

The Job Search

Chapter: 16

Job Correspondence

Resumes and Job Application

Format of a Cover Letter

- **Address and salutation:** Address the letter to a named person i.e. the Head of Department.
- **First paragraph:** An introduction, explaining which post you are applying for, how you heard about it, and some brief background on who you are e.g. in terms of your research interests and academic background.
- **Middle section:** Evidence of your academic career in terms of your research interests and achievements as well as teaching and administrative experience. Also mention your future research plans. The balance between research, teaching and administration will depend on the nature of the institution and department's work.
- **Final section:** Explain what attracts you to this role in this institution and department and how the role fits in to your career plans.
- **Concluding paragraph:** A conclusion summarising what makes you suitable for the job and a statement expressing interest in an interview.

Writing a Cover Letter

A job letter is just another type of sales letter – except that you are “selling” yourself, not a product or service.

A cover letter should include the following elements:

- Where and how you found out about the position
- Your reason for being interested in this company
- Your main skills and accomplishments (summary of few key points)
- How you fit the requirements for the job
- Items of special interest about you that would relate to your potential for the job
- Request for an interview

The letter should be one page or less. You should always include a resume with the letter.

ABC Format: Job Letters

Abstract

Apply for a specific job

- Refer to ad, mutual friend, or other source of information about the job
- Briefly state how you can meet the main need of your potential employer (optional)

Body

Specify your understanding of the reader's main idea

- Provide main qualifications that satisfy these needs (only highlight information from resume do NOT simply repeat all resume information)
- Avoid mentioning weak points or deficiencies
- Keep body paragraphs to six or fewer lines
- Use a bulleted numbered list if it helps draw attention to three or four main points
- Maintain the “you” attitude throughout

Conclusion

Tie the letter together with one main theme or selling point

- Refer to your resume
- Explain how and when reader can contact you for an interview

Example cover letter

Dear Sir or Madam.....

I am writing in response to your advertisement for a Senior Lecturer in French History in the Department of French at South Shields University:

I believe that this post represents an excellent opportunity for me to develop my academic career and I consider myself to be an eminently suitable candidate with highly relevant research and teaching experience.

My PhD dissertation was entitled "The Haitian Revolution: The Role of the Planter in Political Life in the 1790's". My first post-doctoral position was at Midshire University where I supported research into French Caribbean Society. This was then followed by another post-doctoral position developing research into democracy and society in eighteenth century Guadeloupe. In 2007 I was appointed Lecturer in the Department of French Studies.

I have published 13 papers on Post Colonial French Atlantic history (see Appendix in my CV) and recently attended a conference on Electoral Reform in the French Caribbean. My current research is on The Planters of Tortuga: 1752 – 1806: Migration and Exile in the French Revolutionary Atlantic.

This study makes innovative use of interdisciplinary research methodologies including nominative record linkage to understand key aspects of the French Atlantic world between 1752 and 1806. Drawing principally on a systematic sample of records on government assistance to planters from Tortuga exiled in France during the 1790s, it explores how an examination of Tortuga's planter class sheds light on the relative strength of metropole-colony ties, especially the role of migration in maintaining human ties across the Atlantic. It examines common assumptions about the "deserving poor" through analysis of assistance offered to exiled planters

1: Always address your letter to a named person where possible; ideally the hiring manager.

2: Say where you saw the post advertised.

3: This is obvious.

4: Keep the cover letter punchy; it is not an essay. This sentence is not adding much as the content is assumed. Better to go straight into why they might want to hire you before the employer loses interest.

5: The cover letter is not a summary of your CV – rather it is the place to highlight and evidence key, relevant, achievements. Be selective.

6: This level of detail is better in the CV itself.

7: This reads more like a PhD abstract and is too detailed. Bear in mind that your cover letter might also be read by non specialists, such as HR staff. Just highlight the key areas of research which link best to your target position and which really establish your academic credentials.

I am now keen to develop my academic career further in a highly rated research institution where there are opportunities for future career development. With a reputation for academic and research excellence, I believe that joining this department will expose me to a vigorous research community which will allow tremendous cross-fertilisation of ideas. I would also be interested in getting involved in your joint degree programmes and in your e-learning initiatives, which is an interest of mine.

I currently teach four undergraduate modules covering up to 25 students. I supervise three PhD students and get involved in PhD admissions and viva examinations. I also invigilate examinations and sit on the SSLC, which involves negotiation and problem-solving skills. Indeed, I believe improving communication with the student body is paramount. My efforts in improving the student experience have helped the department achieve a reputation for transparency and innovation.

In summary, I would like to reiterate my interest in the position and would be extremely grateful if you would consider my application positively. I am convinced I would bring a great deal to the department.

Yours sincerely

8: This is too vague and could apply to any post; you need to tailor to the specific role targeted and show you have done your homework on the dept.

9: This needs backing up to include evidence of this interest.

10: Although accurate, this is standard stuff and is unlikely to make you stand out as a candidate. Always think about what you can offer that might differentiate you from other candidates.

11: There is no point making general assertions about your beliefs and principles, however relevant, unless you can back them up with evidence.

12: Too vague – what efforts?

13: A bit waffly – not persuasive.

Cover Letter Do's and Don'ts

Your cover letter—along with your c.v. and your letters of recommendation—will determine whether a search committee will pursue your candidacy. As many as half the applicants for a particular job are rejected after the search committee looks at the cover letter. The committee members may conclude that the candidate is not qualified for the job or that the applicant's work is not engaging. In other words, it is crucial that your letter grab the committee's interest.

Avoid common cover letter blunders:

- DO address the letter to a specific individual.
- DO be concise. This is not the place for an overly lengthy discussion of your dissertation.
- DON'T be too lengthy. Generally one or two pages is sufficient.
- DON'T use hyperbole. Be professional in tone.





Don't:

- Try to summarise your CV or give too much detail – you need to be selective about the points that you highlight
- Make unsubstantiated statements about relevant skills and experience without giving examples
- Send the same or a similar letter to more than one employer. Never 'cut and paste' as employers will suspect a lack of research and career focus
- Make generalised statements about why you want to work for the institution (e.g. referring to 'a top 50 global institution' or 'a department with a high reputation')
- Use jargon specific to your employer or profession which the employer might not understand
- Focus on what the employer can do for you – it's more about what you can do for the employer.

Cover Letter Rubric

Sender's Address Date Recipient's Address Salutation		2
First Paragraph	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purpose of writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the position you are applying for Where you saw or heard about the position How your academic/ professional experience matches the position 	2
Second paragraph	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence (Academic/Work/Research/Skills) [at least 2 with specific examples] Reasoning (Relevancy with job) Specific example based on information in résumé Future Plans 	3
Third Paragraph	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More detail on position requirements How you are fit for the role? Specific example based on information in résumé What attracted you to this organization? How you will help the organization achieve its goals 	2
Closing Paragraph	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your main objective: an interview <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide contact information Close the letter in a professional manner Provide enclosure information 	3
Closing off	Yours sincerely, Signature/Provide signature block Name Contact (if not mentioned in the last paragraph)	1
Mechanics	Spellings Vocabulary/ formal tone Sentence structure Tone	2
	TOTAL MARKS	15

Include a Resume

The resume, a summary of your skills and accomplishments, is your “**silent sales representative**”

In writing a resume, include the following information:

- **Contact information:** Your name, address and telephone numbers at which you can be reached, your email address
- **Job Objective:** A precise, clear sentence about your specific area of expertise
- **Example:** To use my intellectual abilities, quantitative knowledge, communication skills, and proven leadership ability creatively to further the organizational mission of a high integrity marketing research organization.
- **Employment History:** paid and nonpaid experiences, beginning with the most recent. be sure to give employment dates, and briefly list important duties and accomplishments.
- **Education:** Schools attended, degree completed
- **Relevant professional certifications and affiliations:** Memberships, offices held
- **Special skills:** Fluency in foreign languages, computer expertise
- **Interests and activities:** only those that are related to your objectives
- **References:** People who know your work, your capabilities, and your character who will vouch for you. Include only a statement that references are available on request.

Matt R. Abboud

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Temporary

67B Whistle Run Apartments
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87103-4737
505.555.0173

Permanent

803 Princeton Road
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87118-1190
505.555.0149

OBJECTIVE

Computer programmer in an industrial environment

QUALIFICATIONS

- 3 years' experience in networking and computer support
- AAS degree in Computer Programming
- Experience in C ++, Microsoft SQL Server, Visual Basic 2008, and Windows Server 2008
- Proficient in all Microsoft Office (2000/XP) products

EDUCATION

Maddox Community College, Albuquerque, New Mexico
AAS, anticipated graduation May 2010
Major: Computer Programming, GPA 3.9/4.0

Major Courses

Advanced C++

Java Programming

UNIX Fundamentals

Windows Server
Admin

Visual Basic 2008

Database Concepts

Database Management

Interpersonal
Communication

Internet Programming

Systems Analysis/Design

International Business

Technical Writing

CO-OP

EXPERIENCE

Wadell Computer Industries

January 2010–Present

Albuquerque, New Mexico

- Design and develop test specifications for software systems
- Evaluate existing computerized systems to improve efficiency
- Serve on Quality Assurance Team in IT department

Landcaster Microsystems

July 2009–December 2009

Santa Fe, New Mexico

- Set up and maintained clients using Windows NT/Server 2008
- Maintained SQL server database
- Answered help desk calls

OTHER

EXPERIENCE

Earned half of college expenses working part-time

2005–2009

Auto Express, Santa Fe, New Mexico, Salesclerk

AG Shirt Factory, Santa Fe, New Mexico, Production Line Worker

VOLUNTEER

WORK

Special Olympics—Santa Fe, New Mexico

2007

Big Brothers Big Sisters—Santa Fe, New Mexico

2006–2008

- Looking at the resume for ten seconds. What do you remember? In other words, what stands out?
- Does the resume look balanced and attractive? Explain.
- What information is included in each major section?
- How does Matt's work experience relate to his job objective?
- What impression does his earning some of his college expenses make?
- What kind of impression does his volunteer work make?



Focus on Ethics

Recently, the city manager of a small town was fired because he listed a degree in city planning on his resume that he did not actually have. Being two classes short of a college degree, he decided that that was as good as the degree—except that it was not. It was a lie.

Many people have “skeletons in their closets”: a court conviction, a substance abuse problem, or an unfinished degree. It is true that on paper, someone with a conviction does not look as good as the person with a sterling record. Someone without the proper degree does not look as good as the person with the degree. However, the truth is better than any lie conceived to cover up the “skeleton.” If a person cannot be trusted to complete employment data honestly, then he or she is not a good risk for a company.

The bottom line is this: Falsifying employment data carries serious consequences, such as immediate termination or prosecution. Some events in the distant past may have little bearing on the job hunt and need not be disclosed. However, if you are asked about something, do not lie.

Think Critically

What are the consequences for the city manager and the citizens of the town?



CONSIDER THIS: How Applicants Are Screened for Personal Qualities

In a survey of over 2,000 employers, two qualities—personality and communication skills—stood out as essential when making a new hire (Barck). But your résumé and cover letter provide limited information about these areas, so employers need to use other methods in order to screen applicants for personal qualities. Screening often begins with a background check of education, employment history, and references. Be sure your résumé is accurate: when polled, 58 percent of employers indicated they had discovered lies on résumés (Tarpey).

Increasingly, employers will also go online and check Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and other Web sites to get a better feel for the applicant's personality and fit. Note that in six states, it is illegal for employers to ask people for the passwords to their social media accounts

(Kerr). But still, with so much information freely available online, there is a lot that can be found without having direct site access.

Beyond screening for background, employers sometimes use personality tests to pinpoint desirable qualities. These tests ask questions about how you might handle a difficult situation, your emotional stability, or whether you have a sense of humor. While such tests may provide insights to employers, they have also come under scrutiny as being potentially discriminatory or as simply not providing information that is truly needed by the employer. In the end, employers seek candidates who are well qualified *and* can get along with people. In other words, employers want a good fit with the company: “what is taking precedence in the way companies recruit ... is our increasing emphasis on the cultural fit of new hires” (Barck).