

5-minute career clips

career tips & information for Midd alumni

The Cover Letter



MIDDLEBURY
CENTER FOR
EDUCATION
in ACTION **EIA**

Careers, Fellowships, and Civic Engagement

Purpose of the Cover Letter

- 1. Get the reader's attention**
stand out in the crowd (the large volume) of other letters/resumes
- 2. Make the human connection**
personalize your resume and experience data; give the reader a sense of who you are
- 3. Make the connection between you and the job**
show your 'fit' with the job; make the direct connection between your qualifications and the job requirements; state how you will benefit the company
- 4. Convey your interest**
show your interest in this *specific* position, with this *specific* company;
showing what you know about the company and the industry indicates your interest
(requires you to research the company/industry first)
- 5. Showcase your written communication skills**
with attention to message, construction, flow, and tone
- 6. Get the Interview !**
motivate the reader to want to meet you (interview you) and learn more about you

Format and Style

- Be concise, well-organized
- Always address the letter to a person (“*Dear Ms. Jones*”)
Never use the impersonal “To Whom It May Concern” or “Dear Sir or Madam”
- Limit to 3 paragraphs (4 is absolute max.)
- Make your first paragraph count !
- Mention name and title of any inside contact in first sentence
- Mention name of the employer and the position title in first paragraph

10 Keys to a Great Cover Letter

1. **Concise.** 1 page max ! (3-4 short paragraphs)
2. **Personalized** (not “To Whom it May Concern” or “Dear Sir/Madam”)
3. **Attention-Getting Opening Paragraph** (but not outlandish)
4. **Customized** to show interest in that specific job and company (requires that you research the company first)
5. **Dynamic.** Conveys positive energy
6. Convey **Authenticity and Genuineness** (not a ‘canned’ letter)
7. **Balance:** why I’m interested in your company
why you should be interested in me; how I can benefit you
8. Demonstrate **Good Writing/Communication Skills**
9. Use **Key Words** that connect directly to words used in job description or common to the industry
10. Give the reader a **Sense of Who You Are**

Starting to Write Your Cover Letter

Exercise:

1. Review the job description (or job listing) and identify the key requirements for the position.
2. Divide a piece of paper into two columns, the left column titled “Job Requirements” ... the right column titled “My Qualifications”
3. List the requirements for the position in the order that they are given in the job description (because they are usually listed in priority order)
4. In “My Qualifications” column, match each job requirement with your best qualification (experience or skills)
5. Using this worksheet - then write your cover letter, including the highlights from this requirements-qualifications match
6. This exercise is also very helpful preparation for the job interview!

Starting to Write Your Cover Letter

Sample Exercise

Job Requirements & Duties	My Experience & Skills
[<i>Marketing Assistant position</i>]	[<i>new grad's experience at Midd</i>]
Create e-marketing campaigns.	Assisted in developing online edition of campus newspaper.
Write and edit various ongoing monthly and quarterly newsletters.	Wrote weekly column on campus speaker series.
Partner with graphic designers, and producers on complex projects.	Asst editor for arts and sports sections; decided which stories to print based on available completed articles
Must have excellent presentation skills.	Teamed with campus newspaper editor, writers and photographers to produce 35 weekly issues/year.
Must have ability to multi-task and adapt to changing priorities.	Made several presentations in open campus meetings re: plans for campus publications.
Must be able to produce quality work under tight deadlines.	Part of editorial team that successfully met weekly publishing deadline for 3 consecutive years.

Keywords are Essential !

For your resume and your cover letter, it is essential that you use **KEY WORDS** for the job and industry to which you are applying.

KEY WORDS are the 'buzzwords' that identify an industry or a profession. They are the terms and phrases that hiring managers supply to HR managers and recruiters to create job postings and find matching resumes for positions.

Your cover letter and resume will be scanned - whether manually/visually by a human being, or electronically by a scanning software - as the employer's way to filter through the volume of resumes and select the most relevant. The scanning process (whether manual or electronic) looks for specific key words that it recognizes for that job in that industry. If your resume does not contain these key words, it's not likely to make it to the next round of review. That is, it won't make the 'first cut'.

* NOTE: Key Words are important for both your Cover Letter and Resume

Keywords are Essential !

How do you know which are the **KEY WORDS** for a particular job or industry?
It requires research:

- Review the job description to find key words in the description of job duties and required qualifications.
- Review job descriptions or advertisements of similar jobs in other companies in the same industry.
- Look on the company's website for description of their services or products – which will contain buzzwords (key words) for the industry.
- Research websites of professional associations related to the job, or to trade publications related to the job.
- Look on LinkedIn and search profiles of members who have similar jobs. See what key words they use to describe their work.

For more strategies on how to research and use key words:

Tuning Your Resume to the Right Keywords www.theladders.com/career-advice/tuning-resume-right-keywords

Anatomy of the Cover Letter

Use the BUSINESS LETTER FORMAT

Business letter format:
in block paragraphs
(entirely left-justified) with
exception of your contact
information at top, which
can be either centered or
left-justified

Your Contact Information

Date

Employer Name
Company Name
Address

Salutation (Dear xx)

Opening Paragraph

Body Paragraph(s) 1-2 max.

Closing Paragraph

Complimentary Close (Sincerely; Regards, etc)

Signature
Typed Name

Length of letter = **1 page** MAX !

Font: Times New Roman, or Garamond
Font size: 11 or 12 ; never smaller than 11
(smaller size used on this slide for display only)
Margins: 1" side & top

Business letter format - in block paragraphs
(entirely left-justified) with exception of your
contact information at top, which can be
either centered or left-justified.

Never use the impersonal 'To Whom it May
Concern' or 'Dear Sir or Madam'.
Always find name of person to address this
to - Can find by researching company
website, or through inside contacts (even if
the name you use is incorrect, it's better
than no name at all). This shows that you
took the initiative to research.

Market yourself! Connect your qualifications
to the core parts of job description. Use **key
words** from job description to illustrate the
'fit'. Show that you know something about
the company/industry – you must research
this first. In these 1-2 body paragraphs, be
specific but concise!

End on a positive note. Re-state your
interest in the job – and ask for 'action' (an
interview or meeting).

Your name
street address • city, state and zip code
phone number • email address

Date

Mr./Mrs./Ms. Name (*specific person*), Title
Company/Organization Name
Street Address
City, state and zip code

Dear Ms. or Mr. (*last name*)

Opening Paragraph – Make an Impression

- If referred by someone (connection to the employer), mention that name in first sentence
- Open with a strong statement (but not outlandish)
- State your long-held interest or passion for the field (if genuine)
- Name the position (title of the position) you're applying for
- Briefly state the fit between you and the job; how you will benefit the company

Body Paragraph(s) – Make the Connection *between job description and your qualifications*

- Lead with a strong topic sentence linking your experience to the job qualifications
- Indicate the relevant skills you have developed through your work experience and career (and academic study, if applicable)
- Stress accomplishments & achievements vs job duties/responsibilities
- Make the connection to how this qualifies you for the position; explain the 'fit' between you and the job/company (you stated the 'fit' in opening paragraph – now explain the 'fit')
- When explaining the fit, show that you know something about the company/industry
- Use key words from the job description/advertisement – when explaining your qualifications for the job
- Don't repeat your entire resume!

Closing Paragraph – Make it Happen

- State that you will gladly provide any additional information, beyond your attached resume
- State that you look forward to further discussion of your strengths in relation to the position
- Thank the reader for considering your application/resume

Sincerely,

Your Signature - 4 spaces
Your Typed Name

[*Optional: Enclosure*]

Opening paragraph

- If referred by someone (connection to the employer), mention that name in first sentence
- Open with a strong statement (but not outlandish)
- State your long-held interest or passion for the company or field (if genuine)
- Name the position (title of the position) you're applying for
- Briefly state the fit between you and the company; how you will benefit the company

Weak opening paragraph:

“ I am writing to apply for the account manager position you have posted on your company Website.”

Strong opening paragraph:

“ I have increased the size and sales levels of my client base in every position I have held, which in turn has increased the revenues and profits of my employers. I want to bring this same success to the account manager position with ABC Company.”

Middle Paragraph(s)

- 1 or 2 paragraphs (MAX)
- Concise and Specific; avoid generalities
- This is the part where you 'sell' yourself !
- Don't just explain what *you* want ...
Describe **what you can do for the employer**; how you will benefit the company and why you are a great fit for the position
- Use **Key Words!**
- Don't repeat what's on your resume ...
This is your chance to **articulate the 'fit' between your qualifications and the specific job requirements**

Closing paragraph

- Restate confidence that you are the right candidate
- Ask for 'Action' - request a meeting / interview
- Give timeframe when you will follow up

Weak closing paragraph:

“ I have enclosed my resume for your review and I look forward to hearing from you about my possible candidacy for the XX position. Thank you for your consideration.”

Strong closing paragraph:

"My knowledge of online marketing, combined with my passion for environmental issues of sustainability, make me an excellent candidate to join the team at XYZ Foundation. I look forward to the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my resume (attached), and will call your office within the next two weeks to arrange a meeting. Thank you for your consideration!

Sample Cover Letters

For excellent examples of Cover Letters, see:

www.quintcareers.com/cover_letter_samples.html

www.theladders.com/career-advice/persuasive-cover-letter

www.gottamentor.com/viewDocument.aspx?d=2205

More Middlebury Resources re: Cover Letters

■ Individual Career Counseling

- practice your Elevator Speech or your Networking Interview
- help with optimizing MiddNet, and with planning your networking campaign
- review your Resume and Cover Letters
- practice Job Interviews
- career counseling and help with career direction

Contact Career Services to schedule a phone counseling appointment:
802-443-5100; or careerservices@middlebury.edu

■ 5-Minute Career Clips www.middlebury.edu/studentlife/eia/alumni/services

series of brief online workshops with 'How To' tips on Networking, Resumes, Cover Letters, and Interviewing

■ Online Tips / Information for Conducting a Job Search

www.middlebury.edu/studentlife/eia/alumni/services

articles, videos, online workshops, website links - including subscription websites free to Midd alumni with ID#

■ MiddNet

searchable online networking database of over 7,400 Midd alumni who have volunteered to offer career advice and info to fellow alumni and students. Search by industry/career area, location, etc.

www.alumniconnections.com/olc/membersonly/MDR/networking/networking.cgi

Additional Resources re: Cover Letters

- *Cover Letter Resources for Job-Seekers* www.quintcareers.com/cover_letter_tutorial.html
- *Sample Dynamic Cover Letters for Job-Seekers* www.quintcareers.com/cover_letter_samples.html
- *Tuning Your Resume to the Right Keywords* www.theladders.com/career-advice/tuning-resume-right-keywords
- *Cover Letter Samples: Weak and Strong* www.gottamentor.com/ViewDocument.aspx?d=2156
- *Dynamic Cover Letters: How to Write the Letter that Gets You the Job*
by Katharine Hansen and Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D. ; Ten Speed Press , 2001
- *Dynamic Cover Letters for New Graduates*
by Katharine Hansen and Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D. ; Ten Speed Press , 1998
- *201 Killer Cover Letters*
by Sandra Podesta Andrea Paxton; McGraw-Hill, 2003

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Check out all the career clips in the 'Job Search' series

Networking

Networking • 1

Your Elevator Speech

Networking • 2

The Networking Interview

The Resume

Resume

Make Your Resume Count

Cover Letter

The Right Introduction

Interviewing

Interviewing • 1

Prepare to Ace the Interview

Interviewing • 2

Handle the Tough Questions

Interviewing • 3

Ace the Interview

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