

# Cover Letters

## Student Employment Assistance

The job process can be very frustrating and time consuming. DMACC Student Employment Assistance is here to help. The goal of the department is to create a smooth transition from school into a successful career by assisting and educating on effective job search skills.

Located at the Ankeny Campus, Building 1, Dave and Jacki are happy to help with any aspect of the job search process. Areas of assistance include: job posting registration, part time job openings, resume critiques and revisions, cover letter writing, mock interviews and completing online applications. Videos, handouts and websites are all available and free for your use.

Contact Dave (964-6463 or [ddreimers@dmacc.edu](mailto:ddreimers@dmacc.edu)) or Jacki (964-6215 or [jlboldt@dmacc.edu](mailto:jlboldt@dmacc.edu)) for assistance.



# The Cover Letter

## What is it?

An introduction to you and your resume that highlights your strengths and talents

## Who should have one?

Everyone currently looking for employment or considering a future job change. A resume should never be sent without a cover letter.

## Can I use the same one again?

No. This is a common mistake job seekers make. Cover letters should be tailored to each individual job posting. A good cover letter will explain what you can do for the company, not what the company can do for you.

## What are the different types of cover letters?

There are three main types of cover letters that will be used based on your situation and the goal you are trying to achieve. These are as follows:

- **Traditional (Application):** This is written in response to a job advertisement and specifically states your application for the position.
- **Networking:** This is written to contacts (generally in the same industries) you have previously generated. This letter does not inquire about employment opportunities, but asks for help with job leads or tips on career success in a specific industry.
- **Cold cover (Prospective):** This is written to specifically inquire about employment, but is not written in response to a job posting. This letter is normally sent to a place you would be interested in working for.

## Basic Cover Letter Guidelines

- Write your letter with the focus on the position and the employer. Send an individualized cover letter explaining how your skills and qualifications can benefit the given employer.
- Organize your information. Keep similar information together and create new paragraphs if necessary.
- Always address the cover letter to a specific person at the organization. Do not use “Dear Human Resource Manager” or “To Whom it May Concern”. Contact the organization to ensure the correct contact if necessary.
- Keep the cover letter to a maximum of one page.
- Make sure your cover letter is error free. Have someone read it for you to double check for spelling and/or grammar errors.
- Send hard copy cover letters on high quality paper and envelopes.
- Write in a conversational, yet formal manner.
- Use a common professional font and 10 or 12 point (Times New Roman, Helvetica, Courier)

## Areas to Consider

**Purpose:** Your immediate goal is to gain attention.

- Provide enough information that the employer will decide you make it to the next level (interview)

**Audience:** Tailor your letter to each specific organization.

- Research the company to know the interests, needs, values, and goals of the company
- Reflect your personality, enthusiasm, interest, and intellect in a company

**Content:** Each individual letter should include definite points and ideas.

- Identify a specific person in the company; do not send it to HR Manager, To Whom It May Concern, etc.
- Specifically name the position you are applying for and your qualifications for that position
- The employer should know why you want to work with the company, why you fit with the company, and how you qualify
- Highlight your experiences and accomplishments, direct the reader to your resume and request a follow up
- Incorporate similar phrases/wording from the job description into your cover letter

**Format:** Write in a professional paragraph form

- Follow a block style business letter

## Email Cover Letters

When applying online or over email, use the email message as your cover letter if a separate one is not requested. An effective cover letter should vary from a hard copy in the following ways:

- Create a shorter, simpler version
- Include only an opening paragraph and closing sentence.
- Format your letter as you would an email message. Your contact information can go at the bottom of the page and obviously you won't be able to sign your letter.
- Use the job title or code along with your name as the subject line.
- Rename any and all attachments with a description and your name. (Example: jsmithresume)
- Make sure the salutation and closing are professional.
- Make sure you have an appropriate, professional email address. Sign up for a new one if needed.
- All attachments should be created in Microsoft Word (unless requested otherwise). Test your email with the attachments first by sending it to a friend.

## Sample Block Style Format

**Your street address** (You may choose to use the same heading format as your resume.)

Your city, state, zip

Your phone number

Your email (optional)

**Today's date**

**Name**

Title

Organization

Company street address

Company city, state, zip

**Salutation:**

**Paragraph One: Why You are Writing**

Use complete sentences; use single spaced paragraphs with a double space between paragraphs; include two or three sentences stating what job you are applying for, how you learned about it, any personal contacts you have in the company and your general qualifications for the job

**Paragraph Two/Body of the Letter: What You Have to Offer**

One to three paragraphs (based on space and qualifications) containing information that expands on your qualifications; discuss the most relevant details of your experience and education; be specific and thorough; relate these points to how they would benefit the company

**Paragraph Three/Conclusion: How You Will Follow Up**

Close by requesting a time to further discuss the position (try not to use the word "interview"); provide your basic contact information (email or phone number); close by thanking an employer for his/her time and consideration; if requested include a history salary range and let the employer know you would be willing to negotiate

**Sincerely,** (avoid yours truly, your friend, etc.)

*(Your signature—sign with blue or black ink)*

**Your name**

**Enclosure** (if you have included a resume)

## Sample Traditional Letter

17 N. Walnut St.  
Arrowhead, MI 55555  
(555) 555-5555  
bsmith@hotmail.com

August 16, 2008

Mr. James Pitt  
Owner  
Dental Associates  
5134 W. 73<sup>rd</sup> Ave.  
La Crosse, WI 55555

Dear Mr. Pitt:

I am writing to apply for the Dental Hygienist position posted on Iowacareer.net on July 31, 2008. I recently received my Associate in Applied Science degree from Des Moines Area Community College and believe my education and experience would be a great asset to your office.

While completing school, I was employed as a dental assistant which taught me a great deal about the dentistry field. In this position, I learned the importance of client interaction, client comfort and honest quality work. I feel these traits, along with my strong communication and organizational skills would help in the retention and expansion of clients. I genuinely enjoy my career and am excited to share my skills and ideas with a medium-sized, local organization such as yours.

I believe my educational background and experience qualifies me for consideration for the position. I look forward to meeting with you and further discussing my qualifications. I can be contacted at (555) 555-5555 from 12-9 or at bsmith@hotmail.com Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

*Beth Smith*

Beth Smith

Enclosure

## Sample Networking Letter

123 45<sup>th</sup> St.  
Des Moines, IA 50310  
(515) 252-7766  
jsmart@msn.com

June 24, 2008

Ms. Susan Smith  
Vice President Account Director  
Acme Advertising  
1234 Madison Avenue  
Minneapolis, MN 77777

Dear Ms. Smith:

Bob Randall, senior vice president of media at Jones Advertising, suggested that I write to you. I met with him recently to talk about media as a possible career option and he was very helpful. He suggested that you might be able to provide some insight into the opportunities in account services.

I am a student at Des Moines Area Community College majoring in Marketing. My interest in an advertising career is a result of work I did as a volunteer on a recent election campaign and my subsequent internship at Jack Morris Advertising.

I would like a few minutes of your time to explore the role of account services, what a typical day is like, the kinds of problems you encounter and the most rewarding part of your job. I know your time is valuable and appreciate all the help you can provide. I will call next week to arrange a brief meeting. Thank you.

Sincerely,

*Jane Smart*

Jane Smart

## Sample Traditional Letter

935 W. 43<sup>rd</sup> St  
Ankeny, IA 50021  
(555) 555-555

October 15, 2008

Mr. Bob Taylor  
Human Resources  
Brahmin Entertainment  
10 Fourth Avenue  
Des Moines, IA 50310

Dear Mr. Taylor:

I am writing in response to the advertisement for an executive assistant position found on hotjobs.com. My four years of executive experience at Lambert Warner have equipped me with a multitude of skills, and I would like to continue my growth at Brahmin Entertainment.

Throughout my career I have demonstrated for my employers an exceptional facility for meeting organizational objectives and demands. In addition to my secretarial skills, I am a skilled event planner, having served as the director of the Lambert Warner Christmas Ball for the last two years. My skills as a hostess have often been utilized by employers; I was the only executive assistant entrusted with client greeting, tour leading, and other hospitality services. I am certain I would prove to be an asset at Brahmin Entertainment as well.

If my abilities meet the needs of Brahmin Entertainment, I would greatly appreciate the opportunity of speaking with you personally at your earliest convenience. As requested, my salary history from 2004 to present ranges from \$27,500 to \$32,750. I may be contacted at (555) 555-5555. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

*Katherine Jaynes*

Katherine Jaynes

Enclosure

## Sample Cold Cover Letter

53 W. Jefferson Ave.  
Des Moines, IA 50310  
(555) 555-5555  
lmason@msn.com

July 15, 2008

Mr. Jim Olson, Manager  
Human Resources Department  
Star Computer Company  
923 N. Pennsylvania St.  
Ankeny, IA 50021

Dear Mr. Olson:

I am writing to inquire about opportunities for Computer Programmers with the Star Computer Company.

A recent graduate from Des Moines Area Community College, I feel confident with my programming education and past experience. Through my past experiences, I have gained the ability to effectively reason and analyze problems and situations. I have developed a strong comfort level with writing instructions, designing, coding and maintaining documents.

I am certain of my abilities and confident I could be a benefit to your organization if given the opportunity. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet and further discuss my qualifications. I can be reached at (555) 555-5555 or lmason@msn.com. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

*Lance Mason*

Lance Mason

Enclosure



## Common Cover Letter Mistakes

### **1. Too short**

Some people send short, one paragraph letters or even two or three sentence notes in place of a cover letter. Make sure your cover letter is the full length. It should be at least 3 paragraphs long and should follow the correct outline.

### **2. Using Humor**

Some applicants try to show their personality through the cover letter by making it funny. Unfortunately, you have no way of knowing if your prospective boss shares your sense of humor. Cover letters are to show maturity and professionalism. Save your humor for another time.

### **3. Poor Grammar and Misspellings**

Have someone else or student employment assistance reread your letter before sending it to check for any errors you didn't see when proofreading yourself.

### **4. Writing Overdone Sentences**

When trying to impress a prospective boss, people will often overdue sentences and misuse words they are unfamiliar with. Be yourself and write letters you are comfortable writing.

## Cover Letter Rubric

How does your cover letter stack up against the competition? Are you on your way to an interview? Test yours against the following criteria and make changes as necessary.

(This is created to evaluate a traditional, hard copy cover letter.)

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>
<b>Format</b>	Block business format; Full page	Block business format; Less than one page	Incorrect format; One half page or less
<b>Spelling &amp; Grammar</b>	0 mistakes	1 mistake	More than one mistake
<b>Content</b>	Tailored to a specific company & position	Specific position is mentioned, but letter does not show knowledge or research of organization	General & generic
<b>Salutation</b>	Addressed to a specific contact	Addressed to a general person or position	Addressed to a general person or position
<b>Opening Paragraph</b>	Includes specific opening & where found; includes brief statement of qualifications	Missing 1 piece of information; longer than 3-4 sentences; specific opening mentioned	Missing more than 1 piece of information; generic & general; no specific position mentioned
<b>Body</b>	Includes information on skills & qualifications related to the job; references information to the position & specific organization	Includes information on skills & qualifications; relates information to the position; does not relate information to the individual organization	Generic skills & qualifications provided; no reference to the position or organization
<b>Closing Paragraph</b>	Includes a thank you, contact info, and a request to discuss	Closing paragraph is missing 1 piece of information	Closing paragraph is missing more than 1 piece of information
<b>Closing</b>	Ends with sincerely; provides typed name & a signature with blue or black ink; states enclosure if resume provided	Inappropriate signature; signed with off color; enclosure not stated	Inappropriate closing; signed with off color; enclosure not stated