, in front of the “buyer”, THE EMPLOYER, and to reinforce your benefit to the employer.
- **Be brief.** While there is no “rule” about the length of a thank you letter, a half page is generally sufficient.
- **First paragraph:** Open with the obligatory thank you and include how and why you enjoyed the meeting (e.g. something about the staff? the philosophy of the organization?).
- **Second paragraph:** Refer to something that took place during the interview which particularly pleased and interested you. Say what it was, and tell them why (e.g. “I was particularly pleased to learn that your company/the opportunity/your management style...whatever”). Discuss a particular aspect/s of the job that you find appealing and reiterate why you would be successful in those areas.
- **Third paragraph:** (Optional) If you have several examples that you would like to refer to, you can use an additional paragraph.
- **Final paragraph:** Reiterate your interest and express your enthusiasm.
- **Don't** start every sentence with “I”!

**CAUTION:** If you are struggling with what to include in your letter, perhaps you need to do more work clarifying your career direction or articulating your value to employers! Consider arranging a counseling appointment at the BU Center for Career Development: 617-353-3590.

## BASIC COVER LETTER FORMAT

Your Address  
City, State Zip

← *Skip 1 line*

Today's Date

← *Skip 1 or 2 lines*

Name of Person  
Title  
Name of Organization  
Street Address  
City, State Zip

← *Skip 1 line*

Dear Mr. or Ms. last name: *(use colon)*

← *Do not indent. Single space letter and skip 1 line between paragraphs*

**OPENING PARAGRAPH:** State the reason for writing. Name the specific position, or type of work for which you are applying. If there is a job number or reference code, be sure to include this as well. Also mention the resource used in finding out about the opening or organization (classified ad, job listing, placement center, friend, faculty, etc.).

**BODY OF LETTER:** Explain why you are interested in working for this particular employer and/or specify your reasons for desiring this type of work. Point out relevant work experiences and/or education by giving specific examples. This needs to do more than reiterate information that is on your resume. Emphasize only those qualifications that are most relevant for the position or type of work for which you are applying. The job posting/description can guide you in deciding what to include. Using your own examples highlight the requirements, keywords, and terminology listed in the ad.

**CLOSING PARAGRAPH:** Keep this short. Thank them for their time and indicate when you will follow up (unless the posting requests no calls). Also indicate your desire for an interview and list a phone number that they can use to reach you.

Sincerely,

← *When mailing, skip 4 lines and sign your name*

Your Name Typed

## SAMPLE INTERNSHIP COVER LETTER

500 Anywhere Ave., Apt. Z  
Boston, MA 02115

September 9, 2010

Ms. Jane Smith  
B's Book Review  
331 Anywhere Street, Suite 17  
Cambridge, MA 02139

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am writing to apply for the editorial internship position that was posted on The Atlantic Online. I am always looking for new books to read and seek out reviews. I have read many of the reviews on your web site and would be eager to have the opportunity to work for B's Book Review. My hope is to complete this internship during the spring semester from January to May 2011.

As you can see from my enclosed resume, I am a member of the Creative Writing Club, a student-run group. For this group, I select and edit written submissions for our annual magazine as well as design promotional materials. In addition, I have worked for the past two years as a sales associate for The Gap. From this position, I have learned the importance of customer service skills and the value of working as part of a team.

The skills that I will bring to this position include excellent written and verbal communication skills. Because of my proof-reading and editing abilities, I am frequently asked by classmates to edit papers. These skills, combined with my coursework and past work experience, make me a good fit for this opportunity.

Thank you for your consideration. I hope to meet with you soon to learn more about the internship and to further discuss my qualifications. I will contact you to learn if I am selected for an interview during the week of September 23<sup>rd</sup>. In the meantime, I can be reached at 555-333-1234.

Sincerely,

Lilly Reader

States reason for writing and source of job posting

Shows her knowledge of the company and passion for the field

Clearly indicates timeframe desired for internship

Uses relevant example of a campus activity with specific details about her role

Highlights the importance of the skills she has gained in a seemingly unrelated job

Essential skills for an editorial position

Demonstrates her skills with an example

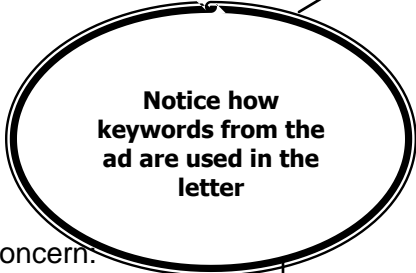
Indicates how and when she will follow up

**SAMPLE RESPONSE USING KEYWORDS FROM ADVERTISEMENT**

700 Anywhere Ave.  
Boston, MA 02215

September 1, 2010

District Attorney's Association  
Attn: Human Resources  
100 Anywhere Street, Suite 300  
Boston, MA 02114



**JOB POSTING:**  
The DAA is seeking an administrative assistant to support a staff of ten. The principal duties of this position are:

- \* Conference Planning: help coordinate education and training programs, handle hotel contractual arrangements and food/beverage vendors, issue invitations, handle registration, and organize handouts.
- \* **Committee meeting** support: assist in planning and distributing agendas, prepare meeting folders, verify attendance, and distribute minutes.
- \* Legislative/Budget: assist in tracking budgetary and legislative matters.
- \* General administrative: phone, mail, filing, track daily news and legislative developments.

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to apply for the administrative assistant/conference planner position that was posted at Boston University. This position is the perfect fit for my event planning experience and interest in law.

As you can see from my enclosed resume, I was an active member of the Student Government Association for three years. During my senior year, I chaired the Senior Soiree committee. In this role, I planned and led weekly committee meetings, selected a hotel to hold the event, negotiated contractual arrangements with vendors, printed invitations, and sold tickets. Not only did the event stay within its budget, we had a record number of students attend.

At Gram's Restaurant, I was recognized for my friendly attitude and excellent customer service; two important qualities to uphold when you are planning events, meetings, and providing support to a busy staff. In addition, I was quick given new responsibilities and trained five employees on restaurant procedures and protocol.

Please note that these words are underlined simply to demonstrate that they are taken directly from the ad. In your own cover letter, you would NOT do this.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to having the opportunity to learn more about the Massachusetts District Attorney's Association and to further describe my qualifications. I will contact you the week of September 13<sup>th</sup> to see if an interview can be arranged. In the meantime, feel free to contact me at 555-795-0000.

Sincerely,

Jane Jones

## SAMPLE RESPONSE TO AN ADVERTISEMENT

200 Anywhere Rd.  
Boston, MA 02215

June 2, 2010

Mr. John Smith  
Quest Expeditions  
PO Box 0000  
Friday Harbor, WA 98250

Uses personal story to show knowledge of company and passion for the field

Dear Mr. Smith:

During the summer of 2000, I was privileged to participate in one of your five-day sea kayaking trips. After this encounter, I decided to major in marine biology and ecology. This past May, I graduated from Boston University with my Bachelor's degree. Please accept the enclosed resume for the field guide position posted on your website.

States specific job for which they are applying

Important and relevant details based on job description

From my coursework, community service, and traveling, I have extensive experience in environmental and conservation work. In addition, I have taken numerous courses on marine ecosystems, namely of the pacific coastal regions of southwestern Canada and of the tropical Ecuadorian coast. As these Pacific systems contain very similar flora and fauna as well as a similar geographical makeup to the San Juan region, I am already fully equipped to share an extensive library of knowledge with clients. I am a natural leader and remain calm and collected in stressful situations. These are essential qualities for a field guide because, in addition to a leader's knowledge, he or she must be trustworthy, confident, and enthusiastic so clients will feel completely at ease.

Explains how their academic background fits with position

Shows how their personal characteristics make them a match for the job

Thank you in advance for taking the time to review my resume. I can be reached at 555-333-0000. I hope to hear from you about an interview soon.

Sincerely,

Indicates how they can be reached. They do not include when they will follow up, because the posting requested no calls. Also shows desire for an interview

Leslie Lab

## SAMPLE RESPONSE TO AN ADVERTISEMENT

265 Anywhere Place  
Essex, NY 11714

April 10, 2010

Sally Service  
Children's Zone  
Program Director  
1916 Anywhere Street  
New York, NY 10037

Dear Ms. Service:

Please consider this letter as an application for the position of student advocate which was listed on Idealist.org. The mission of the Children's Zone is similar to that of previous organizations where I have worked. This position appears tailor-made for my education and career interests of working with teens.

Gives relevant details of a past experience to highlight qualifications

As my resume shows, during my internship at the End House, I co-led the after-school program. In this position, I tutored students individually and in school groups during homework time as well as participating in recreational activities with the children. My psychology major has helped me to better understand human behavior, social groups, and institutions. What I learned in and out of the classroom will assist me in working with teens to serve as a guide for your after-school program for high school students. In addition, my volunteer experiences have shown my ability to adapt to different environments and interact with different types of people, as well as my commitment and hard work.

Draws a connection between major and how it is relevant to position

Briefly explains reason for writing & how she heard about the position. In addition, it expresses knowledge of the organization & references similar experiences

Thank you for your time. I hope you will consider me for this position. I look forward to meeting you and discussing my qualifications in more detail. I can be reached at 555-333-0000.

Indicates how she can be reached, but does not include when she will follow up, because the posting requested no calls

Sincerely,

Jane Roe



## SAMPLE RESPONSE TO ADVERTISEMENT

265 Anywhere Street  
Cambridge, MA 00000

Ms. Susan Smith, Human Resource Director  
Great Ads  
6262 Anywhere Street  
Somewhere, MA 07665

June 2, 2010

Addresses letter to  
a specific person

Opens with strong  
knowledge of the  
company

Dear Ms. Smith:

These  
skills  
were  
listed  
directly in  
the ad.

It is with much enthusiasm that I read in the May 25<sup>th</sup> *Boston Globe* that Great Ads is expanding its business into the local restaurant industry. I feel confident that my experience in writing and restaurant service are a unique match for the junior copywriter position, #64537, as advertised on BU CareerLink.

States and  
underlines job  
title, as well as  
lists reference  
number, source  
of ad, & specifics  
about relevant  
qualifications

Takes  
waiting  
tables &  
turns it  
into a  
valuable  
business  
experience

As an English major at Boston University and editor for the student newspaper, I developed my creativity and writing skills in deadline-oriented environments and achieved strong working knowledge of AP style. Volunteering with the Heads-Up literacy program helped me learn to make words exciting.

Not  
mentioned  
in the ad,  
but  
important to  
copywriting

Perhaps most important, as a server at several area restaurants I gained a valuable familiarity with the environments, patrons, and menus of the very businesses you seek to assist. I would appreciate the opportunity not only to write fresh ads for these restaurants, but perhaps to generate new business using my network of contacts at these locations.

Shows how  
she can  
contribute  
by bringing  
in new  
business

I would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you to discuss the position. I will call you the week of June 11<sup>th</sup> to follow up. In the meantime, I can be reached at 555-333-1234.

States intent to follow up on a specific week

Sincerely,

Wayne Writer

## SAMPLE LETTER OF INQUIRY

10 Anywhere St.  
Brighton, MA 01234

February 17, 2010

Ms. Jane Smith  
ABC Associates  
1515 Anywhere Street  
New York, NY 10010

Dear Ms. Smith:

I just completed reading the article in *Business Today* on ABC Associates. Your innovative approach to recruiting minorities is of particular interest to me because of my background in public relations and minority recruitment.

Shows knowledge of company and why it is of interest

Clearly states reason for writing

I am interested in learning more about your company and the possibilities of joining your team of highly qualified professionals. Please note my relevant qualifications:

- Researched and wrote articles on minority recruitment
- Helped to secure funding for minority programs
- Wrote several articles on education and minorities
- Organized campus-wide conference for Student Public Relations Society
- BA in English

Bullets allow reader to quickly skim candidate's qualifications

I will be in New York City during the week of March 10<sup>th</sup>. Perhaps your schedule would permit us to meet briefly to discuss our mutual interests. I will call your office next week to see if such a meeting can be arranged. In the meantime, I am enclosing my resume for your review. I can be reached at 555-333-1234. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Natalie A. Tired

Directly asks for a meeting during a specific date range and explains what action will be taken next

## SAMPLE LETTER OF INQUIRY

10 Anywhere Rd.  
Boston, MA 02215

March 18, 2010

Mr. John Smith  
Human Resources  
Bank of USA  
100 Anywhere St.  
Boston, MA 02210

Dear Mr. Smith:

States reason for writing

I will be graduating from Boston University this May with a BA in economics, and I am interested in exploring career opportunities with Bank of USA in the Fitchburg area. I am aware that Bank of USA is a leading bank in Massachusetts and, therefore, is the kind of organization within which I would like to begin building my career.

Explains why they are interested in *this* company

Shows the student's goals

You will note from my enclosed resume that I have a strong background in banking, reinforced by several related courses at BU. I am currently interning at a credit union where I interact with customers on a daily basis and process a variety of loans including home equity and mortgage loans. I am seeking a position leading towards a managerial career in the lending/credit industry.

Gives examples of what they are doing in their current internship which relates to the banking industry

Notice how these details are ones that will be especially relevant to a banking position

My strong math skills and attention to detail combined with my commitment to customer service will allow me to be successful in this field. I am confident that I would be an asset to Bank of USA and I hope that you will seriously consider me as a candidate for an entry level opportunity. Since my home is in Southborough and I attend school in Boston, I am readily available for an interview at either location. I will contact your office within the next two weeks to determine you level of interest in arranging a meeting. In the meantime, I can be reached at 555-333-1234. Thank you for your consideration.

It is appropriate to thank them for their time

Indicates their next step and desire for an interview

Sincerely,

Sally Banker

## SAMPLE LETTER WITH REFERRAL

8446 Anywhere St.  
Allston, MA 02135

July 26, 2010

Ms. Emily Gotepils  
Director of Recruiting  
East Arbor  
721 W. Anywhere St.  
New York, NY 10021

Starts with the name of the person who referred her to the position. Also includes the position she is applying for.

Dear Ms. Gotepils:

Shows her knowledge of the company

Jill Browne suggested I contact you regarding the marketing position available at East Arbor. I am enthused about the prospect of pursuing my marketing interests at your company due to its reputation as a well respected, innovative, and growing company in liability policies.

My diverse and rigorous academic, professional, and leadership experiences would make me a valuable asset to Eastern Arbor. Currently, in a part-time professional position as a student admissions associate at Boston University, I assist in promoting the university to prospective students and their parents. I participate in interviewing and evaluating students as well as leading group information sessions. Since I work with people every day in a business setting, I have developed strong interpersonal and communication skills.

Refers to specific skills that are relevant to the position and gives examples.

My leadership experience, particularly with the Boston University Women's Center, is another example of my strong sense of responsibility and motivation. As an active member concerned with the rights of women, I have brought fresh new ideas into the agenda, such as bringing student leaders together to discuss how to create a more active community at Boston University. As a result of this idea, our organization, along with the other student leaders, has begun planning a leadership forum for next semester.

Draws from campus leadership activities that demonstrate relevant skills/personal qualities & shows positive outcome of her efforts.

I have enclosed my resume for your consideration and will contact you the week of August 6th to follow up. Thank you for your time and consideration and I look forward to the opportunity to talk with you further about my enthusiasm and qualifications for the marketing position. In the meantime, I can be reached at 555-333-1234.

Indicates when she will follow up & how she can be reached.

Sincerely,

Alana Devane

## SAMPLE THANK-YOU LETTER – POST JOB INTERVIEW

28 Anywhere Road  
Allston, MA 02134

May 28, 2010

Mr. R. Hayes  
Director, Personnel Department  
C Products Incorporated  
762 Anywhere Avenue  
Boston, MA 02110

Dear Mr. Hayes:

Thank you again for the opportunity to interview for the marketing position. I appreciated your hospitality and enjoyed meeting you and members of your staff.

The interview confirmed for me how compatible my background, interests, and skills are with the goals of C Products Incorporated. My prior marketing experience with the Department of Commerce has prepared me to take a major role in developing domestic and international marketing strategies. I am confident that my work could result in increased market shares for C Products Incorporated in the rapidly expanding Pacific Rim market.

Please feel free to contact Mr. John Smith at the Department of Commerce at 555-266-0000 if you would like more information on the new product promotion program that I mentioned. I spoke with Mr. Smith this morning and mentioned your interest in this program.

I look forward to meeting with you and your staff again.

Sincerely,

Matt Market

States reason for writing and references the position he interviewed for

Shows his initiative in following up on something that was discussed in the interview

Mentions specific skills/experience, how they fit with the company's goals, and how he can contribute to the company