Effective Cover Letters

The University of Mississippi
Career Center
303 Martindale
915-7174

http://career.olemiss.edu
The Cover Letter

- Accompanies Resume
- Highlights Personality
- Communicates skills and highlights specific qualifications that are *directly relevant* to the job you are seeking
What Your Cover Letter Reveals About You

- Communication Skills
- Experience and Qualifications
- Level of Professionalism
- Clues to your personality
- How detail-oriented you are
5 Things to Think About Before Writing

- Employer’s needs
- Your objectives
- 3-5 Qualities you’ll bring
- How can you match your experience to the job?
  - What are at least two specific accomplishments you can mention which give credence to the qualities you previously identified?
- Why do you want to work for this particular organization?
Cover Letter Format

- Use 11-12 point font (*usually* Times New Roman)
- Different formats can be used (*play it safe—stick to standard business format*)
- Pay attention to spacing
- Pay attention to grammar and spelling
Cover Letter Format

- Your Address
  - Leave your name off (save it for the end)
  - Do not use commas between city and zip
  - Be consistent (St. or Street, MS or Miss. or Mississippi)

- Today’s Date
Cover Letter Format

- Inside address and salutation
  - Attempt to contact the company/program for the actual name of the employer to whom you are writing
  - Verify address and correct spelling of names
  - Do not use “Dear Sir or Madam” and avoid “To Whom It May Concern”
  - If employer or recruiter is unknown, use “Dear Employer” or “Dear Search Committee”, etc.
Cover Letter Format

● The First Paragraph
  – How you learned of the company or position
  – The position for which you are applying
  – “Name drop” if someone referred you
  – Indicate what interests you about the position (based on your research of the company)
    ● Example: I see from your website that Company X incorporates a teamwork atmosphere, which greatly appeals to me.
Cover Letter Format

– The Second Paragraph
  ● Sell yourself in this paragraph! Tell the employer why he/she should hire you.
  ● Describe your educational background and relevant experiences that qualify you for the position
  ● Illustrate through SPECIFIC examples how you will be an asset to the company/program
  ● Use key words from the job listing and focus directly on the skills/qualifications the company/program is seeking
  ● Okay to use 1-2 paragraphs for this section.
Cover Letter Format

The Third Paragraph

- Invite the employer to contact you by including your phone number and e-mail address
- Illustrate open dates for an interview
- Thank the employer for his/her time and consideration
- Consider using the aggressive approach: inform the employer that you will call during a particular week to follow up/set up an interview
Cover Letter Format

- **Your Signature**
  - Use “Sincerely”
  - Sign your name neatly in blue or black ink
  - Type your name under your signature

- **Enclosure(s)**
  - Type “Enclosure(s)” at bottom of letter if you are including resume, list of references, or other supporting documents
Common Mistakes

- Failing to communicate a clear purpose
- Appearing unprofessional in form, structure, and design
- Spelling, grammatical, and punctuation errors
- Awkward language/use of passive voice
- Being overly assertive, boastful, obnoxious
- Appearing self-centered rather than job- or employer-centered
- Saying little about your interests, skills, accomplishments, etc.
- Addressed to wrong person and/or wrong place
- Produced on inferior paper
Cardinal Rules for Cover Letters

- Target your letter to the specific job
- Talk more about what you can do for the employer than about what the employer can do for you
- Convey focused career goals
- Maintain a positive tone
- Cut to the chase – don’t ramble
- Don’t make empty claims that aren’t backed up by examples
Cardinal Rules, cont.

- Typically limit cover letter to one page
- Proofread!!!
- Never mail a resume without a cover letter
- Do not staple your cover letter to your resume
- Don’t forget to sign your name
- Use quality paper and envelopes
- Get other people’s opinions before you mail
Questions?