

Cover Letters Workshop Facilitator Guide

Instructor Notes

OVERVIEW

Participants will learn how to write & design a successful cover letter.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Participants will learn the benefits of having a well written cover letter.
2. Participants will learn cover letter basics & structure.
3. Participants will understand how to tailor cover letters for specific job openings.
4. Participants will become familiar with two types of cover letters: job posting and cold cover letters.
5. Participants will learn how to write a cover letter.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

1. Identify the benefits of a well written cover letter.
2. Create a successful cover letter using appropriate content and design.
3. Correctly identify how to tailor cover letters for specific job openings.

MATERIALS

- ▶ Projector/Screen
- ▶ PowerPoint Presentation - "Cover Letters That Get Results"
- ▶ Pens/Blank Paper
- ▶ White Board/Flip chart (if needed)/markers
- ▶ Handouts:

#1 - 5 Things That Make a Good Cover Letter
#2 - Tips to Make Your Letter Professional
#3 - Cover Letter Openings
#4 - T-Format Cover Letter Examples
#5 - T-Format Cover Letter Template
#6 - Top 10 Cover Letter Tips
#7 - Cover Letter “Dos and Don’ts”
#8- My 60 Second Commercial

PREPARATION

► **Facilitator Guide** - Read Guide, familiarize yourself with content and flow of activities and decide on schedule. Make note of optional activities you may want to include.

► **Participant Handouts** - Review handout content and update as necessary. Photocopy all handouts in advance.

► **Guest Speakers/Team Training** - Plan session segments if applicable.

► **Measurement/Evaluation Criteria** - Workshop Evaluation Form

► **Research Materials** - Books, videos, websites & additional materials as needed.



ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED MEDIA

YouTube Video- What is a Cover Letter?:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGFJszbVcM8>

Podcast- Helpful Hints for Creating Readable, Engaging Cover Letters

<http://www.rkmc.com/files/Podcast-Cover-Letter.mp3>

iTunesU Video- Cover Letter Workshop from Seattle Pacific University

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/resumes-cover-letters/id452047067>

ACTIVITIES

Facilitator begins workshop with an introduction. Give each participant a packet of handouts (or distribute each handout during each activity).

1. Introduction (Slide 1)

Facilitator can begin the Cover Letters PowerPoint with an introduction and information as to what participants will be covering in the workshop.

TIP:
You may recommend that attendees Google the company or field and sprinkle in some interesting historical facts into the cover letter.

By the End of This Workshop (Slide 2)

Facilitator can say: “During today’s workshop you will learn about different types of cover letters, the overall structure of a standard cover letter, and receive additional cover letter tips.”

2. What is a Cover Letter (Slide 3)

Facilitator can say: “Your cover letter is a powerful tool. It is a letter of introduction and should work in combination with your resume. Your cover letter is the first point of interaction between you and the prospective employer.”

Good Cover Letters: (Slide 4)

- a. Engage the reader;
- b. Are written for the specific position you are applying for;

Describe, Include and Outline (Slide 5)

A cover letter should:

- c. Describe why you are interested in the position;
- d. Include what qualifications or experience makes you an ideal candidate for the position; and
- e. Outline your experience or education and reflect your enthusiasm and willingness to learn.



Facilitator can say: “A cover letter summarizes your experiences, qualifications, interests, and points out what specific skill(s) make you the right pick for the job. A good cover letter also helps the hiring manager answer the question: What value or benefit will this person bring to my organization?”

3. When Applying for a Job (Slide 6)

Read the application instructions carefully before applying. The quickest way to land a cover letter in the waste basket is to ignore the application instructions. Do not make the cover letter too wordy or long. Your cover letter should be a brief summary of your experience and qualifications highlighting your key strengths or achievements that relate to the specific

position you are applying for. Choose your language carefully and keep the cover letter professional.

4. What makes a Good Cover Letter (Slide 7)




Facilitator can say: “There are some key elements to writing a good cover letter that are of utmost importance”:

Key Elements (Slide 8)



Facilitator can ask participants to take out **Handout #1: 5 Things that make a Good Cover Letter**. The Facilitator can review each of the five items on the handout with workshop participants.

Insert One-Stop
Center Logo Here



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**THINGS THAT MAKE A GOOD
COVER LETTER**

1. No spelling or typing errors. Not even one.
2. Address it to the person who can hire you. If you can find out (through networking and researching) exactly who is making the hiring decision, address the letter to that person. Be sure the name is spelled correctly and the professional title is correct. If the name is gender neutral (Kim, Pat, Courtney, Shawn, etc.) make sure you know whether or not you are addressing a man or a woman. Don't assume and accidentally use Mrs. instead of Mr.
3. Write the cover letter in your own words so that it sounds like you.
4. Show that you know something about the company and the industry. This is where your research comes in. Don't go overboard- just make it clear that you didn't pick this company out of the phone book. You know who they are, what they do, and you have chosen them!
5. Use terms and phrases that are requirements for the job from the job posting. You will have this information if you did research on the industry or networked with people in the industry. Use key words listed in the vacancy announcement.

Cover Letters Handout # 1



Why Should I Hire You? (Slide 9)

Facilitator can say: “Your cover letter is a powerful tool. It is a letter of introduction and should work in combination with your resume. Your cover letter is the first point of interaction between you and the prospective employer.”



Facilitator can say: “Your cover letter should answer the question: Why should I hire you? It should grab the employer’s attention and point out why you, above all other applicants, should be contacted for an interview.”



5. What Should Your Cover Letter Do For You? (Slide 10)

Facilitator can ask participants to take out **Handout #2: Tips to Make Your Cover Letter Professional** and review each bullet with participants.



Helpful Tips to Make Your Cover Letter Professional

- ❑ Research the company and the specifics about the position so you can tailor your letter to the needs of the organization.
- ❑ Avoid using too many sentences that start with “I” or writing in the passive voice (ex. “This experience enabled me to...” or “Through my internship, I was responsible for...”); instead, make yourself the subject of each sentence and use active descriptions (ex., “In this internship, I demonstrated sound judgment and problem-solving skills on a daily basis.”).
- ❑ Do not use contractions (I’d, didn’t, it’s).
- ❑ Spelling, grammar, or punctuation mistakes are out of the question! Cover letters are a reflection of your writing skills, so make each cover letter an example of your best work.
- ❑ Keep your letter short and simple.
- ❑ Use good quality paper that matches your resume paper and envelopes. If applying by email, paste the entire content of your cover letter directly into the body of the email. You can also attach the cover letter to the email as a pdf.
- ❑ Make sure you use consistent fonts and font sizes throughout your cover letter.
- ❑ Be sure to sign your cover letters – you can also use an electronic signature if your cover letter is being emailed.
- ❑ Have a Career Center Advisor review your cover letters during drop-in hours OR you can make an appointment anytime.

6. Express (Slide 11)

Facilitator can say: "The best cover letters express three things:



- Why you're good at what you do;
- How you'll help the company; and
- Your enthusiasm for the job.

Once this information has been written - stop. Do not continue writing about a specific project. Stop using words like "managed" and "team." The cover letter is about you and why you fit the job. It's about getting you to the top of the pile, not getting you the job."

Your Cover Letter is a Story (Slide 12)

Your cover letter tells a story. It has a beginning, middle, and an ending. If you tell your story right then you'll get your resume read.

7. Let's Talk About Types of Cover Letters (Slide 13)



Facilitator can say: "There are different types of cover letters, depending on the situation - let's go over the two most common types of situations where you will write a cover letter":

- Cover Letters for Job Postings &
- "Cold" Cover Letters

a. Cover Letters for Job Postings (Slide 14)



Facilitator can say: "When writing a cover letter for a job posting, keep the specifics of the job posting in mind (travel, relocation or salary). Target the cover letter to the specific requirements outlined in the job posting. If the job requires travel or relocation, make sure to specify your availability in your response. Only address salary preferences if requested, phrasing it in a range so you don't limit your opportunities."



Example: *“In regards to your request for salary requirements, I am seeking a position which pays from the high \$30k’s to low \$40k’s depending on the overall benefit package and responsibilities of the position.”*

It is also important to keep in mind that postings should be responded to quickly. The faster your letter reaches the employer’s desk, the more individual attention it will receive.

Follow the application instructions closely. If you are going to apply for the position via email, paste your cover letter directly into the body of the email. Most hiring managers and recruiters don’t want to spend the time opening multiple attachments and by placing your cover letter into the email you make the process more convenient for the employer. If you are going to attach your cover letter, attach it as a pdf file to make sure the hiring manager is able to open and read the file.

b. A “Cold” Letter to a Potential Employer (Slide 15):

Facilitator explains that a “Cold” cover letter is a way of getting your “foot in the door”. With a “Cold” cover letter you can directly contact potential employers without a referral or previous correspondence.



Facilitator can say: “Let’s go through the steps necessary to draft a written “Cold” cover letter.” (Facilitator can write on whiteboard or newsprint or discuss each item aloud with participants.)

Step 1: Make a list of all companies that you might be interested in working for.

Step 2: List the names of the people who you believe can offer you a job by calling each company's main number and asking the receptionist for the name and title of the hiring manager in the field you are looking in to.

Step 3: Write a great cover letter. Make sure that each letter is individualized by addressing each to a named individual, and, if possible, saying something about the company to show that you've done some homework about the company.

Step 4: Contact the people you wrote a cover letter to and ask for an interview. Be persistent, even if the potential employer says there are no current job openings (do not be rude or too pushy).

Step 5: If you cannot get a job interview, ask for an informational interview where you can gain more knowledge of the field and perhaps get names of more people you can contact. Try to get as many informational interviews as possible. Informational interviewing with them gives you the opportunity to get noticed and offer you an opportunity to get referrals to other employers who might have job openings available.



Facilitator can ask participants to take out **Handout #3: Cover Letter Openings** and say: This is a sample to help you with wording to start writing your cover letter. The facilitator can review each bullet.

- While visiting **(Company Name's)** website, I noticed you are seeking a **(Job Title)**.
- At a **(event name- recruiting seminar, job fair, etc.)** I had the pleasure of discussing **(Company Name's)** **(specific goals- financial, management, etc.)** goals with **(Mr./Ms. Smith, Title)**. **(S/He)** alerted me to the fact that **(Company Name)** is actively seeking an ambitious **(Job Title)**.
- Through a recent press release, I became aware of the impending departure of **(Name of position and individual)**. Example: **Companies Director of Human Resources, Ms. Robin Strickland)**
- I am confident in my ability to make an immediate and valuable contribution to **(Company Name)**.
- I was recently speaking with **(Mr./Ms. insert name)** from **(Company Name)**. **(S/He)** recommended that I send you a copy of my resume. Knowing the requirements for **(name of the position)**, **(s/he)** felt I would make an ideal candidate.
- I was pleased to learn of the need for a **(Job Title)** with **(Company Name)**. I believe the qualities you seek are well matched by my track record.

Cover Letters Handout #3

8. Ingredients of a Cover Letter

Facilitator: Begin with slide 16 to discuss the structure of a well-written letter.

Your address/date - (Slide 16)

Begin with your current address. You do not need to include your name in this heading. Avoid abbreviations in the address, except for State (NY or PO Box). Date: Leave a blank line after your return address. This should be the date that you are writing the letter. Write out the date; do not abbreviate.

Example: September 12, 2010

Employers address - (Slide 17)

Leave a blank line after the date.

Line 1: List the full name of the addressee

Line 2: Individual's formal business title

Line 3: Name of the company

Line 4: Address of the company

Do not assume that a person uses the title "Mrs." Always include the person's title. If you don't have the address, look it up on the company's website.

Greeting/Salutation - (Slide 18)

Leave two blank lines beneath the company's address. Begin with "Dear Mr." or "Dear Ms.," followed by the individual's last name and a colon. When responding to "blind" job postings, use a general salutation such as:

Dear Hiring Manager, I am responding to...

Dear Director of Human Resources, I am responding to...

AVOID: Dear Gentlemen or Dear Sirs...

Refer to the reader by his/her last name. Use a colon after the greeting, not a comma.

▪ Your First Paragraph - (Slide 19)

"Why I'm writing"

You've got to grab the hiring manager's attention to get them interested. Customize your letter to the job!! Identify the position and the company.

Indicate specifically how you learned about the position. Why are you interested in this job? Be creative and enthusiastic!

▪ Your Second Paragraph - (Slide 20)

“Why do I fit”

Now that you’ve grabbed the reader’s attention, it’s time to demonstrate why you’re a good fit for the company. Match qualifications you have to the job. Highlight skills and qualifications that are most relevant in the job opening. Explain what you have to offer the employer and show that you’ve spent some time researching the organization. Showing you’re a problem solver and can help with challenges that the company faces are qualities that many employers look for.

▪ Your Third Paragraph or final paragraph - (Slide 21)

“Seal the Deal”

Convince them you’re a good fit. The last paragraph is where you seal the deal and ask for the interview. Be clear. Thank the employer for their time in reviewing your qualifications and restate your desire to work for the company. If I don’t hear from you in a week or two, I’ll be following up to see if there’s a possibility of scheduling an interview. Keep your closing short and simple. Always keep your final words professional and to the point. Close with the word “Sincerely.”

▪ Handwritten & typed signatures - (Slide 22)

Handwrite your signature when you send a hard copy of a cover letter. Press enter twice, and type your name.

If sending via E-Mail, you can insert a JPEG of your signature AKA an electronic signature.

If you have a scanner in your One-Stop Center, you can scan your signature to make a jpeg. If this isn’t possible, some people use a cursive font for their name.



NOTE: If you have scanners in your One-Stop Center, offer assistance for signatures. If not, point out that these can be done at home.

▪ Enclosures - (Slide 23)

Indicate what other documents may accompany the cover letter, such as the resume or an application.



OPTIONAL ACTIVITY (Slide 24)

Another Approach to Showing Your Qualifications

The facilitator can introduce an alternative way of organizing a cover letter.



Facilitator can ask participants to take out **Handout #4- T-Format Cover Letter Examples** to show different ways this format can be used when writing a cover letter. **Handout #5- T-Format Cover Letter Template** can be distributed to participants as an example of a complete cover letter done in this format.



(Slide 25) Facilitator can say: Another way of crafting a cover letter is to use a “T-format” style cover letter. A T-format is designed to show a hiring manager how you stack up against the job requirements listed in a job announcement both quickly and clearly. To write a T-format cover letter, make 2 columns in the body of your cover letter. The left column will address the employers hiring needs and the right column highlights your specific qualifications that meet the listed hiring needs. You can select the hiring needs by reviewing the job description and selecting what you think are the must-haves for position.

(Slide 26) Remember that a job description will have a long laundry list of ideal nice-to-have skills. Your job is to choose the top 3 requirements that match your experience. If you’re trying to make a career transition and have to get a little creative by choosing a requirement that doesn’t seem as high-priority, so be it. These requirements will become the mini sections under the “Your Requirements” column. Now write a little blurb for each of the requirements in the “My Qualifications” column. Try to reference examples of your work that demonstrate how you meet each of the hiring manager’s primary needs.




9. Top 10 Cover Letter Tips (Slide 27)

Facilitator can ask participants to take out **Handout #6 - Top 10 Cover Letter Tips** to discuss the importance of each point with participants.



NOTE: The following are the Top 10 Cover Letter Tips, turned into questions for the facilitator to use to generate a group discussion.

 Facilitator can say, “Now that we have covered the basics of cover letters, let’s recap what we’ve discussed.” Facilitator can then ask each of the corresponding questions while encourage participants to join in the discussion.



1. How can you make yourself stand out from the competition?
2. Why is it important to try to target the right person?
3. How and why should the cover letter be kept simple?
4. What can you do to make your cover letter shine?
5. How can you be an attention getter?
6. What should you keep in mind when you are looking to sell yourself to a potential employer?
7. Why is it important to have someone else look at your cover letter?
8. Why is it important to avoid exaggeration when writing a cover letter?
9. Why would you tell an employer you will follow up to arrange a meeting?
10. Why follow up with a company after sending a cover letter?



10. Cover Letter Do's & Don'ts (Slide 28)

If time permits, facilitator can go over what attendees should and shouldn't do when writing a cover letter. Facilitator ask participant's to take out

Handout #7: Cover Letter Do's and Don'ts



ADDITIONAL OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

60 Second Commercial (Slide 29)

Facilitator can explain how having a 60 second commercial can help attendees to summarize their experiences and strengths when creating a cover letter.

Facilitator can have participants take 7 minutes to write their own 60 second commercial using the information below. Facilitator can ask for volunteers to read their 60 second commercial to the group.



For example - have participants take out **Handout #8: My 60 Second Commercial/Infomercial**

I : (insert profession or job title)

With expertise in: (insert top skills, talents, abilities, knowledge)

My background includes: (insert industry, department, type of company or service)

My unique qualities are: (insert marketable traits and characteristics)

Tag line: (insert closing statement that's memorable)



ADVANCED OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Modern Cover Letters (Slide 30)

Facilitator can use this slide as an example of how a cover letter, using a unique layout can capture an employer's attention. By using the web/internet industry as an example, facilitator can discuss how most web people have a short attention span and how this has changed the status of a cover letter.

11. Closure/Conclusion (Slide 31)

Encourage workshop attendees to practice writing cover letters for positions they found job announcements. You may want to encourage participants to e-mail their cover letters for critique and attend other workshops available at the One-Stop. Circulate the workshop evaluation and collect responses.