

# Cover Letters: 10 Steps to Success

Also includes:

- Thank You Letters
- Inquiry/Networking Letters

**Center for Career & Life Planning**

[www.rollins.edu/careercenter](http://www.rollins.edu/careercenter) | 407-646-2195

<http://rollins.joinhandshake.com>



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Cover letters are used as an effective means of introduction. Your cover letter allows you to present yourself, in narrative form, as a qualified candidate. Whenever you mail, email, or fax your resume, it should almost always be accompanied by a one-page, targeted cover letter. The cover letter expands upon certain information in your resume that pertains to the specific position for which you are applying. Being asked to submit a cover letter is an opportunity to highlight your most impressive and relevant experience, and to discuss how that experience meets the qualifications the organization is seeking.

Imagine your cover letter as a marketing tool, much like a television or radio commercial. Effective commercials catch your attention by highlighting only the most attractive features of a product. Your cover letter can be your commercial, in which you highlight your most attractive qualifications. Avoid detailing your entire work history in your cover letter. The best way to distinguish yourself is to highlight one or two of your accomplishments that show you are an above-average candidate for the position.

Cover letters may not always be required when applying for internships, but are certainly appropriate to show a potential internship site that you are serious. When writing a cover letter to accompany your resume for an internship, you may not have much relevant experience to highlight. Instead, describe your educational background or focus on your desire to work in the chosen industry or career field. This way, you can still demonstrate your sincerity and interest in the career field, even though you may be lacking relevant experience.

You should write a different cover letter for each position to which you apply. Take time to research employers and what they are looking for in potential candidates. Incorporate information from the job description into your cover letter to demonstrate that you have the skills the employer is seeking. If your cover letter is well written, it will lead the employer to the other part of your application – the resume. When an employer opens the envelope, email, or attachment, the cover letter is the first thing seen. Be sure that first impression is a good one by following the steps below.

## **Step One – The Basics**

If printed, your cover letter should be on the same high-quality white or off-white paper as your resume and use the same font style as well. A cover letter should not exceed one-page in length and, ideally, contains 3-4 short paragraphs. A busy employer will probably not read a long cover letter, squeezed onto one page with small fonts and shrunken margins. Your cover letter should appear neat, easy-to-read, and visually appealing.

## **Step Two – Business Format**

Two addresses should appear at the top of every cover letter you send; one belongs to you and the other to the person or organization receiving your letter. For *your* address, you have two choices. You may copy the heading style you used on your resume, or you may decide to head your cover letter in traditional business letter format, as discussed below.

If you choose to write your cover letter in traditional business format, you will include your street address, city, state, and zip code.

Beneath your address, skip one line and enter the current date (or the date you plan to mail the letter). Take time to spell out the entire month, avoiding abbreviations, dashes, and hyphens.

Next, skip one line and enter the contact information for the person receiving your cover letter. Begin with the contact's name, followed by his or her title, the department or division if appropriate, the name of the company,

street address, city, state, and zip code. In some cases, you may not know the name of the contact person, especially if you are responding to a public advertisement for a position. Do your best to find the name of the person responsible for hiring by searching the web and/or telephoning the main office. If the company will not provide them, simply omit the name and title from the address information, including only the information you know.

## Jennifer Job

jennifer\_job@yahoo.com

Current: 1000 Holt Avenue 2587, Winter Park, Florida 32789 • 407-555-5555  
Permanent: 3000 Dogwood Drive, Troy, Ohio 45373 • 937-555-9999

January 15, 2017

James Brown  
Marketing Manager  
Talent Search/New Artist Division  
Soul Records  
7922 Jazz Road  
Motown, Florida 32855

1000 Holt Avenue - 2587  
Winter Park, FL 32789

January 15, 2017

Talent Search/New Artist Division  
Soul Records  
7922 Jazz Road  
Motown, FL 32855

## Step Three – Salutation

As discussed in Step Two, it's important to address your cover letter to a specific person. Letters addressed to the appropriate hiring manager or human resources person are more likely to be read and received positively than letters mailed simply to "SunTrust," for example. Within a large organization, it is especially important that your cover letter finds its way into the hands of the right people.

Following the last line of the company address, you will skip one line and type "Dear Ms." or "Dear Mr." or "Dear Dr." and enter the last name of your contact person, followed by a colon. Be careful to use the correct gender when addressing your cover letter and never use "Dear Mrs." or "Dear Miss" in a formal business letter.

If you do not have a specific contact name, there are a few options for addressing your letter:

- Dear Hiring Manager:
- Dear Human Resources Director:
- Dear Selection Committee: (only use if you know a group is involved in the hiring process)
- Dear Board of Directors: (only use if you know this is the group reviewing your application)

## Step Four – The First Paragraph

Generally, you should begin your first paragraph by clearly stating the purpose of your letter. Questions that should be answered in the first few sentences of your letter include:

1. *Why* are you contacting this person (to apply for a job)?
2. *Which* position are you applying for (name of the position or department)?
3. *What makes you a competitive candidate?*

It is very impressive to employers if you can demonstrate knowledge about their organization. Cite information that attracted you to the company or a specific reason why you want to work there. Visit the company's website and research relevant publications for the latest news updates on the organization.

Finally, include in the first paragraph a short statement that expresses your honest desire to work for the organization. Briefly, illustrate why you are a worthy applicant and entice the employer to keep reading.

Dear Ms. America:

I am writing to apply for the Environmental Specialist position with The Nature Conservancy. I am motivated to pursue a career in the sciences and I feel confident that my Environmental Studies education, international field studies trips, and internship experiences make me a qualified candidate for this position.

Dear Mr. Wilson:

Through several recent articles in *The Orlando Business Journal*, I have learned about the rapid growth and success of Jackson Public Relations in this area, and am writing to apply for the position of Event Planner. I admire your organization's unique approach to promotions and publicity and am interested in joining your staff and making immediate, creative contributions.

## Step Five – The Middle Paragraph(s) - Highlights ONLY!

This is the part of the cover letter where you link yourself and your skills to a specific job or internship. Indicate your desire to work in the field and call attention to relevant strengths by highlighting one or two of your accomplishments. The middle paragraph(s) allows you to move beyond your initial declared interest and competence to more persuasive information about skills you bring to the job. This is your opportunity to highlight insights and qualifications gleaned from your work, service, or education – or to elaborate on content that may have been difficult to describe on your resume.

It's important to remember, however, that it is NOT sufficient to simply state what you believe to be true; you must provide examples. A successful cover letter will *describe* a job, a class, or a group project where you *demonstrated* those skills. Provide an example of something creative you produced rather than claiming to be creative. If you are hard-working, describe achievements that demonstrate that. Your qualifications are strengthened when you provide specific examples.

Some successful examples follow:

My undergraduate degree in psychology, four years in retail bicycle sales, and internship with Rogers and Wells Public Relations combine to make me a strong candidate for Gwinn Cycles' marketing team.

Meeting the demands of a full-time undergraduate education, serving as student government vice-president, and completing a 20-hour-a-week internship with Davidson Management provided me with the multitasking experience needed to excel as a financial analyst at Whittier Finance.

As a child caregiver and an officer in my sorority, I developed effective and creative communication strategies to achieve success with my teams. For example, caring for children challenged me to think of imaginative ways to engage their attention while maintaining structure, especially when tutoring. Meanwhile, leading my sorority as Social Chair required me to schedule, plan, and promote several recreational activities for approximately 50 members. These experiences provide me with a level of maturity and a propensity for thinking on my feet, skills that will make me an asset to the American Red Cross.

## **Step Six – Final Paragraph**

The final paragraph is your fond farewell and the shortest paragraph in the letter. You should restate your interest in the position and thank the employer for reading your letter. It is appropriate to suggest a time when you'll be getting in contact by phone or to indicate that you will wait for a response. Provide your telephone and/or email address again in this paragraph of the letter. Don't forget to thank the employer for reading your letter. The following are sample sentences you may include in your final paragraph:

- Thank you for your time.
- Thank you for reviewing my qualifications.
- Thank you for your consideration.
- I look forward to your reply.
- I look forward to hearing from you.
- I look forward to your response.

## **Step Seven – Closing**

Although the closing of your cover letter will probably be just one simple word, it is nonetheless an important part.

There are a few “tried and true” methods of closing your cover letter that are safe and effective. The Center for Career & Life Planning recommends using a standard, traditional closing such as:

- Sincerely,
- With sincere regards,

After typing your closing, skip three lines and type your full name (as it appears on the top of your resume). Use that space for your signature (see Step Eight).

## **Step Eight – Your Signature**

This part is easy – don't forget to sign your name! Use blue or black pen, but don't forget to sign! Emailed cover letters are exempt from this requirement; simply typing your name below the closing is appropriate for email correspondence.

## **Step Nine – Enclosures**

After your typed name, skip one line and type the word “Enclosure.” This indicates that another document (probably your resume) is included in the application packet you are mailing to the employer. If the employer requested writing samples or a reference list, the word “Enclosures” should be followed by a number in parentheses indicating how many separate documents you have included with the cover letter.

Enclosed is my resume for your review. I hope I will be given the opportunity to speak with you to discuss ways in which I can contribute to the growth and success of the American Red Cross. Please contact me by phone (407-555-2195) or by email at [tjackson@gmail.com](mailto:tjackson@gmail.com) if you have questions about my application materials or wish to arrange a meeting. Thank you in advance for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Tyler Jackson

Enclosure

Enclosed is my resume, which provides additional information about my experience and qualifications. I am extremely interested in this internship and welcome the opportunity to interview with you at your convenience. I can be contacted at [sjobseeker@rollins.edu](mailto:sjobseeker@rollins.edu) or (407) 555-3210. Thank you for your time and consideration.

With sincere regards,

Sarah Job Seeker

I have thoroughly enjoyed my two public relations internships and believe these experiences, combined with my coursework and college activities, have prepared me to be a successful Event Planner at Jackson Public Relations. Enclosed are my resume and two writing samples for your review. I will contact you within the next two weeks to see if an interview may be arranged at your convenience. If you wish to reach me prior to that time, please contact me at [bmclendon@yahoo.com](mailto:bmclendon@yahoo.com) or 407-555-2195. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Brian McClendon

Enclosures (3)

## Step Ten – Dos and Don'ts

**DO** use spell check – misspelled words on a cover letter will almost certainly send your application packet straight to the recycling bin.

**DO** proofread your letter several times. Spell check can't always catch misused words like "their" vs. "there" or "customer" vs. "costumer;" it also may not notice that you typed "Rolling" instead of "Rollins."

**DO** ask someone to proofread your cover letter. It's a good idea to have fresh eyes review your work to catch mistakes you may have missed. The Center for Career & Life Planning can help! Set up an appointment, stop by during walk-in hours, or submit your cover letter through the CCLP's online submission form to get feedback, tips, and suggestions for improvement.

**DO** keep your cover letter brief. Stick to the highlights and limit your cover letter on one page.

**DO** use professional language. Remember, this is an employer's first impression of you as a potential employee.



**DON'T** hide your reasons for writing the letter in the last paragraph. Begin your letter by telling the reader why you are writing.

**DON'T** begin your letter with something like, "Hi, my name is Sam Smith and..." Your name appears in the signature line and does not need to be repeated.

**DON'T** overuse the thesaurus. Speak in language that is clear, easy to understand, and professional.

**DON'T** use the same cover letter every time you submit a resume. Tailor your letter to address the requirements of the job for which you are applying.

*See the following page for information on Thank You and Networking Letters.*

## **Thank You Letters**

Each time you have a personal contact with a potential employer, you should send a thank you letter. Most often sent after an interview, the thank you letter can be used to enhance your candidacy. Your letters should (1) express your appreciation for the interview, (2) emphasize your interest in the position, (3) re-emphasize your skills, (4) refer to a specific topic that was addressed during the conversation, and (5) provide additional information regarding qualifications you may not have mentioned earlier.

A well-written thank you letter can provide you with an edge in the interview process. As a general rule, thank you letters should be sent within 24 hours of your interview. If you suspect the employer will make a hiring decision before receiving your letter in the mail, you may wish to email a formal thank you letter. Whether you email or mail a thank you note, be sure to write it in a traditional, business style format.

During the course of a formal interview, you may meet with several individuals. Be sure to collect business cards and send a separate thank you letter to each person who has input into the hiring decision. Each letter should have a slightly different message, depending on the scope of your discussion with that individual. Adding a personal touch or mentioning a specific topic that was discussed just between the two of you helps to personalize each letter.

It is also appropriate to send thank you letters to other individuals who have assisted you in the job search process. These individuals may include professors who have written reference letters, alumni career contacts, and your friends and acquaintances who have provided support, information, or advice. Handwritten note cards are appropriate for acquaintances (including faculty) who have assisted you in your job search process. Alumni, employers, and others should receive formal, thank you letters typed on high-quality resume paper (or a formal thank you letter via email, depending on the hiring timeline).

To view additional sample thank you letters, visit the Resumes and Cover Letters section of the Center for Career & Life Planning website and click the “Resume/Cover Letter Samples” link.

## **Inquiry/Networking Letters**

The inquiry or networking letter is generally used when requesting an informational interview. Whether you request this type of meeting over the phone or through email, these general guidelines still apply. Your inquiry or networking letter should be brief and clearly state your interest in meeting with an individual to learn about a specific career field and recommended job search techniques. It is important to stress that you are looking for advice and information only; you are not, at this point, seeking a job interview.

In the letter, briefly introduce yourself and explain your desire to speak with this contact. You may want to discuss how you found their contact information (for example, from the company website or through the Rollins College Alumni Group on LinkedIn). Explain that you will call to determine if an informational interview may be arranged. A resume is not typically included with this form of letter, but can be presented during the meeting to assist the employer in responding to your questions regarding qualifications.

To review a sample inquiry/networking letter, visit the Resumes and Cover Letters section of the Center for Career & Life Planning website and click the “Resume/Cover Letter Samples” link.

# Stacy Jackson

407-646-2195 • sjackson@rollins.edu

February 10, 2017

Andrew Patterson  
American Red Cross  
2525 Tulip Lane  
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Mr. Patterson:

Please accept this letter of application for the entry-level communication and marketing position listed on your organization's website. I am motivated to pursue a career in the non-profit sector based on my past volunteer experience and feel excited about the opportunity to help the American Red Cross succeed.

As a student at Rollins College, I participated in several local Habitat for Humanity projects and witnessed the completion of two separate homes built for families in need. By collaborating with other students, I helped Habitat for Humanity raise an extra \$100 to purchase small toys for the children who would move into the new home. Observing and working closely with the site leaders taught me the significance of recruiting, motivating, and retaining volunteers in the nonprofit world, and piqued my curiosity in the industry.

As a child caregiver and an officer in my sorority, I developed effective and creative communication strategies to achieve success with my teams. For example, caring for children challenged me to think of imaginative ways to engage their attention while maintaining structure, especially when tutoring. Meanwhile, leading my sorority as Social Chair required me to schedule, plan, and promote several recreational activities for approximately 50 members. These experiences provide me with a level of maturity and a propensity for thinking on my feet, skills that will make me an asset to the American Red Cross.

My resume is enclosed for your review. Please contact me by phone at 407-646-2195 or by email at sjackson@rollins.edu if you have questions about my application materials or wish to arrange a meeting. Thank you in advance for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

*Stacy Jackson*

Stacy Jackson

Enclosure

1000 Holt Avenue - 2222  
Winter Park, FL 32789

June 6, 2017

Katherine Jackson  
Jackson Public Relations  
51 Mills Avenue  
Orlando, FL 32794

Dear Ms. Jackson:

I am writing to apply for the Event Planner position, as advertised through Handshake at Rollins College. Several recent articles in *The Orlando Business Journal* have detailed the rapid growth and success of Jackson Public Relations in this area, and I am particularly inspired by your organization's unique approach to promotions and publicity.

My interest in public relations began when I served as the Events Intern for the Winter Park Arts Festival. This position required great attention to detail in organizing and executing an event that annually attracts more than 100,000 people. In collaboration with two other interns, I managed an advertising budget of \$5,000, recruited over 100 food and craft vendors, and designed security plans to ensure the safety of guests at the event. My second internship with Best Public Relations enabled me to observe account representatives making presentations to large and small clients and to co-present a public relations campaign for a local restaurant. As a result, my presentation skills and ability to speak in front of large audiences improved significantly.

Enclosed are my resume and two writing samples for your review. I will contact you within the next two weeks to see if an interview may be arranged at your convenience. If you wish to reach me prior to that time, please call me at 407-646-2195. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Brian McClendon

Enclosures (3)

# John Smith

901-843-3800 • j.a.smith@gmail.com

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Until May 2017: 2521 Semoran Blvd., Winter Park, FL 32822  
Permanent : 35100 ABC Ave., Charleston, SC 29401

November 7, 2016

Ms. Myra Rogers, Director  
Orange County Historical Museum  
812 East Rollins St.  
Orlando, FL 32788

Dear Ms. Rogers:

Through the Center for Career & Life Planning at Rollins College, I learned of your spring internship in historical research. I believe my coursework in history and participation in relevant extracurricular activities enable me to successfully contribute as an intern with the Orange County Historical Museum.

My passion for American history has evolved over the past 5 years and motivated me to continue my education through extracurricular activities. As a docent with the Charleston Architecture Museum, I guided walking tours and answered guests' questions up to 10 hours per month. As Treasurer of the Civil War Re-enactors Club, I helped raise funds for a research trip to Fort Sumter, studying the famous battle, the politics of antebellum Charleston, and the atrocities of the slave trade. Finally, as a camp counselor at Grandfather Mountain Wilderness Retreat, I investigated Appalachian culture, using resources provided by the Linville Historical Society. I hope to apply the research experience and interpersonal communication skills I developed through these experiences in the internship with the Orange County Historical Museum.

Enclosed is my resume for your review. I am very interested in this internship and would welcome the chance to learn more about the opportunity. After November 14, I will contact you to verify receipt of my materials. If you need additional information prior to that time, please contact me at 901-843-3800 or via email at j.a.smith@gmail.com. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

*John Smith*

John Smith

Enclosure