Homeless Gear

Offering Hope and a Hand Up

Job Preparation 3 – Cover Letters

1. Sell Yourself: Advertise and Market your Skills

What is the point of a cover letter? If I already have a resume, why do I need a cover letter? The cover letter serves a variety of purposes:

- It demonstrates professionalism and communicates "soft skills."
- It helps set you apart from other applicants.
- It allows you to include relevant information that didn't fit into your resume.
- It allows some of your personality (your voice) to show through and shine!!

2. What's inside?

- A cover letter is an introduction to you and your resume for employers, and should be included and mailed with every resume that you send in to a business. The cover letter should be *in addition to, not in place of*, an application and resume.
- Each cover letter that you write should be tailored specifically to the job opening. If possible, address the letter to the specific person in charge of hiring. If this information is unavailable, address as "Dear Hiring Manager"
    - If you do not know the name of the hiring manager, it is usually acceptable to call the company and ask. You could also look online.
- The purpose of a cover letter is to tell the employer what is missing from the resume. It should include:
    - One or two short paragraphs referring specifically to the job you are applying for and the <u>reasons you are qualified for that particular position.</u> i.e. skills as they relate to the job description.
    - It is imperative that you have a solid understanding of the needs of the employer, so that you can effectively sell yourself.
    - If the company emphasizes certain values, emphasize those in your cover letter (presuming you share those values)
- Make sure to save your cover letters to a flash drive or on your email so you always have it and can easily update it.

3. Things to Avoid

- **Spelling/grammatical errors.** Check your spelling and grammar; if you make too many errors, employers are likely to make negative assumptions.
- **Inconsistent formatting.** Make sure the format of your cover letter matches the format of your resume. That way—if an employer detaches one from the other—it will be easy for her/him to identify that they go together.
- **Salary requirements.** Do not discuss salary requirements until you have received an official job offer.
- **Too much information.** Limit your cover letter to one page. Hiring managers are busy and your goal is to spark their interests as quickly as possible.
- **Generic content.** It is okay to use a template for your cover letter (in fact, we encourage it), but make sure that you **tailor it** to the job you are seeking. Employers receive a lot of cover letters and they will know if yours is generic.

4. Steps in Creating a Cover Letter

- There are several formats you can use to create a cover letter. Hand Up Cooperative advises that you start by using the following method to demonstrate the skills that you posses and how they match with what the employer is seeking.
- **Step 1**
    - Locate the job description of the job that you are applying for.
    - Within that job description identify and highlight all of the *hard and soft* skills that the employer is looking for in an applicant.
        1. The job description will likely list several skills, but it might also *imply* that you should possess several other skills. Try to identify both the explicitly-stated skills and the ones that are implied.
- **Step 2**
    - Pick out some of the skills that the employer is looking for that you posses and list them in one column.
    - In the next column, list how you can convince an employer that you have that particular skill.
- **Step 3**
    - Start the cover letter process; below is a template for a cover letter that identifies and highlights the skills that were pulled from the job description.
    - Make sure to have the correct headings in a cover letter. This displays professionalism, ensures that the right person receives the cover letter, and guarantees that the recipient knows who it is from.

Follow the example on the next page to see each step in detail.

5. Example:

Travel Agent Job Description

The job of the **Travel Agent** is as a facilitator for arranging and helping customers in opting for the best travel packages that suit their interests and likings. The responsibilities of the **travel agent** is to keep himself/herself updated about the travel and tour packages and other travel related information so as to help and query the customer's needs. The travel agent must also assist and support their customers in all their travelling plans and make arrangements to provide them with best of services.

Example Step 1-

- Highlight all of the skills that were outlined in the job description.

Example Step 2-

- List the skills that you've identified on a piece of paper. Then for each skill, start to build the case that you have that skill. Ideally you will have some piece of concrete information that 'backs you up,' such as stating that you have great customer service skills and you have numerous received customer compliment and even a few raises due to your strong customer service skills.
- Another way to convince employers is to think of short but powerful stories that illustrate the fact that you have a particular skill.

Example Step 3-

- Put it all together in the following cover letter format:

Your Name
123 Main Street
Anywhere, CO 90013

Date, 20_____

John Doe
ABC Company
123 Center Street
Anywhere, CO 90013

Dear Mr. Doe:

In response to your advertisement on _____, I am writing to apply for the position of [job title]. I have enclosed my resume for your consideration.

I have strong skills and expertise in the _____ arena and have been fortunate to apply these in a variety of different work situations. As you will see I am an excellent fit for the position because I embody the following skills and qualifications:

1. Facilitator for arranging and helping:
    - I have strong skills and experience in organizing, arranging, and assisting customers from my 8 years as a customer service representative at Center Partners. I handled over 100 calls daily with a positive rating of 97%.
2. Maintain updated travel and tour information and query the customer's needs:
    - I am an excellent self starter and have no problem motivating myself to stay updated with necessary information I will need for the job. In past experiences it has been my preference to know more than expected so I can not only excel in assisting customers but also feel confident in my abilities and position.
3. Ability to make arrangements to provide customers with the best of services.
    - Follow through is very important in customer service and it is something that I have consistently displayed in past jobs. In order to provide the best service I have been committed to helping customers from our initial interaction till the end when their needs are met.

I welcome the opportunity to speak with you and discuss your current and upcoming needs and how I can assist the organization in moving forward. Please feel free to call me at your convenience. If I do not hear from you, I will plan on getting in touch with you on ____Date____.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
[Signature]
[Your Name]

6. Practice

- Now it is your turn to practice the process. Below is a job description to highlight skills, and then identify the skills that are applicable to you, and plug into the template cover letter. There are many skills that can be taken from the below job description.

Step 1- The Job Description

Instructions: Please read the following Job Description and identify by highlighting or underlining the hard and soft skills that this employer is looking for.

Job Posting

Hiring: Crew Leader

Valley Landscaping is looking for a self-motivated team player with at least one year of experience landscaping. Candidates should have a customer-first attitude and should strive to provide exceptional landscaping. If you are a problem-solver, have good communication skills, can work well with a team and have basic math skills, this might be the job for you!

Crew Leaders are responsible for:

- Supervising all tree care service activities of the crew
- Coordinating with branch management, customers and employees as needed
- Ensuring that all crew members have the required safety material
- Ensuring that the crews have the training and tools needed to complete the job
- Making sure that the crews are operating safely at all times
- Creating, reviewing and managing crew schedules
- Adhering to company's policies
- Ensuring that the public will be safe while in contact with crews
- Documenting and storing all contracts and paperwork related to a job

Qualified Candidates must have at least a high school diploma or GED.
Mail Resume and Cover Letter to:
Valley Landscaping, 101 Valley Boulevard, Lake Town, VA 36345 or Fax to 970.555.9216

Step 2- Pull out skills that you possess and building the case that you embody those skills.

Instructions: Please write down the skills that you have and that are also listed in the above job description where the form says "skill." Underneath where it says "your example," begin to build the case that you have that particular skill.

1. Skill-_____

Yourexample_____

_____

2. Skill-_____

Yourexample_____

_____

3. Skill-_____

Yourexample_____

_____

4. Skill-_____

Yourexample_____

_____

5. Skill-_____

Yourexample_____

_____

6. Skill-_____

Yourexample_____

_____

7. Skill-_____

Yourexample_____

Step 3- Take 3 of the strongest skills and apply them to the following cover letter template:

Your Contact Information

_____

Date, 20_____

Their contact info.

_____

_____

_____

Dear _____:

In response to your advertisement on _____, I am writing to apply for the position of _[job title]. I have enclosed my resume for your consideration.

I have strong skills and expertise in the _____ arena and have been fortunate to apply these in a variety of different work situations. As you will see I am an excellent fit for the position because I embody the following skills and qualifications:

1 Skill

_____

_____

a. Example_____

_____

_____

(Continued)

2 Skill

_____

_____

a. Example_____

_____

_____

_____

3 Skill

_____

_____

a. Example_____

_____

_____

_____

I welcome the opportunity to speak with you and discuss your current and upcoming needs and how I can assist the organization in moving forward. Please feel free to call me at your convenience. If I do not hear from you, I will plan on getting in touch with you on ____Date____.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
[Signature]
[Your Name]

Name

970.765.4321 242 Conifer St. Fort Collins, CO 80524 myemail@live.com

November 30, 2011

Buisness Name
1234 Pleasant Oak Drive
Fort Collins, CO 80525

RE: _____ Position

Dear Hiring Manager (Or ideally insert hiring manager's name):

I am very interested in the position of receptionist that I saw listed on your website. I am confident that you will find me to be an asset to the business name team in no time. As you will see I am an excellent fit for the position because I embody the following skills and qualifications:

My Qualifications:

- **4 – 6 relevant skills with as much credibility built in if possible**
- FOR EXAMPLE: 10 years experience in a warehouse environment
- Strong background in operating fork lift
- Ability to accurately read orders and complete paperwork in a timely manner
- Excellent communication skills and a good team player

As you can see I am an excellent candidate for this position. I welcome the opportunity to speak with you and discuss your current and upcoming needs and how I can assist the organization in moving forward. Please feel free to call me at your convenience.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Signature

Name

Name
970-555-0218
yourname@gmail.com

March 24, 2011

Diane Murata
Quad Graphics
380 W. 37th St.
Loveland, Co. 80538

RE: Bindery Support Operator/Palletizer

Dear Ms. Mutara:

I am very interested in the position of Bindery Support Operator/Palletizer listed on your company's web page. The skills and qualifications you are looking for match my experience in this career field.

I have strong skills and expertise in the Graphic Arts industry and have been fortunate to apply these in a variety of different work situations. As you will see I am an excellent fit for the position because I embody the following skills and qualifications:

Your Requirements:	**My Qualifications:**
• Knowledge of the printing process and perfect binding	28 years in the Graphic Arts Industry and 5 years lead operator TV Guide operation
• Mechanical aptitude, troubleshooting	Ability to take down and reassemble binding machines. Experience changing knives and completely self sufficient.
• Maintaining schedules and deadlines	Extensive experience in scheduling and bindery supervision. Strong ability to focus and meet deadlines.
• Interpersonal and communication skills	7 years overall experience meeting customer and staff needs.
• Self motivated with leadership qualities	Demonstrated history of self starting, leading, and teaching. Proven ability to creatively solve problem.
• Punctuality, reliability, ability to stand, and work overtime.	Solid teamwork, excellent work ethic and follow through. Ability to stand, bend, lift, and dedicated to the needs that come with the job.

As you can see I am an excellent applicant for this position. I welcome the opportunity to speak with you and discuss your current and upcoming needs and how I can assist the organization in moving forward. Please feel free to call me at your convenience.
Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.
Sincerely,