GUIDE TO COVER LETTERS

Russell Sage College – Office of Career Planning

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Hours: 8:30am-5:00pm, Monday through Friday
Walk-in hours: 12:30pm-4:30pm, Wednesdays

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Cover Letter Writing

A cover letter is a marketing tool intended to generate interest in you and get the reader excited about reviewing your accompanying resume. The cover letter should succinctly articulate your interest and enthusiasm for both the company and specific position, and demonstrates how your unique background, skills and experiences make you an excellent fit for both the position and organization to which you are applying.

General Tips
- Make connections between what is on your resume and the position requirements; don’t just repeat what’s on your resume.
  - Describe specific accomplishments, experiences and skills that demonstrate how you fit the position. Provide examples to support claims; doing so supports you and makes you a stronger candidate.
  - Cite examples from the most relevant areas of your background, including your internship or employment experience, leadership, extra-curricular activities and coursework.
- Prepare a unique letter for each position you apply to.
  - Nothing looks worse than a generic cover letter; make sure your cover letter highlights skill sets and credentials consistent with those of the job posting.
  - Customize the employer’s information on each individual letter; specify why you are interested in working in this position at this company.
- Address each cover letter to the appropriate person.
  - Use “Dear Mr. or Ms. Last Name”. Do not use phrases such as “To whom it may concern” or Dear Sir or Madam”. If the name is unisex (e.g. Pat Brown), use “Dear First & Last Name”.
  - Call the Human Resources office or Hiring Manager of each organization to find out who you should be addressing your letter to.
  - If you cannot identify the appropriate person, address your cover letter to “Hiring Manager” or “Human Resources Director”.
- Keep a copy of every letter you send out.
  - Designate a folder on your computer to save each cover letter you send out. Use the dates on each cover letter as a reference.
  - If you do not hear from the employer within two weeks, follow up on the status of your application.
- Make it perfect.
  - Typographical errors, misspellings and poor word choice will earn your cover letter and resume a one way ticket to the “no pile”.
  - Have someone proofread your letter before sending it out.
- Enthusiasm Sells.
  - Employers want candidates that want to work for them. Show them that you’ve researched their organization and make a convincing case for why you want to work for them.
  - Be professional and courteous, but let your personality come through.

Formatting Tips
- Use 8 ½” X 11” quality bound paper – the same kind you used for your resume.
- Keep it to one page, single spaced.
- Use 10-12 point font and choose the same style you chose for your resume.
- Remember to sign your name at the bottom of each hard copy letter you send out. If you apply electronically, scan a copy of your signature, save it as a Jpeg, and then add the image to the signature line.
- Use a Block Style Format, and align names, dates and paragraphs along the left-hand margin.
- Use 1” margins all around the page.

***Remember that a cover letter is a professional pitch of why a company/organization should hire you...be more formal and professional than you would in an email!***
(Either insert the same heading as your resume, or use the format below)
Your Street Address
City, ST Zip
Today’s Date

Mr. /Ms. First and Last Name of Contact
Title of Employer
Company/Organization
Street Address
City, ST Zip

Dear Mr. /Ms. Last Name of Contact:
Your opening paragraph tells **why you are writing** and notes where you learned about the position or if someone referred you. When referring to the position, use the title used by the employer. If someone referred you and no specific title is known, be as specific as possible about the kind of position for which you are applying. Do some research on the organization so that you can state your interest in this particular employer.

Your middle paragraph(s) should **highlight your qualifications**. Make **direct connections from your resume and relevant experiences** and tailor each cover letter for every position that you apply to! Give details of your background that will show the reader why they should consider you as a candidate. If you have had relevant experience or related education, be sure to link your experiences and/or education to the position. By using examples, show the employer that you have the necessary skills they seek.

You could include another paragraph **detailing additional experience** that will highlight your qualifications. For a concluding sentence, summarize the skills and personal traits that you would bring to the job for which you are applying. Also, remember that the reader will view your letter as an example of your writing skills.

In your closing paragraph, **reiterate your interest in the position, thank the employer for his/her consideration, provide your contact information, and indicate the follow-up action**. State what you want the recipient of the letter to do next (such as contacting you to further discuss the available position) or what you will do next (such as calling to follow-up on the status of your application). If you say that you’re going to follow up on the status of your application, **REMEMBER TO FOLLOW-UP**!

Sincerely,
(Sign your name)

Your Name (typed)
Tips

When writing a cover letter, you want to market your experiences, background and skill set to the specific position to which you're applying. Depending on the position, you may pull from different areas of your own background, and choose to highlight experiences that better target the skill sets and credentials most pertinent to the specific job or internship you’re applying to. Below is a sample internship description for a position at Ticketmaster. Notice how Wesley, the student whose cover letter appears on the proceeding page, draws a clear link between the skills/experiences detailed in the job description and his own academic background, skill set and campus involvement. In doing so, Wesley makes a clear case for his candidacy.

Sample Job Description

Job Title: Marketing/Promotions Intern
Company: Ticketmaster
Industry: Arts & Entertainment – Other, Retail/Merchandising
Job Function: Marketing
Description: As a marketing intern for Ticketmaster, you can expect to learn sales and marketing practices of the ticketing industry in the world of entertainment. The internship will allow you to enhance your writing, presentation and research skills as well as learn how to develop and maintain client relationships. By the completion of the internship you should know how to determine via research what marketing techniques to apply to various projects, online placement, discounting, promotions and more. This internship will give you insight and vast general knowledge of marketing in live entertainment ticketing; concerts, sports, arts and family events.

Position Responsibilities:
• Track event data and present findings.
• Develop recap materials and the conclusion of a promotion.
• Support product-related initiatives.
• Contribute to website content and the creation of custom web pages.
• Monitor that the Ticketmaster brand is properly represented in client and promotional partners advertisements.
• Assist with customized marketing/promotional presentations.
• Run quality assurance tests.

Qualifications:
• Student pursuing a BA/BS degree in related area from an accredited institution.
• Must have a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0.
• Excellent organizational, verbal and written communication skills are essential.
• Creativity and strong attention to detail required.
• Proficiency with Microsoft Word/Excel/Power Point and the Internet required.
• Must be able to work in a team environment and able to meet deadlines.

Additional Information:
• Scheduling office hours is negotiable per applicant.
• Length of internship: minimum 15 hours per week for 10 weeks.

It is also a good idea to demonstrate the following competencies in your cover letters!

Here are the 8 top skills that employers are looking for in applicants

Leadership  Equity & Inclusion  Critical Thinking  Communication  Technology  Teamwork  Professionalism  Career & Self-Development

Tip – Print out the job description for the position you’re applying to, then identify and highlight keywords from the posting. This will help you better “target” your cover letter.
Sample Cover Letter 1

817 South Street, Apt 6
Albany, NY 12210

January 7th, 2020

Mr. Ron Swanson
East Regional Recruiter
Ticketmaster

Dear Mr. Swanson,

In response to your posting for the Marketing/Promotions Intern at Ticketmaster, attached is my resume for your consideration. I learned of this position through the Office of Career Planning at the Russell Sage College. After reviewing the position description and researching Ticketmaster, I believe this internship represents an ideal opportunity.

As a sophomore at Russell Sage College, I have undertaken a number of courses and extra-curricular engagements that prepared me for this internship. Majoring in business has helped develop my research, analytical and creative thinking skills, as it has allowed me to contemplate the relationships between human behavior and economical, environmental and cultural factors. As part of a project, I am currently researching how companies effectively utilize branding strategies and catchy logos to increase their client base and better capture their target markets. I believe this on-going analysis of corporate markets and the knowledge I am gaining regarding effective marketing strategies will directly benefit the Marketing/Promotions department.

I’ve complemented my academic background with strong extra-curricular involvement. As Publicity Coordinator for the Association of Campus Events (ACE), I was responsible for overseeing and implementing a marketing plan for campus concerts, comedic performances, and novelty acts. This required strong teamwork, organizational and interpersonal abilities as I interfaced with campus administrators, student organizations and other ACE members in executing the marketing plan.

I believe I would be a strong asset to the Marketing/Promotions team at Ticketmaster and would greatly appreciate the opportunity to further discuss my qualifications with you. I can be reached at 518-333-6565 or via e-mail at knopel@sage.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
(insert signature here)
Leslie Knope

First Paragraph – Cite the position you’re applying to and reference where you found out about the opportunity (corporate website, personal referral, etc.). Try to display your enthusiasm for the position and/or line of work by stating WHY you want to work for the particular organization.

Highlight skills and pieces of your background consistent with the job posting. Leslie does a good job of linking her own skill set with the needs of the specific position.

Body Paragraphs – Notice how Leslie specifically highlights some of the broader skill sets outlined in the job description, uses key words that are consistent with the job posting and cites examples to support their statements.

NOTE – All keywords on this cover letter are bolded and italicized for emphasis. Refrain from doing so on your own cover letter or resume.
February 1st, 2020

Ms. Amy Smith
Regional Recruiter, Capital District
Enterprise Rent-A-Car
900 Central Avenue
Albany, NY 12206

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am writing to apply for the Management Trainee Internship position at Enterprise Rent-A-Car for the spring of 2020 semester that is posted on your website. I am excited about the opportunity to enhance my skills and knowledge about the world of business through a well-known and reputable hands-on internship program such as yours.

As the attached resume indicates, I spent the past two summers working with the Institutional Advancement team at Russell Sage College. Through this position, I was able to experience firsthand what it is like to work in a team-based environment and gained valuable insight into what it takes to be successful and keep the college running. I was involved in establishing and maintaining relationships with alumni, creating marketing materials to send to donors, and planning events for the alumni donors. In this position, I successfully created and implemented an event for local alumni to thank them for their donations to Russell Sage College in which over 60 alumni attended each year. My experience working with the Office of Institutional Advancement have provided me with a strong set of administrative and communication skills.

While maintaining a full course load at Russell Sage College, I have also demonstrated that I am hard-working and passionate about giving back to the community. As a volunteer EMT, it is imperative that I am dependable, a team player, and can handle working under stress. I have demonstrated my leadership skills in this position, and as a result of that, my supervisors have asked me to train more than 8 new volunteers over the past year. In addition, I am a member of the Russell Sage Habitat for Humanity Club and conduct community service throughout the Capital Region, as well as a bi-annual trip to New Orleans. For the trips to New Orleans, we depend heavily on fundraising, and I this year, I am in charge of brainstorming ideas of how to raise money and using my creativity to develop the advertising materials and flyers.

I believe that I would be a great fit for this internship, as I have had many experiences that have allowed me to strengthen and demonstrate my leadership, communication, and customer service skills. I would be thrilled to have the opportunity to discuss the internship with you further. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Ana Tomy
Sample Cover Letter – E-Mail Body

When sending a cover letter via email, we recommend attaching it as an attachment, and provide a brief introduction and summary paragraph. Below is a sample of an introductory paragraph to include:

Dear Mr. Paper:

Please accept the attached cover letter and resume in response to the Journalism Internship recently posted on your website. Since moving to the Capital District for college, I have been very impressed by the quality of stories and content of your newspaper, and believe my education background and journalism experience could be of use to your organization.

If you wish to contact me to discuss this opportunity and my qualifications further, I can be reached at (276) 555-0201 or toue2@sage.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Edie Tour

Cover Letter Sentence Starters

As stated earlier, the purpose of the cover letter is to get the reader excited about your candidacy and make them want to read your resume. As such, you want to communicate your relevant qualifications as they fit the needs of the position while also expressing your enthusiasm towards a particular company and/or career field.

Because knowing what to say in a cover letter can be difficult, we’ve listed a number of “sentence starters” to aide you in matching your unique background, skill set and qualifications to the needs of the position and employer.

Use these sentence starters as examples when drafting the three parts of your cover letter: the introduction, the body and the closing paragraph.

INTRODUCTION

- It is with great interest that I am applying for the position of ______.
- It is with strong interest that I apply for the position of _______ (position title) at _______ (company).
- (Name of contact) provided me with your name and suggested I contact you in reference to the _____ position.
- As a recent graduate of Russell Sage College with a degree in _________ and an avid (reader, writer, sports enthusiast, etc.), I believe I am a strong applicant for this position.
- I am eager to apply for the position of _____ because I believe I have the ___________ that it takes to be successful in the position.
- Thank you for speaking with me on (date) and discussing the __________ position is a wonderful match for my talents and ____________.
- It was great to meet you at the Mocktails event at Russell Sage College in March, and I am excited to apply to this position that we had discussed at that event.
- Your organization impresses me because of (the performance of your product, the integrity of your support staff, its customer satisfaction, strong reputation, etc.).
BODY
• My experience as a __________ will help me to contribute __________.
• Throughout my four years of undergraduate studies I have demonstrated skills and abilities that are exactly what the position of __________ demands.
• My previous success in __________ has proven my ability to __________.
• To highlight some of my accomplishments I have, __________.
• Working with __________ has strengthened and improved my already strong (analytical, research, interpersonal, organizational, etc.) and (analytical, research, interpersonal, organizational, etc.) skills.
• I am confident that I can be a valuable asset to your organization because __________.
• During my time at Russell Sage College, I was involved with __________ (club/organization name) and was able to grow and develop skills such as __________ and __________.

CLOSING
• I am eager to learn more about __________ and would like to discuss my qualifications and interests with you.
• I am very interested in the position and would appreciate the opportunity to discuss my background and the position requirements in greater detail.
• I feel that my __________ and __________ make me a strong candidate for this position and therefore look forward to the possibility of employment with __________.
• I would appreciate the opportunity to further discuss my qualifications with you. I can be reached at (phone number) or by email at __________.
• I will follow up in ________ (10 days, 1 week, etc.) to ________ (verify my application materials are in order, inquire as to the next steps, etc.).

SENTENCES THAT CAN BE USED MULTIPLE TIMES
• I would like the opportunity to put my skills, drive and enthusiasm to work as a __________ or __________.
• Being (a team player, results driven, a quick learner, etc.) who loves challenges, I will __________.
• My career goal is to __________. Therefore I welcome the opportunity to make a contribution to __________ (organization name here).
• The __________ position described in __________ sounds exactly like the opportunity I’m looking for.

***Cover letter writing can be tough sometimes, especially for students and alums that don’t feel comfortable talking about their strengths and skills… set up an appointment with the Office of Career Planning and we can help you brainstorm ways to leverage your experiences and skills and write an impressive cover letter!***