COVER LETTERS

A cover letter introduces you and your qualifications to prospective employers. Next to your resume, the cover letter is the most important document in your job search. Contact the career development office for assistance in creating and perfecting your cover letter.

Cover letters should answer the following questions:

- What position are you seeking, and how did you hear about the position?
- Why are you interested in the position and organization?
- What skills or attributes do you bring?
- What specific skills / knowledge / experiences uniquely qualify you to meet the employer’s needs?

Cover Letter Checklist

☑ Review sample cover letters before you begin writing. Optimal Resume has several samples that you can access by creating an account with your Calvin e-mail address (https://calvin.optimalresume.com).

☑ Personalize each letter to the position and organization. If you do not know the name of the person to whom your letter should be addressed, call the organization and ask. Addressing a specific person is best, but other acceptable greetings include: “Dear Hiring Manager” or “To Whom It May Concern.”

☑ Use paper, font style and font size to match your resume.

☑ Keep the letter short. Three to five paragraphs on one page will help hold the employer’s interest.

☑ Explain how you can fill the company’s needs, not what the company can do for you.

☑ Vary your sentence structures (i.e., don’t start all of your sentences with “I”). Challenge yourself to use as few personal pronouns as possible.

☑ Do not close the letter without identifying what you will do next. Request an interview. Show initiative by offering to follow-up or giving a specific timeframe when you plan to call.

☑ Sign the letter and keep copies of all correspondence.

☑ Proofread. Bring your letter to the career development office to have someone else proofread it.

☑ When sending the resume and cover letter by e-mail, you can either attach both the cover letter and resume (as PDF documents), or you can treat the body of the e-mail as your letter. Delete the address block, and keep the letter brief and professional. You do not need to sign e-mailed cover letters.

Cover Letter Outline

First Paragraph

- State the reason for writing
- Name the specific position or type of work for which you are applying and indicate from which resource (career development office, website, personal contact, etc.) you learned of the opening

Middle Paragraph(s)

- Highlight related experience, education and activities
- Use specific examples to emphasize accomplishments and relevant skills
- Present a direct match between your qualifications and the job requirements by using keywords from the position posting
- Express enthusiasm and demonstrate you have done your research by including information about why you are interested in the position and/or organization

Closing Paragraph

- Reiterate that you are a strong or qualified candidate for the position
- Refer to your enclosed resume if you have not already and indicate your interest in an interview
- Indicate how and when you will follow up
- Include a statement expressing your appreciation for the employer’s time and consideration
SAMPLE COVER LETTER

3201 Burton Street SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49546

May 30, 2014

Mr. Philip Carter, Recruiter
Spectrum Health
100 Michigan St. NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Dear Mr. Carter:

Please accept the attached resume for the Systems Analyst position that was advertised on the Spectrum Health website. I am confident that I can effectively meet the needs of your organization because of my academic background in computer science and my previous experience working in the healthcare technology sector.

I recently graduated from Calvin College with a major in economics and a minor in computer science. My computer science course work especially developed my abilities in analyzing problems and implementing effective solutions. Throughout my time at Calvin, I also worked as a student consultant in the computer lab, which strengthened my customer service and communication skills. Additionally, last summer I was a technical services intern for Epic, a healthcare software company, where I gained knowledge of many of the software programs that Spectrum Health uses.

Not only am I a strong candidate because of my experiences, but I also share many of the values that represent Spectrum Health’s organizational culture, such as excellence, accountability, integrity, and teamwork. Because of these shared values, Spectrum Health is my top choice and I believe I would be a valuable addition to your team.

I will contact you within seven days to further discuss this position and the possibility of an interview. If you have any questions, please contact me at (616) 526-4444 or jelgar@gmail.com. Thank you in advance for your consideration of my qualifications.

Sincerely,

[handwritten signature if submitting a hard copy]

Jim Elgar
SAMPLE COVER LETTER

Adding bullet points or other formatting features is acceptable if you want to change the visual appearance of your letter. The letter below includes bullet points to make it easier for an employer to quickly skim.

April 21, 2014

Forest View Hospital
1055 Medical Park Dr. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49546

Dear Hiring Manager:

When I saw the opening for the case manager position at Forest View Hospital, I was thrilled because I know that your organization is committed to providing mental health services with compassion and respect in a safe and supportive environment. I look forward to the possibility of contributing my social work education and internship experience to the team of professionals at Forest View Hospital.

The following are examples of how I have developed strong interpersonal skills, direct counseling experience, and the ability to work effectively and efficiently as a team member:

- As a social work intern in an urban hospice agency in downtown Chicago, I have experience establishing rapport with, counseling and supporting families and individuals through extremely difficult situations using cognitive behavioral therapy and a task-centered approach. Many of my clientele also suffer from severe and persistent mental illness and/or substance abuse.

- I am a former student and facilitator of an interviewing and basic counseling course for upper-level social work majors at Calvin College that focuses on empathic listening and a non-judgmental frame of reference. The framework of the course is based upon the strengths-perspective and utilizes solution-focused techniques.

- Working as a student assistant in the Calvin College admissions office provided me with four years of experience working as a productive, organized, and responsible member in a teamwork setting.

These experiences, combined with my passion for helping others improve their mental health and well-being, make me an excellent candidate for your position at Forest View.

I look forward to the possibility of an interview. I will contact you within the next week to follow up. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[handwritten signature if submitting a hard copy]

Leslie Brown
SAMPLE COVER LETTER

2200 Meadowbrook St. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49546

March 23, 2014

Ms. Michelle DeHaan
Cascade Township Library
2870 Jack Smith Ave. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49546

Dear Ms. DeHaan:

I am writing to express my interest in the Youth Services Librarian position at Cascade Township Library, which I heard about from a library employee, Cheryl Jones. My experience and education make me an excellent candidate for this position.

My past work experience in both private and public libraries has given me the knowledge required to immediately contribute substantively to your organization. While working at Calvin College’s Hekman Library for the past four years, I have become adept at assisting patrons who have requests and questions. In addition, my volunteer work in various branches of the Kent District Library system has prepared me to navigate efficiently in library settings. I have enjoyed serving my community and enriching the lives of others with the abundance of library materials available, and I hope to be able to do this at Cascade Township Library as well.

With a bachelor’s degree in English from Calvin College, my educational background has also prepared me to successfully meet the needs of your library. My strong oral and written communication skills, together with a comprehensive knowledge of literature, qualify me to serve as a helpful resource for your library patrons. Finally, I have extensive experience working successfully with computers, and I am comfortable with and quick at learning new computer programs.

I look forward to further discussing this position with you and how I can contribute my skills and experiences to Cascade Township Library. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

[handwritten signature if submitting a hard copy]

Kathleen Johnson
616.555.1234
kjohnson@gmail.com