How to Compose Your Cover Letter

Writing a Cover Letter

The following information is provided to help you create cover letters for your applications. A cover letter is an introductory letter used to present your resume to an employer. It is not designed to replace the resume but rather to get an employer to read your resume and hopefully ask you to attend an interview.

Your resume is a collection of facts about your background, education, and experience, presented in a fairly structured format. It is a statement of facts about you. A well-written cover letter should highlight your skills, experience and education as they relate to the specific position you are pursuing and entice the reader to review your resume. This is one component of the application process that allows you to really connect with the reader and obtain their interest in interviewing you.

Your cover letter should show:

a) the **specific** skills and background **you** have that is **relevant** to the job
b) your **enthusiasm** for the job/company,
c) your **knowledge** about the company/industry
d) some **friendliness**/warmth,

Cover Letter Do's:
- Ensure the letter is addressed to the correct person, company and job posting
- Use proper grammar and demonstrate solid business writing skills
- Be professional and concise while still communicating important information
- Highlight your skills and experience that are directly related to the position
- Conduct company research

Cover Letter Don'ts:
- Do not forget to proofread: proper spelling and grammar demonstrate sound communication skills and attention to detail
- Do not send a generic letter to different companies or to different jobs within the same company
- Do not be too wordy or lack content: find a balance which demonstrates your skills without being too lengthy

1. The first step in the process is to read the job description. You must read the job description to see what key skills/background/experience the employer is seeking so that you can write your cover letter to address those requirements. This helps you to decide what to put in your cover letter, and makes it relevant to the reader.

Sample Job Description:

Position: Web Developer - Information Technology - Education
Department: Associate Development and Recruitment, Sears Canada

As one of Canada's largest retailers, Sears Canada operates a large Information Technology (I.T.) shop that develops, enhances and maintains a large number of business systems supporting retail, catalogue, home services, finance, travel, credit, merchandising, logistics and target marketing to name a few.

The education team is responsible for building, delivering, and supporting tools, processes, and services to help us: attract and retain the best I.T. professionals, promote associate growth and development, and recognize associate and team accomplishments. Some of the tools and services used to promote the growth and development of over 500 Sears I.T. associates are: education planning, associate performance and development review process, career planning, new associate orientation program, e-learning, and communications (e.g. intranet).

Job Description
You will design, develop, and test Intranet content for the Associate Development & Recruitment teams' Intranet site. If you are **a self-starter**, **quick to adapt to new technologies** and an **out of the box thinker**, then this position is for you.

Responsibilities
· Gather content and **determine technical requirements**
· Provide **work estimates and schedule deliverables**
· **Design, develop and perform usability testing** using Lotus Domino Designer

Technical Qualifications
· Experience with **WIN95/98, NT and TCP/IP**
· Good working knowledge of **HTML**, Lotus scripts/formula, **Java and Java script**s
· Good working knowledge of Lotus Domino Designer
· A flare for **graphic and interface design**

Competencies
· **Strong verbal and written communication skills**
· Good **problem solver**
· **Customer focused**

2. Pick out key skills and attributes listed in the description (I have bolded <u>some </u>of them in the example above), and see where your skills/background match with those noted. Next, think of examples and situations from your past, which demonstrate these skills and abilities. Write those down in point form. Those points will become the body of your cover letter.

3. Your cover letter should have your name, address, phone, and e-mail listed in some fashion at the top. Next, address it to the recipient. Typically the cover letter is addressed to a specific person in the company, but in co-op we do not provide that information (at our employers request), so you'll begin with Dear Sir/Madam.

For example:

Joan R. Easton
123 Easy Street
Toronto, ON
M5B 2K3
(416) 555-1212
jeaston@coldmail.ca

January 23, 2003

Sears Canada
Toronto, ON

Dear Sir/Madam:

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4. Begin your cover letter with an introductory paragraph listing the job you're applying for; and indicating your interest. You can begin your letter a number of different ways.

Here is an example:

Enclosed is a resume in application for the Web Developer - Information Technology - Education position listed in the Co-op Office at Ryerson University. I am aware of Sears' position as one of Canada's largest retailers, and would welcome the opportunity to acquire development experience in such a large and well-established company. I feel my education and experience are well suited to the Web Developer position.

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5. Offer evidence that you have the skills the employer has outlined.

For example:

My technical qualifications include study and experience with WIN95/98, NT and TCP/IP. Last year one of my course projects included the development of a personal web page www.scs.ryerson.ca/sEaston, which I completed in HTML. I did further work this past summer with HTML designing a small web site for friends who operate a novelty business www.jokersrule.ca. In my current studies, I am working with JAVA and JavaScript in my Web Applications course and am also taking a course in graphical user interface (GUI).

Through a one semester, team-based project in Data Structures and Software Engineering I was involved in all aspects of the development cycle including design, development, and testing. This and other team-based projects have developed my interpersonal and communication skills, as well as honed my organizational and time management skills.

In addition to my academic experience, my work experience at McDonald's has given me the skills to work in fast paced environment where customer service and timeliness, are necessary to succeed.

6. Close with a statement repeating your interest and suitability for the position and a request for a personal interview. Ordinarily, you would close your letter by providing your phone number and or e-mail address for the employer to contact you. However co-op employers normally notify us of the students they wish to interview, so in your closing sentences/paragraph you may choose to remove that information, or request that the employer contact you via the Co-op Office.

For example:

I am enthusiastic about the possibility of joining the Associate Development and Recruitment team and am confident that my abilities and background would make me an asset. I welcome the opportunity for an interview at your convenience. I can be reached through the Ryerson Co-op Office at (416) 979-5068.

Sincerely,

Joan Easton

The final product would look like the sample on the following page:

Joan Easton
123 Easy Street
Toronto, ON
M5B 2K3
(416) 555-1212
jeaston@coldmail.ca

January 23, 2003

Sears Canada
Toronto, ON

Dear Sir/Madam:

Enclosed is a resume in application for the Web Developer - Information Technology - Education position listed through the Co-op Office at Ryerson University. I am aware of Sears' position as one of Canada's largest retailers, and would welcome the opportunity to acquire development experience in such a large and well-established company. I feel my education and experience are well suited to the Web Developer position.

My technical qualifications include study and experience with WIN95/98, NT and TCP/IP. Last year one of my course projects included the development of a personal web page www.scs.ryerson.ca/sEaston, which I completed in HTML. I did further work this past summer with HTML designing a small web site for friends who operate a novelty business www.jokersrule.ca. In my current studies, I am working with JAVA and JavaScript in my Web Applications course and am also taking a course in graphical user interface (GUI).

Through a one semester, team-based project in Data Structures and Software Engineering I was involved in all aspects of the development cycle including design, development, and testing. This and other team-based projects have developed my interpersonal and communication skills, as well as honed my organizational and time management skills.

In addition to my academic experience, my work experience at McDonald's has given me the skills to work in fast paced environment where customer service, and timeliness, are necessary to succeed.

I am enthusiastic about the possibility of joining the Associate Development and Recruitment team and am confident that my abilities and background would make me an asset. I welcome the opportunity for an interview at your convenience. I can be reached through the Ryerson Co-op Office at (416) 979-5068.

Sincerely,

Joan Easton

Notes:

- As you can see, the letter addresses many of the highlighted skills/abilities outlined in the description. Depending on the detail provided in the description, however <u>you may not be able to address all the key points indicated</u>. In the example above I did not address being a self-starter nor an out of the box thinker as was mentioned in the description (*"You will design, develop, and test Intranet content for the Associate Development & Recruitment teams' Intranet site. If you are a self-starter, quick to adapt to new technologies and an out of the box thinker, then this position is for you."*). I could have created a different letter addressing those and other points. You will have to decide which things you consider worthwhile addressing given your background and experience.

- Cover letters should be no longer than one page. If you have problems fitting your letter to one page, edit your letter, or change the font (must be 10-point minimum, 11 or 12 preferred).

- Cover letters should be customized for each job to which you apply, however it is possible to create a generic cover letter that requires less customization so that you can prepare it quickly. There are elements of the letter above that I can use repeatedly while customizing other parts.

For example:

Joan Easton
123 Easy Street
Toronto, ON
M5B 2K3
(416) 555-1212
jeaston@coldmail.ca

(Date)
(Company Name)
(City, Province)

Dear Sir/Madam:

Enclosed is a resume in application for the **(Position title/Job title)** position listed through the Co-op Office at Ryerson University. (**Introductory sentence here**). I would welcome the opportunity to acquire experience with your company. I feel my education and experience are well-suited to the **(Job title)** position.

(Customized paragraph here to replace the second paragraph above)

(I could keep the next 2 paragraphs below because they mention experiences that show the development of broad, generic skills that can be used in many different jobs, or I can replace them with new paragraphs)

Through a one semester, team-based project in Data Structures and Software Engineering I was involved in all aspects of the development cycle including design, development, and testing. This and other team-based projects have developed my interpersonal and communication skills, as well as honed my organizational and time management skills.

In addition to my academic experience, my work experience at McDonald's has given me the skills to work in fast paced environment where customer services, and timeliness, are necessary to succeed.

I am enthusiastic about the possibility of joining **(company name, department, division or group)** and am confident that my abilities and background would make me an asset. I welcome the opportunity for an interview at your convenience. I can be reached through the Ryerson Co-op Office at (416) 979-5068.

Sincerely,
Joan Easton

- Please check spelling and grammar as you compose your letters. In my review of student resumes, I saw many instances where verb tenses were used incorrectly in the same paragraph or sentence. While composing my sample above I first wrote, "This and other team-based projects have developed my interpersonal and communication skills, as well as honing my organizational and time management skills." In this sentence, the verb honing is in the wrong tense. The verb that preceded it in the sentence, "developed" is in the past tense, while "honing" is a present tense. I had to change honing to "honed" to make the sentence grammatically correct.

- Last but not least, please do not cut and paste the wording used in this sample for your cover letter. Create your own, so that the words and tone of your letter are reflective of your personality and thoughts.