The Art of Cover Letters

Feld Career Center

October 11, 2011
Agenda

• The purpose of a Cover Letter
• Format
• Messages
• When do you need a Cover Letter?
• Best Practices
• Composing emails
The Purpose of a Cover Letter

• Business letter with a specific format
• One page
• Introduces you and why you are applying
• Should complement, not duplicate resume
• Positions your background and “fit”
• Why should THEY hire YOU – why me, why now?
• Motivates interest in seeing your resume
Specific Format

• Your name & address
• Date
• Company Address
• Salutation (Greeting)
• P1 – Purpose in Writing
• P2 – Your Fit/Interest in the firm
• P3 – Call to Action and closing
• Signature block
Content Format

• Visual appearance is the first “cut”
• White space!
• Easy to read
• Centered horizontally and vertically on the page
• Paragraph format
What Should You Write?

• Deconstruct the position description
• Identify the qualifications, responsibilities and other key information
• Determine your fit
• Plan how to describe your fit with their needs
# Make the Match

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Their Needs:</th>
<th>Your Qualifications (Highlight specific examples):</th>
<th>Connect back to position:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market research experience</td>
<td>As a Marketing Intern at XYZ Company last summer, I developed strong qualitative and quantitative market research skills. In order to help the company better understand its target market audience, I interviewed current and potential customers through individual meetings and focus groups. I developed a survey of questions intentionally focused on probing in more detail unmet needs and interests of our product. In addition, my extensive online research on various articles and blogs led me to notice current and probable market trends to anticipate in the future. In the end, I was able to analyze the firm’s strategic position against its competitors and confidently present to senior management recommended strategies to strengthen its position in the marketplace.</td>
<td>Given this experience, I understand the importance of conducting thorough market research and am eager to bring these skills to ABC Company.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Content Messages

• Less is more!
• Customize for the position and the recipient
• Why them?
• Clear, compelling messages about what you can do for them
• Avoid using “I”
• Active voice
When Do You Need A Cover Letter

• Always include a cover when instructed to do so – signals you can (cannot) follow directions
• Specific messages about your fit that might not be obvious from your resume
• Conveys your passion for the firm
Best Practices

• Keep it simple!
• Leave yourself enough time to write it well
• Customize each letter
• Save As........
  • Yournamecompanynamecoverletter.docx
• Review 3 times
  • 1- Compelling, clear messages
  • 2 - Grammar, spelling, punctuation
  • 3 - “Look” (white space, horizontal/vertical position)
• Format is the same for snail mail or email
• Put it aside overnight & review again
Ask for Help!

• Send a copy with the posting to your counselor
• Leave plenty of time
• Be clear about deadlines
Writing Emails
Writing Emails

• Biggest complaint from alumni and employers
  • Waaaayyyy too informal
    • Tone
    • Text message abbreviations
  • Generic content
  • Typos
  • Grammatical errors
It’s Still a Business Document

• Compelling Subject Line
  • Purpose in writing
  • Identify BU connection if there is one

• Salutation (Greeting)
It’s Still a Business Document

• Use a formal title if you do not know the person or they are very senior
  • Mr. Smith
  • Ms. Smith
  • First name for a peer

[Image of an email example]
Applications

• If a cover letter is required
  • Include with resume in a single pdf with your name in the title
  • Reference it in email body
• If no cover letter is required
  • use the email body for a brief introduction and positioning of your fit
Tips

• Every “touch” matters
• Maintain formality until invited to be casual
• Be direct and polite
• Customize each one
• Proofread, proofread, proofread
  • Spelling
  • Punctuation
  • Grammar
Questions?