



Cover Letter Writing

AUBURN UNIVERSITY CAREER CENTER
YOUR CAREER. OUR MISSION.

303 MARTIN HALL | 334.844.4744 | AUBURN.EDU/CAREER

MAKE YOUR COVER LETTER COUNT

If you think it is enough to fit your “life” onto one page via the resume, you are wrong...most of the time. According to an accountemps.com (2011) survey of executives, 86 percent reported that cover letters are valuable when evaluating job candidates.

While a cover letter should compliment your resume, it should not just regurgitate it. The cover letter allows you to demonstrate your writing skills and personality while you target past experiences and successes that related directly to the job you are seeking. The following guidelines can assist you in preparing a solid cover letter:

Follow a standard business letter format. Try to address the letter to a specific individual. Call the organization and ask who is heading the search and ask for correct spelling and title. CareerShift, available at jobs.auburn.edu, is another resource where you may be able to identify individuals at companies. Once you have a hiring manager’s name, address it to Mr. or Ms. If you are unable to identify an individual to whom to address your letter, avoid generic salutations like “To whom it may concern,” and use more direct approaches like “hiring manager for xyz position,” “internship supervisor,” etc.

Opening Paragraph: Start your letter with a “hook” that announces specific personal traits, skills or knowledge that make you a unique fit for the position. Follow that with a sentence letting them know what position you are seeking and how you learned of it. If you are “name dropping” this is where you will do that: “After learning about my leadership and sales experience, Jane Doe encouraged me to apply for the office manager position.” If you do not know someone in the company, simply state your interest: “I am applying for the office manager position posted at jobs.auburn.edu on May 15.”

Second/Third Paragraphs: Here you must not only demonstrate an understanding of the company and position, but you must tell them why your skills, interests, and values are a fit. For example, if it is a service-minded company, communicate that you too have a similar vision to link work with service to your community. Research the company to be able to communicate an interest in current projects, developments, expansions, etc. Also, identify three to five requested or required skills from the job description and specifically narrate how you have demonstrated them in the past successfully. These examples may come from jobs, internships, leadership positions, volunteer work or group projects.

Closing Paragraph: Thank the reader for his/her time and let them know if and when you will be following up with him/her. If you will be visiting the area on a specific date (spring break, for example), share your availability.

Closing the letter. End the letter with Sincerely. Do not fret about not having a signature when submitting electronically. Just space appropriately and leave it blank.

Feedback: Have someone else (other than Spell Check) review your cover letter. Friends, family members, career counselors and professors are all great options.

ATTACHING COVER LETTER/RESUME TO EMAIL

Much of the job application process will take place on-line or via email. Here are some tips:

- Use a professional email address that includes your name (Yahoo! and Gmail are good options).
- List position for which you are applying in subject line.
- In body of email, do not include your email address, date or employer’s email address as that information is transmitted electronically.
- Do not leave spaces between the salutation and typed name as there will be no signature.
- Make sure attachments are attached before hitting “send.”
- Follow-up initial email with brief email asking if all documents were transmitted and readable in their system.

EMAIL COVER LETTER FORMAT

From: imatiger@gmail.com	Your Email
To: janedoe@business.com	Recipient’s Email
Subject: Marketing Position	Position you Want
Dear Ms. Doe:	Salutation
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	Body
Sincerely, Ima Tiger	Closing

TOP 10 COVER LETTER MISTAKES

A good letter entices the recipient to review your resume. A bad one turns them away. Avoid these cover letter mistakes:

1. **Sending your resume without a cover letter:** Some employers don't read them, but since you do not know the reader's values, include a letter.
2. **Failing to address letter to specific name of recipient:** Addressing the letter to "To Whom It May Concern," "Dear Sir or Madam" or worse, "Dear Sirs" instead of a named individual are lazy approaches that show the employer you were not concerned enough to find out the name of the person with the hiring power. Call, tap into your personal network or someone who works for the company, library, phonebook and online resources.
3. **Telling the employer what the company can do for you instead of what you can do for the company:** A common mistake for recent college graduates and inexperienced job-seekers, don't forget that employers want to know what you can do for their bottom line, not what they can do to fulfill your career dreams.
4. **Leaving the ball in the employer's court:** Rather than ending your letter with, "I look forward to hearing from you," request a meeting and promise to follow up with a phone call. If you say you will follow up, do so. This follow-up aspect is another good reason to obtain the specific name of the hiring manager. Here's a sample closing paragraph requesting specific action and describing the writer's planned follow-up.
5. **Being boring and formulaic:** Use the first paragraph to grab the employer's attention and tell the employer why you are writing. Later paragraphs will expand on your qualifications. Don't use such clichés as "Enclosed please find my resume" or "As you can see on my resume enclosed herewith." Employers can see that your resume is enclosed; they don't need you to tell them.
6. **Allowing typos, misspellings, or incorrect grammar/punctuation into your letter:** Your letter reflects your ability to write and communicate. Be sure your document is letter-perfect before sending it out. Proofread it and have others do so as well.
7. **Rehashing your resume:** Use your cover letter to highlight aspects of your resume that are relevant to the position, but don't waste precious space or the potential employer's time by simply repeating your resume.
8. **Failing to specifically tailor your letter to the job you're applying for.** The specifics of your cover letter should be tied as closely as possible to the wording of the ad to which you are responding. Literally echo the words of the job posting. They have figuratively painted the picture of their ideal job candidate. You need to illustrate that you are that person.

The *executive summary* style letter does this particularly well by using a two-column format in which you quote in the left-hand column specific qualifications that come from the employer's posting and in the right-hand column, your attributes that meet those qualifications. The two-column format is extremely effective when you possess all the qualifications for a job. Do not use if you need to demonstrate strong writing skills.
9. **Rambling on too long to tell your life/career story:** As a guideline, limit your letter to one page and four or five paragraphs of no more than three sentences each. Bullet points might be a good way to break up blocks of text and interest the reader. This letter is a marketing tool that focuses on the qualifications you possess that the employer seeks. Save the personal narrative for English class. Use simple language and uncomplicated sentence structure. Ruthlessly eliminate all unnecessary words.
10. **Using wimpy language.** Avoid phrases such as "I feel" and "I believe." Your statements will be much stronger without them. It's best to either leave off the qualifier or at least use a stronger one such as "I am confident," "I am convinced," or "I am positive."

Resource: Katharine Hansen: quintcareers.com/cover_letter_mistakes.html

NAME

xxx Street | City, ST ZIP | Phone Number | Email Address

May 20, 20XX

Date followed by 1-2 spaces

Mr. U. R. Employer
Director, Personnel Department
We Have Lots of Money, Incorporated
Auburn, AL 36830

Address followed by
1 - 2 spaces

Dear Mr. Employer: (always address to particular person)

Salutation, followed by colon
and 1 space

Introductory Paragraph: State why you are writing; name the position or type of work for which you are applying; and mention where you learned of the position or organization. Give specific dates if you have had specific conversations with a person, and include this personal reference as it may attract more attention.

Body: The next one or two paragraphs should be your sales pitch. Explain why you are interested and how you best fit this position. "Tease" the reader enough to read your resume. Emphasize particular skills or duties that are part of the job description. As a recent graduate, you may want to use a paragraph to address academic qualifications and another paragraph to highlight experience and skills. Illustrate in this section that you have knowledge of the company's needs and of the position to demonstrate you have done your "homework." Be confident!

Body should be single
spaced, left justified
and have one space
between each
paragraph

Closing Paragraph: Be short and to the point. Indicate what steps you would like to happen next—if you want an interview, ask for it! **Passive Approach:** Results from you saying, "I look forward to hearing from you," and places responsibility on the employer to make the next move. **Active Approach:** Puts you in the position to initiate contact with the employer. State a specific date in the near future when you will verify receipt of the letter and/or seek to arrange an appointment. If you say you will contact them, do! Finally, thank the employer for his or her time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Closing, "Sincerely" is
appropriate, followed by 3
spaces

Always Sign Your Name in Ink

Do not "sign" if attaching to
email

Ima Tiger

Enclosure

Enclosure can be typed if
you are forwarding resume,
reference page, transcripts,
etc.

Typed name, followed by
1 - 2 spaces

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY STYLE COVER LETTER

Ima Tiger

999 Dream Street | Auburn, AL 36849 | (334) 844-0000 | imatiger@auburn.edu

January 24, 20xx

Mr. U. R. Employer
Director, Personnel Department
We Help Others, Incorporated
Auburn, AL 36830

Dear Mr. Employer:

I am writing to apply for the Public Relations Coordinator position posted on the We Help Others job site. Not only do I hold the required degree in public relations, but I have two years of experience in social media. In addition, I demonstrate the required and desired qualifications in the following ways:

Your Requirements

- Bachelor's degree in public relations
- Knowledge and application of public relations
- Deal creatively, confidently and professionally with a wide variety of individuals
- Take initiative, work independently and manage multiple projects
- Organizational, interpersonal and written communication skills

My Qualifications

- Graduated May 20XX with marketing major and 3.80 GPA
- Experienced in social media marketing
- Managed marketing for organization of over 200 members
- Created and managed multiple social media applications
- Built rapport quickly with diverse audience through service activities
- Initiated development of up-to-date marketing strategies, now embraced by organization serving 24,000 students
- Organized marketing campaign for service event that raised \$9000
- Recognized for effective communication in both one-on-one and group situations

Thank you for your time and consideration. I will contact you next week to confirm receipt of my application and discuss the possibility of meeting.

Sincerely,

Ima Tiger

Ima Tiger

TRADITIONAL COVER LETTER

Ima Tiger

999 Dream Street | Auburn, AL 36849 | (334) 844-0000 | imatiger@auburn.edu

January 24, 20xx

Mr. U. R. Employer
Director, Personnel Department
We Help Others, Incorporated
Auburn, AL 36830

Dear Mr. Employer:

Passionate about utilizing my interpersonal and counseling skills to help at risk juveniles, I am excited to apply for the Assistant Director position posted in the August 13 issue of *The Really-Important News*. In addition to the Master of Public Administration I will complete in May, I have three years of experience working with juveniles as well as supervisory, management and marketing experience.

My professional and educational experiences have enabled me to develop and utilize administration, leadership and marketing skills. In my current position supervising 10 telecounselors, I assess their performance, providing ongoing training and feedback to improve services. My leadership skills were challenged and honed through leading the admissions office at Three Springs, an outdoor therapeutic program for troubled teens. It took patience and firm resolve to work with the family members, professionals and agencies in order to create a balance of satisfaction on their part as well as looking out for the interest of the organization. My marketing skills have been utilized in various venues, and I look forward to sharing my portfolio with you.

I am excited about the opportunities that We Help Others, Inc provides and feel confident that both my skills and personal traits will allow me to make an immediate and positive impact on your organization. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Ima Tiger

Ima Tiger

Enclosure