

THE COVER LETTER

A **cover letter** introduces you to a prospective employer and explains why you are sending your resume. Your cover letter should also convey your knowledge and enthusiasm for the industry or organization, serve as a good example of your writing ability, and demonstrate how your education and experience qualify you for the opportunity.

WRITING YOUR COVER LETTER

Begin by answering the following questions to outline the content of each paragraph:

Opening Paragraph:

Why are you interested in this field?

Why are you interested in this organization and position?

What is the objective of your letter (e.g., to apply for a full-time position or an internship)?

How did you discover the opening and/or the organization (e.g., a personal referral, or an ad)?

Body of your letter:

What skills do you possess relative to the position?

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What experiences illustrate how and where you acquired these skills?

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What are your personal traits relevant to the position and how can you apply them to the needs of the organization?

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-
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Closing Paragraph:

When and how will you follow up? Employers look favorably upon a proactive attitude.

How and where can you be contacted?

BUSINESS LETTER FORMAT

Use of a business letter format is imperative for a professional letter. The following styles are acceptable:

- **Block Style** - justify every line along the left-hand margin (recommended)
- **Modified Block** - justify the employer's address and the letter along the left-hand margin, but align your return address, the date and your signature off to the right
- **Semi-Block** – Indent only the first sentence of each paragraph within the letter, all other content is left-justified

Using any of the above styles, you may also choose to use the same header that you have on your resume.

TIPS FOR WRITING YOUR LETTER

- Put yourself in the employer's shoes – if you were hiring for the position, what skills, interests, and experiences might you be looking for in the cover letter?
- Look carefully at the qualifications and responsibilities in the job description; be sure to highlight the experiences that you have had that best match the position.
- Communicate your enthusiasm, but keep sentences short and clear. Use active, not passive, verbs. For example, use “arranged”, “devised”, “evaluated” instead of “was responsible for arranging, devising, or evaluating” (see the Resume Guide for an extensive list of action verbs).
- Begin the second paragraph with a topic sentence. Consider the main points you wish to make and then create a sentence that introduces those ideas.
- Avoid starting every sentence with “I.” Turn some of your sentences around to spice up the letter. For example, say “At the Audubon Society, my effective communication skills were tested _____.”
- Don't copy another person's letter. Your letter should reflect who **you** are and **your** writing ability. The samples in this guide reflect a variety of writing styles; use them only as a starting point. There is no “right way” or specific writing style for a cover letter.
- ALWAYS have someone proofread your letter to ensure that it is error free. One typo or misspelled word may be the only excuse needed to disregard your application.

EMAILING YOUR LETTER

An increasing number of employers are requesting that applicants submit their job application materials via email. It is not always clear how this should best be done.

- Include your postal address and the date of the correspondence as you would in a letter sent via US Mail.
- *Either* type your cover letter directly into the body of the email and include your resume (and any other documents such as references or writing samples) as attachments *or* compose a short email directing the employer to read the attached cover letter and then attach the letter.
- All attachments should be labeled with your name for easy identification. For example, your resume should be JaneDoeResume.doc, rather than Resume12.doc. Also include your name and the position you are applying for in the subject line of the email.
- You will not be able to sign any email correspondence, so simply insert 2 lines between your closing and your typed name.
- Always justify everything on the left-hand margin when emailing a letter (Block Style). Formatting errors are less likely to occur upon receipt.

If sending your materials via **US Mail**, print your cover letter and resume on high-quality paper with a watermark and a weight between 16 lbs. and 25 lbs., using a laser printer or the College's Print Shop. Be sure to sign your letter; leave 3 spaces between your closing and your typed name to do so. Enclose all documents in a matching envelope for a professional look.

WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK A COUNSELOR

Peer Counselors - Make an appointment with a peer counselor by calling 859-4346. The Career Center is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday. Peer counselors also accept walk-ins, depending on availability, and lead cover letter workshops approximately twice a month.

Career Counselors - Appointments must be made at least 24 hours in advance. However, since professional counselors get booked, we recommend calling 7-10 days in advance.

COVER LETTER CONTENT & FORMAT

Your present address
City, State Zip Code

Date of Letter

Name of Contact
Title of Contact
Name of Organization
Street Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Ms./Mr./Dr. (Name): If you do not have the person's name, do your best to get it. Call the organization and inquire to whom you should address your letter. Do not write "Dear Sir or Madam," or "Gentlemen." If necessary, you might address the person by title, "Dear Human Resources Manager" or by organization, "Dear (Name of Organization) Representative."

Opening Paragraph. This paragraph is intended to express your interest *and fit* with the position, organization, and/or field. Include a sentence or two summarizing this interest and fit. Stimulate your audience to continue reading. If applicable, tell how you heard of this opening or internship. If a person referred you to the organization, mention the person's name and connection to the organization.

Body. This section consists of one or two paragraphs in which you tell the employer why you are a strong candidate for the position. Emphasize the *employer's needs* – not your own. Demonstrate your ability and desire to perform the functions of the position by providing examples drawn from your work, academic, and/or extracurricular experiences.

In this section, you may also want to expand on your interest in the position and/or career field drawing from specific academic and work experiences. It is also appropriate in this section to identify a couple of personal qualities that you believe relate to the job and add to your specific skills to make you a strong candidate (i.e., responsible, hard-working, inquisitive). If possible, give specific examples of where these qualities have been demonstrated.

Closing Paragraph - Indicate your desire to arrange a mutually convenient time to interview and state when and how you will contact the employer, as well as how he/she may contact you. Mention any intentions of visiting the city where the organization is located because employers may be more apt to meet with you. Re-emphasize your interest in the position, thank the individual, and mention that you are looking forward to meeting him or her.

Sincerely,

Type Your Name

**** DO NOT COPY THIS LETTER VERBATIM ****

Employers have commented on the similarity of letters when receiving multiple Hamilton applications.

Sample cover letter: in response to a listing for full-time employment

Hamilton College
198 College Hill Rd.
Clinton, NY 13323

Date of Letter

Ms. Rachel Barnard
Vice President, Editorial Director
Frye Young Adult
886 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

Dear Ms. Barnard:

Due to my passion for children's publishing and teen culture, I am applying for the Editorial Assistant position at Frye Young Adult. I enjoy many aspects of teen culture including music, movies, and literature and would love to be involved with a teen-based imprint.

As an Editorial Intern with Pritty Books, I took on many of the responsibilities typical of an editorial assistant including contacting authors and reading manuscripts. During my internship, I worked specifically on Brianna Dean's book, *A New Day*. This book was on a tight schedule which gave me the opportunity to thrive under strict deadlines. I also worked on the Gift Edition, reviewing the manuscript and suggesting images for illustration.

My education at Hamilton College has helped me develop the writing, editing and time management skills needed to be successful in an editorial position. A Creative Writing major, my coursework requires that I evaluate and critique the work of my classmates. Furthermore, I have fine-tuned my ability to manage multiple projects, recently demonstrated in my balancing responsibilities as student, Publicity Assistant at the Hamilton Career Center and reading tutor for youth at an urban junior-high school. These skills will be foundational to my success as an editorial assistant.

I look forward to discussing with you the contribution I can make to Frye Young Adult. I will be graduating from Hamilton College on May 21 and available for employment immediately thereafter. Please contact me with any questions at (716) 765-4956 or at canderson@hamilton.edu. I greatly appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Christine Anderson

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Employers have commented on the similarity of letters when receiving multiple Hamilton applications.

Sample cover letter: in response to a listing for an internship

Terry Bristol
Hamilton College
Campus Mailbox 3291
198 College Hill Road
Clinton, NY 13323

Date of Letter

Ms. Cathleen Brodbank
Associate Director – Human Resources
UBS
677 Washington Boulevard
Stamford, CT 06901

Dear Ms. Brodbank:

I wish to be considered for the position of Investment Management Summer Analyst at UBS. After speaking with several alumni and contacts working at UBS and elsewhere in the banking field, and considering my educational experience in economics, I strongly believe that I have the skills and motivation necessary to succeed in this field. My desire to do so with a prestigious financial firm, combined with my ability to make the most of every opportunity presented to me, make me a solid candidate for an internship position with UBS this summer.

My coursework at Hamilton College, in both psychology and economics, has strengthened my ability to think critically, analyze information thoroughly, and to “think outside the box”. Relevant experience includes my use of Excel and statistics to track quantitative data, knowledge of macroeconomics and capital markets, along with the ability to express my analysis and conclusions effectively in writing and in oral presentations using PowerPoint. Moreover, my involvement as a member of Hamilton College’s women’s ice hockey team, along with experiences on previous sports teams, has enabled me to develop and refine strong interpersonal skills, communicating clearly and cooperatively in one-on-one situations as well as with large groups of individuals.

In addition, as an assistant manager and multi-year employee at Animal City, I demonstrated responsibility and leadership skills, and developed the ability to provide accurate information to a wide variety of vendors and customers. The resulting increase in sales and continuous return of satisfied customers who appreciated my service was well noted by the store owners. These relevant skills, combined with my diligent work ethic and sense of integrity in all my endeavors, will enable me to actively participate with and be an asset to the UBS team this summer.

I have enclosed my resume and would be pleased to provide references upon request. I look forward to discussing with you the contribution I can make to UBS as an intern, and am available to interview at your convenience. If you have any questions, you can reach me at (806) 308-2245 or via email at tbristol@hamilton.edu.

I thank you in advance for your consideration of me for this opportunity.

Sincerely yours,

Terry Bristol

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Employers have commented on the similarity of letters when receiving multiple Hamilton applications.

Sample cover letter: in response to a listing for full-time employment

Hamilton College
198 College Hill Rd.
Clinton, NY 13323

Date of Letter

Mr. Fred Folde
Assistant Headmaster
Sampson School
600 Waltham Street
West Newton, MA 02465

Dear Mr. Folde:

As follow up to my referral by Carney Sandoe Associates, I am writing to express my interest in the middle school math teaching position at The Fessenden School. I am excited by your school's environment with small class sizes, strong academic programs, and a nurturing community in which students and teachers are involved. This setting allows for endless opportunities, making it easy for the students and teachers to enhance learning. In fact, your school seems to have many of the same philosophies of education that attracted me to Hamilton College, the liberal arts institution that I attend.

I seek an environment where teachers have the resources to educate, the opportunity to develop relationships, and the chance to make a difference in students' lives. The Fessenden School is a place where I can accomplish my goals. By the virtue of my experiences, I feel qualified to teach middle school math. During my semester at the New England Center for Children, a school for children with autism, I was in charge of my own students, teaching them lessons, and addressing and caring for their needs. Additionally, for the past 2 semesters, I observed and assisted in a math classroom, where I learned from highly qualified teachers, taught lessons, offered individual assistance to struggling students, and led both small and large groups. As a college student, I involve myself in many aspects of the Hamilton Community, serving as a tour guide, a class representative for our Student Assembly, a tutor to students in the community, and an organizer of several on-campus events. At The Sampson School, I would be eager to involve myself and lead the boys in similar activities.

I look forward to the opportunity to speak with you about the teaching position. Please do not hesitate to e-mail me at wsmith@hamilton.edu or call me at (315) 112-2111, if you have any questions. Additionally, I will be at the Carney Sandoe Associates Forum in Boston. Thanks so much for your time.

Sincerely,

Wendy Smith

THE NETWORKING LETTER

This type of letter is to be used as a first contact in setting up ACEP meetings or other informational interviews. Please refer to the *Networking and Informational Interviewing Guide* for more detailed information on this process.

First Paragraph: Explain why you wish to meet with this particular person (i.e. you are interested in learning more about his/her field or organization) and mention how you received her/his contact information. You do not need to sell yourself as you would to a potential employer. It is more important to inform the reader how you came to learn of this person's career field or place of employment and how he/she can be of assistance to you. Remember, this letter and subsequent meeting are NOT to be used for job solicitation purposes; rather, you are asking for information and advice regarding your own career exploration or job search.

Body Paragraph: Give a *brief* summary of your background, skills, and career interests as they relate to this person's employment to provide some more concrete rationale for meeting with this contact. Build a case for your interest so that the contact can better understand why you would like to meet with her/him.

Closing Paragraph: State that you would like to set up either a phone interview or face-to-face meeting (whichever is more feasible) and that you need *less than thirty minutes* of this person's time. Offer a few dates and times that you will be available. You may wish to include your resume so that this person may gain a better understanding of who you are and how your background pertains to what he/she does. If you do choose to send your resume, indicate here that you have enclosed a copy. Mention that you will call to follow up with your letter, but also include your contact information (phone and email address) should she/he choose to get in touch with you. Remember to thank this person for his or her time and consideration.

**It is acceptable to email a networking letter.
However, it is advised that a business format be used.**

**Remember, you are asking for a favor;
compose the letter with an appreciative tone.**

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Sample Networking/Informational Interviewing Letter

Hamilton College
198 College Hill Road
Clinton, NY 13323

Date of Letter

Maria Reade
Dean of Students
Trinity-Pawling School
Pawling, NY 12564

Dear Ms. Reade:

Heather Wixson suggested I contact you in regard to my interest in teaching at independent schools. I understand that you got involved in independent school teaching immediately following graduation, and as I am looking to do the same, I was wondering whether you would be available to answer a few questions I have about the process.

I am interested in teaching positions at independent schools in particular, because I am hoping to find an environment that closely compares to the small, welcoming atmosphere I have grown to love as an undergraduate at Hamilton College. Teaching has always been a passion of mine, and I have had the opportunity to work with children of all ages in a range of classroom, camp and after-school settings.

Would it be possible to set up a phone interview or meet briefly sometime over the next few months as I conduct my job search? Enclosed is a copy of my resume, which I hope will give you a better sense of my teaching interests. I have several questions that I believe you can help clarify. I will call your office the week of October 24th, to see if your schedule permits such a meeting. I will be attending Eastern College Career Day in Boston, where I believe you will be representing Trinity-Pawling, and I look forward to meeting you there as well. If you have any questions for me, you can reach me at alaurits@hamilton.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Alexandra Laurits

Enclosure: resume

THE THANK YOU LETTER

Writing a thank you letter after an employment interview is a must. In fact, some employers think less of those interviewees who fail to follow-up promptly. You should send out your thank you letter within 24 – 48 hours after your interview.

In your letter, be sure to:

- Thank the employer for his/her time.
- Mention the position you interviewed for, and the date of the interview.
- Reaffirm your interest and enthusiasm.
- Refer back to the interview. Mention a personal connection that you made with the interviewer and/or something discussed during the interview that reaffirmed your interest in the position.
- Express your willingness to provide additional information.
- Conclude by mentioning your interest in hearing from the employer soon.

Thank you letters may be emailed, but there are some considerations. It may be advantageous to send via email because it will reach the employer quickly and may impact the hiring decision. If most of your prior correspondence with the employer has been via email, it should be acceptable to email the thank you letter. However, certain industries and employers may not consider an emailed letter appropriate. Base your decision on the organization's culture and the people you met during your interview. If in doubt, always err on the side of caution and hand write or type the letter in a formal style. When typing a letter, choose high-quality paper with a watermark. If writing by hand, use a simple note card or personal stationery.

THE ACCEPTANCE OR DECLINATION LETTER

An **acceptance letter** is a formal notification to an employer that you are accepting a position. It should be sent only after an offer from the employer has been extended to you in writing. In your letter, state that you are accepting the position as outlined in the offer letter you received from the employer.

Even if you decline a job offer during a telephone conversation, it is a professional courtesy to decline the offer in writing. These letters can be difficult to write and you need to be careful not to "burn your bridges" for future job opportunities. Always use an appreciative tone and thank the employer for their interest in you. If you have accepted another offer, you may inform the organization of the opportunity you have taken.

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Sample Thank You Letter

Hamilton College
198 College Hill Road
Clinton, NY 13323

Date of Letter

Ms. Sophia Thomas
Editor
The Daily Herald
345 Solomon Street
Lexington, KY 40555

Dear Ms. Thomas:

Thank you for meeting with me on Wednesday, April 18, to discuss the position of editorial assistant at *The Daily Herald*. Your paper's creative journalistic style, commitment to training individuals, and enthusiasm for the publishing field impressed me very much. As a result of our meeting, I became extremely interested in joining the editorial staff of *The Daily Herald*.

As I mentioned during the interview, I believe that the strong writing skills which I developed through my liberal arts education and my experience as a writer for the school newspaper qualify me for the editorial assistant position. In addition, I demonstrated an ability to work under pressure and meet deadlines in my advertising internship at Delta Graphics last summer.

Since I spoke with you, I have received the Outstanding College Reporter of the Year Award for my article entitled "Excellence in Publishing" which appeared in *The New York Press*. I was very excited about receiving this distinction since this is my first published article. Enclosed is a copy for your review.

My excellent writing ability, editorial experience, and interest in the newspaper industry will enable me to achieve significant results for *The Daily Herald*. I look forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Chien Li

Enclosure: article

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Sample Acceptance Letter

Hamilton College
198 College Hill Road
Clinton, NY 13323

Date of Letter

Mr. James Thatch
Vice President, Sales
Biotech
1514 Technology Parkway
San Francisco, CA 92120

Dear Mr. Thatch:

I am delighted to accept your offer to join Biotech as a Sales Representative in your San Francisco office, as outlined in your offer letter to me dated April 12, 2008. Thank you and your colleagues for having confidence in my candidacy and please know that I will do my best to be prepared and ready to meet the challenges of the position.

My intention will be to relocate to California a few weeks prior to my designated start date of August 1, 2008. From now until May 20th, however, I can best be reached here at Hamilton College in upstate New York, so if you will be corresponding with me in the coming weeks you may continue to use my mailing address, email and telephone number noted above.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to join Biotech. I am very excited and look forward to seeing you again in California.

Sincerely,

Jared Student

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Sample Declination Letter

Hamilton College
198 College Hill Road
Clinton, NY 13323

Date of Letter

Mr. Adam English
Headmaster
Windsor School
41-60 Kissena Blvd.
Flushing, NY 11355

Dear Mr. English:

Thank you for offering me the position as Spanish teacher at the Windsor School. The offer was very appealing and I appreciate your giving me extra time to make a decision.

After much consideration, I have decided to decline your offer. The decision was very difficult, but I have accepted a position as a teacher at the Hotchkiss School. The opportunity to work with a mentor teacher and to have a reduced teaching load seems to be the most appropriate course of action for me, as I begin my career in independent school teaching. Perhaps our paths will cross in the future.

Thank you again for your interest. Your consideration has been greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Theresa O'Leary