

BENNINGTON

Building Your Professional Cover Letter

Just as with resume writing, a good cover letter starts with some essential elements and it is important to be sure you have a grasp on these. It's also important to know that a great cover letter takes time to write. If you follow these guidelines, you will see that a cover letter requires research, reflection and detailed editing. An articulate, error free letter could be the difference between getting the job and not, no matter how exceptional your resume may be.

General tips

- Send a cover letter with every resume you send, even if it is not specifically requested.
- Write a new cover letter for each application. The letter should create a narrative about you and your work, explaining why you are a good fit for the position and so it needs to be specific.
- Follow the principles of standard English usage.
- Use the same font style and size as your resume.
- Use standard formatting (see the cover letter template that follows).
- Be direct and concise, using simple and straightforward language.
- Do not exceed one page.
- Proofread and correct all spelling and grammatical mistakes. Letters must be error-free.

Where to begin

- Start with the job description and/or the organization's mission statement.
- Highlight the qualifications they are seeking in a candidate and jot down notes that demonstrate you have those qualifications. Use these notes to develop the body of your letter.
- Why are you interested in this position? Brainstorm for yourself and think of specific examples that will demonstrate this.

Important things to know: a cover letter...

- Is not a distilled version of your resume. Rather it should help an employer see why you are a strong candidate by providing insight into how your experience is relevant to the open position's key responsibilities.
- Should show what you hope to contribute to the position and the organization.
- Is an opportunity to focus on your anticipated benefit to the company. You can certainly share what you hope to learn from an internship, but you should lead with what you can contribute.
- Should implicitly demonstrate that you have done your homework on the company and/or industry as well as on the position.
- Should reflect that you have a strong intellect and that you write well.
- Highlights skills and experience specific to the job posting (if there is one) or position description as it has been conveyed to you. In Brianna Bennington's case, the job posting sought applicants with graphic design and Squarespace experience, in addition to some social media and video editing experience. The cover letter speaks to these priority skillsets, focusing attention on the experience she has in those areas. It is concise, clear and specific, reflecting the same keywords used in the actual job position where appropriate.

Sending the application

- **Email:** Include a brief note in your email body indicating that your letter and resume for X job are attached. Use the subject line of your e-mail to clearly indicate what you are applying for and your name (e.g. Internship Application – Benjamin Bennington)
- **Mail:** Use standard 8 1/2 x 11-inch paper. Use good quality white or ivory stationery (preferably the same type used for your resume). If possible type the return address and mailing address (or use computer-generated mailing labels) on a legal-sized or flat envelope. Many offices routinely attach the envelope to the correspondence to reference the post date.
- **On-line application:** The online system should indicate what documents they will accept. If there is a place for you to upload a cover letter, do so.
- **Note:** If you don't know the contact information for the position, check the listing and/or call the organization main number to ask. For example, *"Hello. I am applying for X. Can you tell me to whom I should direct the application?"*

Cover Letter Template

Your Address
City, State Zip Code

Date

Name (To whom you are writing)
Title, Organization
Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr. /Ms. (Last Name):

Opening Paragraph – State why you are writing. Explain how you found out about the organization/position and your interest in it. Mention any referrals. Demonstrate enthusiasm and concisely summarize why you would be a good fit for the position.

Middle Paragraph(s) – Highlight skills relevant to the organization/position. Reference the job description and the company's mission statement to show you've done your research. Indicate how you can make a contribution. Provide a few key examples of things you have done to illustrate your skills. Be specific with your examples (using numbers or outcomes from your work). Craft a narrative rather than simply stating achievements. Demonstrate confidence.

Closing Paragraph – List any enclosures (resume, references, writing sample, etc.). State how and when you plan to follow up. Indicate your interest in meeting to discuss the organization/position. Thank the employer for their time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Signature (scan and copy in if sending via email)
Your Name

Notes:

- Leave one line space between paragraphs. Do not indent paragraphs (formal business correspondence does not use indentations).
- Be concise, but also conscious of the use of space. If it's rather short, play with margins and spacing to make better use of white space. All spacing should be consistent throughout.

Sample Cover Letter

123 Street Name
Bennington, VT 05201

March 1, 2016

Mary Jones
Partner, ABC Construction
555 Main Street
New York, NY 10004

Dear Ms. Jones:

I'm writing to express my interest in the Freelance Graphic Designer position at ABC Construction, which I discovered on Indeed.com. With my interest and experience in web editing along with my related background in design practices, I hope to offer this position a unique perspective.

My skills as a graphic designer and web editor are perhaps best evidenced by my work at Solid Ground Ecological Design. As a hands-on office manager in a small organization, I have been afforded the opportunity to spearhead multiple design and marketing projects, teaching myself all the tools necessary to make the projects come to fruition. With a fast approaching launch date and little margin for error, I successfully completed the process of redesigning and building the company's website on Squarespace. This required synthesizing existing content with new collateral, all with a fresh, clean, modern design. Whether it's taking professional quality photographs for the site and rendering them using Photoshop, reading about HTML late into the night, or figuring out how to bring different social media platforms together in a way that reinforces the organization's brand, I ensure both form and function aren't compromised. After proving my creative aesthetic, my supervisor broadened my responsibilities to include designing the company's promotional apparel and new business cards, both of which I did using Illustrator.

The Freelance Graphic Designer job description highlights social media development as a critical component of this role. In reading about ABC Construction, it is clear that you serve an educated clientele with a sophisticated sense of style. I imagine you will want to use social media to both inform and inspire your targeted audiences. I was fortunate enough to be on the front lines of a powerful multi-platform social media campaign over my last two years at Bennington College through my work in their office of admissions. While there, I was in charge of creating original content and responding to student questions on the office's Tumblr blog. I also maintained Facebook communications with the incoming freshman class and posted regularly to the accepted students' Facebook group. I found that it takes discernment and analysis to make what looks like effortless communications be truly effective. I believe I can deliver this for ABC Construction as well.

Beyond my qualifications for this position, I am drawn to ABC Construction for its commitment to quality and the importance ABC places on customer relationships. It is clear that ABC values its clients' needs and works to develop a collaborative and open relationship throughout the entire building process. This genuine mission, which places people before profit, is an aim I aspire to in my own work. I would welcome the opportunity to lend my design skills in an effort to craft the visual representation of ABC's story and to market its admirable mission.

Please find my resume attached for your review. I believe you will find that my skills and experience align with those required. I would value the chance to talk with you about my background and this opportunity. I will follow up next week on Tuesday, March 8th, if I don't hear from you before then. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Brianna Bennington