



Your future is our focus

Writing Cover Letters

What is a cover letter? A cover letter is a document submitted with a job application explaining the applicant's credentials and interest in the open position. Since a cover letter is often one of only two documents sent to a potential employer, it is often extremely important in determining whether the applicant will obtain an interview. Many employers assess a candidate's professionalism, writing skills, and motivation to work at their organization based on the cover letter submitted.

Generic letters that are not tailored to the position or the employer are rarely effective! You need to describe your relevant experiences in a way that is both concise and compelling. The goal is to spark an interest so that the employer will closely review your resume.

To prepare an effective cover letter, 1) tell the employer what you can do for the company, instead of what the company can do for you, and 2) emphasize how your work experience, education, and personal qualities would be helpful to the employer.

There are three basic types of cover letters. An *application letter* is used to respond to job advertisements. An *initiating contact letter* is used to put yourself into consideration for openings that have not been advertised but are likely to occur. A *networking letter* is used to generate informational interviews, which allow you to meet individuals who can provide information on a specific career field.

When constructing your cover letter, be sure to: address it to a specific individual; sound confident, without being arrogant; keep it to one page; and use the "I" pronoun sparingly. (Using "I" and other personal pronouns repetitively can leave the employer with a negative impression — they will question your writing skills, and possibly view you as someone oriented toward self-flattery.) And, when preparing application and initiating contact letters, you need to answer the question: "Why should we hire you?"

The first paragraph of a cover letter should catch the reader's attention, but avoid catchy phrases and gimmicks. Also, indicate why you are contacting the person. If writing an application letter, include the position title and mention how you found out about the position.

Additional Tips Specific to Application and Initiating Contact Letters:

Paragraph two: Talk About Yourself. Describe what your qualifications are (e.g., education, experience, skills) and how those relate to the job description.

Paragraph three: Talk About Them. Show the employer what you know about their company and how your long term goals or passion is related to their mission. Indicate that you have thought about how you will fit into their mission and/or company culture. This paragraph should encourage the employer to think "This candidate seems like a great fit! Let's bring him/her in for an interview to learn more."

Last paragraph: Ask for an Interview. Ask for an opportunity to speak with the employer in person about the position, reiterate your interest in the position, give the employer your contact information (e.g., phone number and email address), and thank them for their time and consideration.

Cover letters are often sent electronically, attached to an e-mail, an online application, or pasted into a box in an online system. Therefore, you can choose to omit a signature and just type your name, or you can create a digital signature by signing your name on a piece of paper, scanning that image, and then inserting that image into your document. Even though this seems time consuming, if you take the time to do it just once, you'll be able to use that signature over and over for many different purposes. See page 5 for additional information on digital signatures.

Email Etiquette for Cover Letters:

Email is the most likely way you will communicate with a potential employer. Email communication needs to be professional and proofread. Emails should also be concise and to the point, ideally just 5-7 sentences in length, providing a brief explanation of your reason for contacting them. Include a description of the documents you've attached, your contact information, and, acknowledge the time they are taking to review your documents by thanking them. Think like the employer—do you enjoy opening an email that fills your entire screen with text? Neither do they. So, it's best to be concise in the email body and attach a full letter.

When attaching a document, it is best to attach a PDF document as it will be universally recognized regardless of the software used by the receiver. An added effect of converting your document to a PDF is that all of the formatting will be saved so that if the reader has a different type of operating system or software than you, the document formatting will not be corrupted.

When communicating with an employer, it is never okay to begin the email with "Hey" or "Jones" (only their last name), or to use "texting language," abbreviations, or emoticons in the body of the email. Always include a subject on the subject line, and make sure you have a professional email address. It is fine to use your osu.edu, a Gmail or Yahoo address that includes your name, such as janemsmith@gmail.com. It is not fine to use email addresses such as prettykitty23, mojo69, or anything that provides the reader an opportunity to judge your character as less than professional. When emailing a prospective employer, begin the email as you do your formal cover letter: "Dear Mr. Jones,". Explain why you are contacting him— to inquire about possible internship opportunities, to request a job shadowing session or an informational interview, or to apply for a specific position. Then briefly provide one or two specific points about your qualifications or goals, whichever is appropriate.

Finally, explain that you've attached a cover letter and a resume which provide a more detailed view of your qualifications and ask for a follow up conversation by phone or email. Don't forget to thank them for their time!

Follow Instructions and Use Your Best Judgment:

There are times when it is not appropriate to include a cover letter when applying to a position or requesting information. If the application instructions specifically mention "No Cover Letters" or "No Attachments" or "No Additional Documentation," then simply provide only the information requested. If the instructions do not provide guidance on submitting a cover letter, then it is usually fine to include a cover letter without fear of penalty.

If it is your first time contacting an employer and you are strictly requesting information about job shadowing or informational interviews, then a formal letter is not usually necessary. A professional email which requests their time in a respectful way will do the job. However, if you are requesting information about internship or job possibilities, then it is important to attach a cover letter in order to provide them more information than is possible to provide in the space of an email.

The application letter example on the following page is formatted to be sent as an attachment to an e-mail. Assume that the student, Jane Smith, will also attach her resume to the same email. Examples of email text for submitting application, initiating contact, and networking letters also follow.

A helpful collection of cover letters and other forms of job search correspondence is found at:
www.quintcareers.com/covres.html

Sample Application Letter

190 West 17th Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43210

August 15, 2012

Mr. Joe Brown
Director of Communications
The Ohio Historical Society
1982 Velma Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Mr. Brown:

I am writing to express my interest in the Event Planning internship at The Ohio Historical Society that was advertised on the Arts and Sciences Career Services website. I am a junior at The Ohio State University and will graduate in May 2014 with a Bachelor of Arts in Communication.

Through my coursework and previous internship and employment experiences, I have developed skills that make me an excellent candidate for this position. In my internship at the Make-a-Wish Foundation, I was able to plan a yearly fundraising banquet for 200 patrons. This experience helped me develop my organizational skills and learn the steps involved with planning large events. I also have leadership experience through my past job responsibility of training new employees at Burger King.

Growing up in Central Ohio, I have enjoyed numerous exhibitions and events at The Ohio Historical Society. Participating in an internship with the Society would allow me to give back to an organization I have grown to admire and to see as the ultimate source of historical information for the State of Ohio. Given my event planning experiences, ability to work well in a team environment or independently, and desire to see The Ohio Historical Society continue to grow and prosper, I believe myself to be a promising candidate.

My attached resume provides a more complete account of my qualifications. I would like to further discuss this internship opportunity with you, and can be reached at (614) 292-7055 or by e-mail at smith.8000@osu.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

(Insert your digital signature here)

Jane Smith

Sample Email Messages

Application Email

Subject: Event Planning Internship

Dear Mr. Jones,

I am a Communication major at The Ohio State University and I am interested in the Event Planning internship advertised on FutureLink through the Arts and Sciences Career Services Office. As a Columbus native, I have grown up exploring the Ohio Historical Society exhibits and have a great passion for the work of the organization. During an internship with the Make a Wish Foundation, I gained experience planning a successful fundraising event and I hope to put that experience to work for the Ohio Historical Society.

I've attached a cover letter and my resume to provide you with a more complete view of my skills and experience. I do hope that you have the time to review my documents. I may be reached at 614-292-7055. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Jane Smith
Smith.8000@osu.edu

Initiating Contact Email

Subject: Event Planning Internship Inquiry

Dear Mr. Jones,

I am a Communication major at The Ohio State University and my friend Marietta Hocking completed an Event Planning internship with your organization last summer. She recommended I contact you directly to discuss the possibility of participating in the same internship. I am writing to express my interest in this opportunity, in the hope that it will be offered again this summer. Marietta shared with me some of the projects that she contributed to during her internship and they represent exactly the type of experience I would like to gain with the Ohio Historical Society. I have some fundraising experience gained through an internship with the Make a Wish Foundation, so I could bring the skills I gained there to work for the Ohio Historical Society.

I've attached a cover letter and my resume to provide you with a more complete view of my skills and experience. I hope to be considered for the opportunity if it is to be offered again. Please do contact me at your convenience by calling me at 614-292-7055.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Jane Smith
Smith.8000@osu.edu

Sample Email Messages

Networking Email

Subject: Event Planning with the Ohio Historical Society

Dear Mr. Jones,

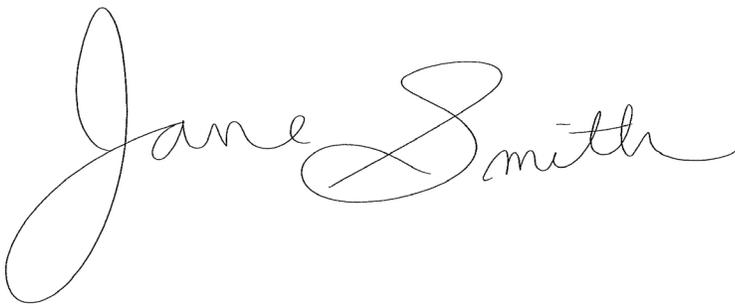
I am a Communication major at The Ohio State University and my friend Marietta Hocking completed an Event Planning internship with your organization last summer. I am currently exploring career options and Event Planning is something I believe I would enjoy. Marietta suggested that I contact you to see if you'd be willing to talk with me, in person or over the phone, about your journey to your current position and possibly give me some insight into the nature of event planning for a large nonprofit organization such as the Ohio Historical Society.

If you have 20-30 minutes to spare in the coming weeks, I'd gladly meet you at your office or schedule a time to talk over the phone. If this is agreeable to you, please let me know your availability between January 15th and February 1st. I am available Monday, Wednesday and Friday after 11:30 a.m. I hope you'll consider sharing your career story and advice to a college student such as myself.

Thank you,
Jane Smith
614-292-7055

Digital Signatures

When inserting a digital signature, you'll need to size it down in order for it to fit correctly. Create a large signature to begin with or else the shrunken version will be very difficult to read. The following image represents a good sized signature to start with:



The above sized signature will be clearly readable when reduced and inserted into cover letters; for example:

