A Guide to Teaching

Cover Letters
COVER LETTERS

OBJECTIVE: Patrons will be able to create an effective cover letter outlining their interest in applying for a position utilizing proper business letter format.

NECESSARY SUPPLIES:
- Copies of Do’s and Don’ts Of Creating a Cover Letter
- Copies of a Sample Cover Letter
- Copies of a Cover Letter Guide
- Copies of a Cover Letter Worksheet

TIME REQUIRED:
1 hour and 30 minutes

LESSON PROCEDURE:
1. Discuss the importance of the cover letter. It is usually the first item that is included with an application or resume that is read. As the commercial says, “You never get a second chance to make a first impression.”
2. Hand out copies of Do’s and Don’ts of Creating a Cover Letter. Talk the class through the important parts of a business letter including heading, inside address, salutation, and the complimentary closing.
3. Have the class review copies of A Cover Letter Guide and the Sample Cover Letter. You may also pass out the Cover Letter Worksheet. Highlight the important items mentioned in the cover letter guide. Many students believe that “minor” errors can’t hurt them when it comes to applying for a job.
4. Stress that punctuation and grammar are vital components of a letter. A business manager or representative may need to see nothing more than one misspelled word to decide that the applicant is not worth a second look.
5. Assist patrons in determining where to “send” their letter. They should make the letter as real as possible by picking a business of interest.

ASSIGNMENT:
Patrons will create a draft cover letter directed to a business in a field of their interest. Some patrons will need to write out their letter, while others may want to type.

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP:
Rather than simply correcting the rough draft, it may prove useful to have the class engage in a peer review session. This will give everyone an opportunity to see other writing styles, both good and bad.
Do’s and Don’ts of Creating a Cover Letter

1. Always include a cover letter when mailing your resume. A letter of introduction will prove useful when applying to companies. It is a useful addition to an application packet.

2. Unless the advertisement specifies “no phone calls please” and the name is not given in the ad, find out the name and title of the individual who will be receiving your letter. Make sure you spell the name properly and get the proper abbreviation (Mr., Mrs., and Ms.).

3. Do not use “form” letters or photocopies. Personalize each letter. If possible, explain why you want to work for the organization.

4. Use a proper business format for your letters.

5. Make sure the letter is PERFECT! Spelling, punctuation, and grammar count. Have someone proofread the letter before mailing it.

6. Create the letter on a computer word processing program (Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, etc.) and use a laser printer, if possible. Use good quality paper. Cheap, flimsy paper makes your application seem very ordinary. However, do not use flashy colors!

7. Utilize a one inch margin on all 4 sides. This white space draws the reader to the body of the letter.

8. In the opening paragraph, tell the reader the purpose of the letter.

9. Use “I” statements and action verbs when describing your experience.

10. Get to the point! Employers do not have the time to read lengthy letters. A cover letter should never exceed one page.

11. Focus on the specific skills and interests you possess that you can offer the employer. Concentrate on skills which match the advertised employment qualifications or the desired program of study. Stress what you can do for the company, not what the company can do for you. Sound upbeat and confident. Sell yourself!

12. Don’t mention salary expectations unless the advertisement specifically requests it. In that case, the best strategy is to give a range. For example, “My earnings have ranged from $7.00 to $10.50 per hour in the various sales positions I have held.”

13. End by thanking the reader and stating that you look forward to meeting with them. Make a specific suggestion for the next step of the process and follow up as promised.

Before mailing a cover letter, can you answer the following questions with a “Yes”?

• Is it clear? Does it state exactly what I want it to state?

• Is it concise? Does it state what I want it to state in the fewest possible words?

• Is it well organized?

• Am I projecting to the employer the contribution I can make?

• Have I stressed areas in my experience and/or education that are relevant to the person reading it?
COVER LETTER GUIDE

PARTS OF A COVER LETTER

SAMPLE LETTER

HEADING INSIDE ADDRESS

Your Mailing Address
City, State Zip Code

Today’s Date

SALUTATION

Employer’s Name
Job Title
Business Name
Business Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear (Mr./Mrs./Ms.) (Use the name of the person that will read the letter):

INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH
Tell why you are writing.

In response to the February 24th advertisement in the Bangor Daily News, I have enclosed my resume for the Receptionist position.

1ST MAIN PARAGRAPH
Describe your qualifications. Sell your skills and knowledge. Sell why you are interested in the company or college. Point out any related experience you have.

I have two years of prior work experience as a receptionist with XYZ Telecommunications. My work has involved answering ten incoming lines and greeting customers in a fast-paced office setting. I have also been responsible for all incoming and outgoing mail, as well as purchase orders. I am very detail oriented and able to handle multiple tasks simultaneously.

2ND MAIN PARAGRAPH
Continue to describe qualifications. Highlight relevant training or classes that relate to the job or major for which you are applying.

I am currently completing an Associate Degree in Executive Administrative Assistant at Northern Maine Technical College. In completing this program, I have gained valuable experience in several computer programs including Microsoft Word, Excel, and Access. Additionally, my training has provided me with the skills to reach my goal of office management.

CLOSING PARAGRAPH
Close by thanking the reader and requesting an interview.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss my qualifications with you in person. I can be reached at (207) 555-1234. Thank you for your time and consideration.

COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE

I am very detail oriented and able to handle multiple tasks simultaneously.

SIGNATURE

Sincerely,

NAME

Place your actual signature above your name

Joe Doe

ENCLOSURE

Enclosure

This indicates that you have enclosed other items (resume, transcripts, application)

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COVER LETTER WORKSHEET

____________________________   Your Mailing Address
____________________________   City, State Zip Code

____________________________   Date

____________________________   Employer’s Name
____________________________   Job Title
____________________________   Business Name
____________________________   Business Address
____________________________   City, State Zip Code

Dear ____________________________

This letter is in reference to the _________________________________ (job/position) that was listed with _________________________________.
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Sincerely,

_____________________________________________     Your signature
______________________________________________   Your name

Enclosure
Northville, ME 04400

January 3, 2003

Ms. Christine Bailey
XYZ Law Offices
123 Main Street
Auburn, ME 04210

Dear Ms. Bailey:

This letter is in reference to the paralegal position that was listed through Trident Technical College's Career Center. I am familiar with XYZ Law Office's recent growth and I am confident that my skills and qualifications will benefit your company.

I am eager to utilize my research and writing skills while working as a paralegal. My academic courses at CMTC have required many research papers and projects. I have a tremendous capacity to undertake research and report findings in clear and concise fashion.

I work well under the pressure of deadlines, and I have been involved in many group projects. My work experiences have taught me that one must be prepared to work beyond the typical forty-hour week to achieve success. I am willing and able to do so for XYZ Law Offices.

Your consideration of my credentials would be greatly appreciated. I will call you next week to confirm your receipt of this letter and enclosed resume. Please feel free to contact me if you require additional information to support my candidacy.

Sincerely,

Place your actual signature here

Joseph Smith

Enclosure

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