



# Writing Effective Cover Letters

**Presenter:**

**Peter Raeth, Ph.D.**

**Career Development Facilitator**

**<http://InformationAnthology.net/CareerMentor>**



# Material Gathered From Here

Writers' Center  
Sacramento State College  
<http://www.csus.edu/wac/WAC/Students/CoverLetter.ppt>

Stacy Lolkus and Allen Brizee  
Online Writing Lab, Purdue University  
[https://owl.english.purdue.edu/media/ppt/20071017015442\\_698.ppt](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/media/ppt/20071017015442_698.ppt)

NIRSA Student Services  
[https://www.nirsa.org/docs/Discover/Student%20Resources/Cover\\_letters.ppt](https://www.nirsa.org/docs/Discover/Student%20Resources/Cover_letters.ppt)

Massachusetts One-Stop Career Center  
<http://www.careerplacejobs.com/cbo/CoverLetter.ppt>

Bori Stoyanov and Lynette Jones  
MIT Department of Mechanical Engineering  
[http://meche.mit.edu/life/postdocs/resources/Stoyanova\\_Resumes.ppt](http://meche.mit.edu/life/postdocs/resources/Stoyanova_Resumes.ppt)

Pamela Bay  
Central Ohio Technical College  
<http://www.cotc.edu/faculty-and-staff/FacultySites/pbay/Documents/Resumes.ppt>

Career Development Center  
North Carolina Wesleyan College  
<http://www.ncwc.edu/files/Resumes%20&%20Cover%20Letters.ppt>



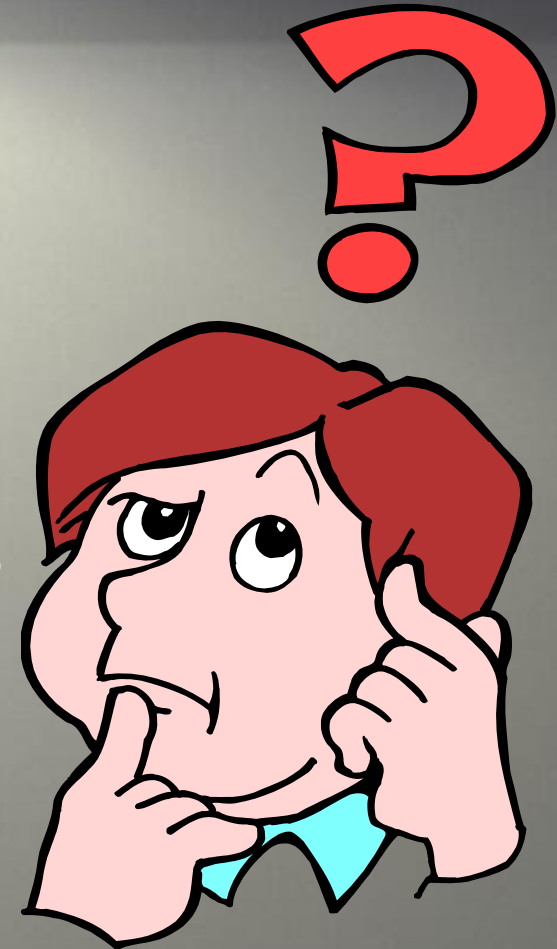
# Contents

- Cover Letter Basics
- Preliminary Research
- Header
- First Paragraph
- Middle
- Conclusion
- Language
- Extra Tips



## We Will Cover

- How do I get started?
- What information do I need?
- What format?
- How long?
- What do I include and leave out?
- What order does everything go in?
- What categories do I need?
- Why do I need a cover letter?





## What is a Cover Letter?

- Supplement to the resume that includes more detailed information about yourself
- Highlights key points in your resume
- Expresses your interest in a position
- Shows off your qualifications to a prospective employer



## What does a Cover Letter Accomplish?

- Whereas a résumé's purpose is to get you an interview,
- A cover letter's purpose is to get your resume read.



## Cover Letter Basics

- A cover letter expresses interest and qualifications for a particular position
- Personal but professional
- Tailored to position/company
- Explains how you fit with organization and how you will help them
- Expands main points from your resume
- “Sells” qualifications to the prospective employer



## Cover Letter Research

- If you have a company or employer in mind, do some research regarding their policies and principles
- Review websites, brochures, pamphlets and any other pertinent materials you can find about the company
- If you can, try to speak with current employees; this will provide you with a unique inside perspective





## Cover Letter Research

Make sure you know:

- General job information
- Desired qualifications and skills
- Key values and words

Research helps you tailor your cover letter

- Look for mission statements, organization
- “vision,” goals, etc.



## Cover Letter Research

- Once you've done your research and you have a good idea of what qualifications the company is looking for, it's time to separate yourself from the rest of the pack
- Before you begin writing your letter, take some time to brainstorm. Make a list of reasons why you're the ideal candidate



## Keep in Mind

- Average view is 4.2 seconds for a committee to scan a cover letter – be brief (but efficient)
- 3-4 paragraphs in length (MAX) stating your interest in the position and just a bit of an overview of why you are qualified for the position.
- Describe why you're the best for the job
- Use “power words” in your letter – same as your resume





## Also Keep in Mind

- Do not over use “I”  
Instead, place the focus on the employer and use the word “you”
- Avoid writing more than one page; since you are probably competing with other applicants, employers just don’t have the time to read two pages
- The point of the cover letter is to flesh out your resume’s selling points not to repeat the same things that appear in your resume



## Beginning The Letter

- You should address the letter to a specific person at the company you're applying to.
- You can usually find a name in the company's publications or you can inquire by telephone.
- Interviewer is best name to use .

Example of Header:

James L. Pierce  
President  
Octiv Tech  
750 P Street  
Sacramento, CA 95826



## Salutation

- If you are addressing the letter to a specific person, start out with the formal salutation: Dear Mr. Pierce. If you don't know the name use: Dear Hiring Manager
- Refrain from using the old standby's: To whom it may concern or Dear Sir or Madam



# Header and Salutation

Your Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Date

Name of Contact Person

Title

Organization

Street Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Ms., Mr., Dr., (etc):



## Header and Salutation

Date

October 4, 2006

Name of Contact Person  
Title

Stacy Lo  
CEO

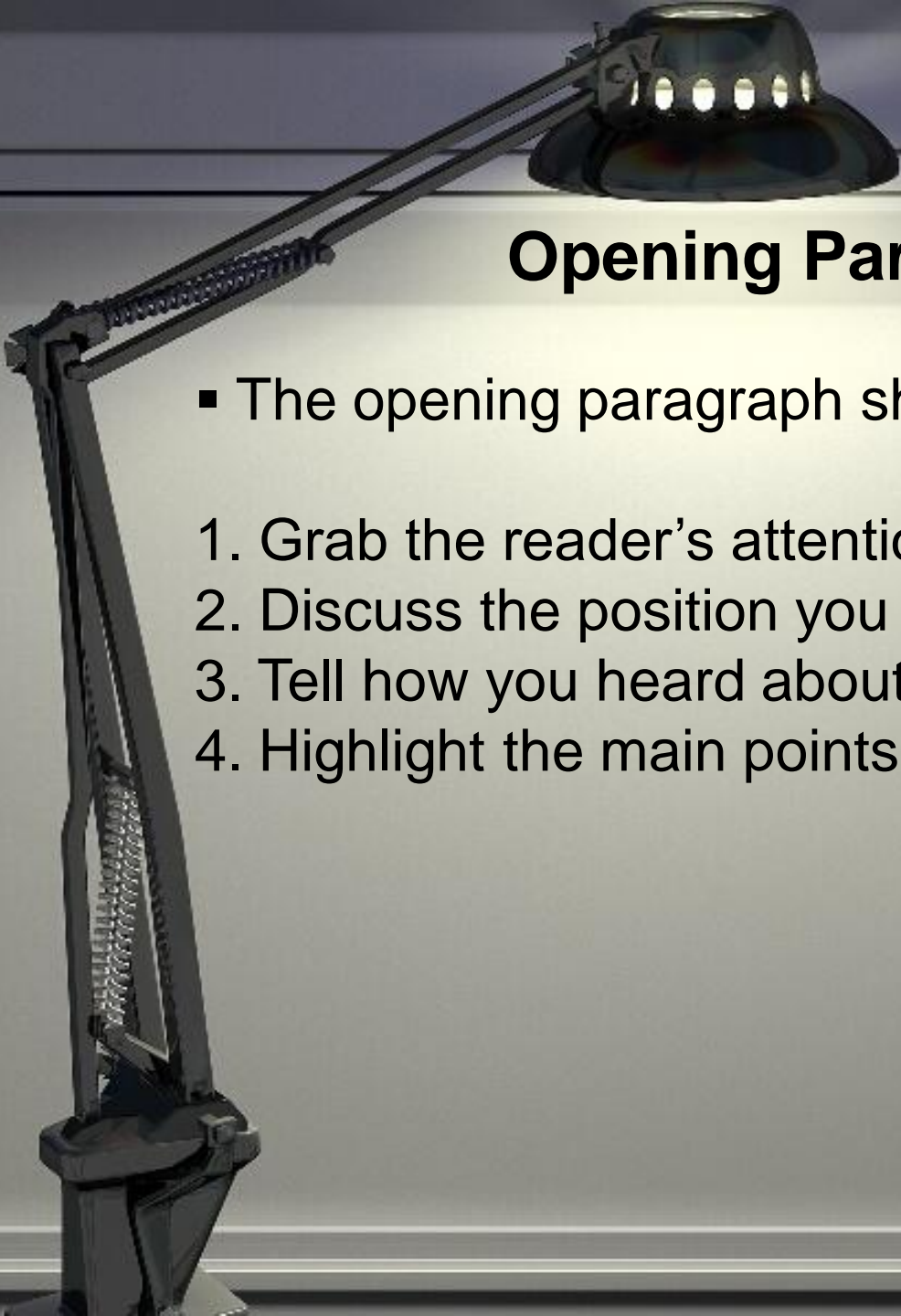
Organization  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Lo Labs  
300 State St.  
Chicago, IL, 60611

Dear Ms., Mr., Dr. (etc):

Dear Ms. Lo:





## Opening Paragraph

- The opening paragraph should:
  1. Grab the reader's attention
  2. Discuss the position you are applying for
  3. Tell how you heard about the job
  4. Highlight the main points you will focus on in the letter



## Opening Paragraph Should

- Introduce yourself
- Explain purpose of letter
- Explain why interested in the position and the company
  - Culture?
  - Approach?
- Explain how you will help the organization
- Preview the rest of the letter
- Get the reader's attention



## Opening Paragraph Example

Dear Mr. Pierce:

As the enclosed resume attests, the customer support position advertised in the *Sacramento Bee* is a perfect fit with my qualifications. My experience working as a Help Desk Student Assistant in the Division of Information Technology at San Francisco State University and my vast experience in the audio field has prepared me for the technological and user support this job requires, making me an ideal candidate for this position.



## Opening Paragraph Example

Dear Dr. Johnson,

After speaking with Emily Richards about her past summer in the internship program, I am interested in your Human Resources Summer Internship position. I worked with employee benefits this summer and became interested in the human resources aspect of the position. In addition to the leadership opportunities I obtained while working as a Business Writing Consultant Assistant Coordinator for Purdue's Writing Lab, I have also developed my communication skills during my summer internship. I believe my skills will help your Human Resources department maintain its excellent track record.



## Body Paragraphs

- The body paragraphs should:
  1. Refer employers to certain points in your resume
  2. Emphasize your strongest qualifications or top selling points
  3. Show how these qualifications will benefit the company you are applying for
  4. You may provide examples of your achievements that have benefited previous companies
  5. Be specific in your descriptions



## Body Paragraphs

- Highlight skills and benefits to the company
- Emphasize interest in the company
- Provide concrete evidence
  - show don't tell
  - use information from your resume
  - include specific, credible examples of qualifications for the position
- Begin paragraphs with topic sentences



## Body Paragraph Example

As my resume highlights, I have offered high-responsibility computer and software support for faculty, staff and students. This experience, along with constant home use of computers, has given me a thorough background of many different forms of software and operating systems including the Windows and Apple families, Microsoft Office, and Dreamweaver. I have also become very comfortable performing hardware and software upgrades on Windows and Mac machines and working with various types of networks including wireless and LAN. In addition, I master new skills quickly and complete tasks efficiently.



## Body Paragraph Example

As a banking representative at Chase, I provided quality customer service while promoting the sale of products to customers. I also handled close to \$20,000 each day and was responsible for balancing the bank's ATM machine. My experience with customer relations and money management can help your accounting firm expand its Middle East division located in Dubai.





## Closing Paragraph

- Your closing paragraph should:
  1. Ask for an interview
  2. Set up a possible time and date
  3. Try using an active ending; in other words, rather than asking them to contact you, tell them you will contact them in a few days
  4. Be genuine and thank them for their time
  5. Conclude with next step
  6. Provide contact information



## Closing Paragraph Example

I would like to discuss these and other qualifications with you to further to explain how I can contribute to your Middle East operations. I look forward to meeting you soon. If you have any questions, please call me at 555-555-5555 or e-mail me at [abcd@purdue.edu](mailto:abcd@purdue.edu).



## Closing Paragraph Example

Please take the time to look over my resume, and feel free to contact my references. I would love to further discuss this position in person. I will follow up with you in a few days to answer any preliminary questions you might have. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me at 916-424-4444.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

- Don't forget to sign your letter



## Closing Formats

Sincerely,

Simon Smith

Enclosure: Resume

Sincerely,

Simon Smith  
5886 Tunbridge Crossing  
Fort Wayne, IN 46815  
ssmith@purdue.edu

Enclosure: Resume

## Applicant Address

Stacy Lolkus  
222 Harrison Dr  
Apartment 5  
West Lafayette, IN 47906  
765-450-7583  
slo@purdue.edu

Date

October 16, 2006

Salutation

Jenny Lock  
Uline — HR Recruiting Center  
2105 S. Lakeside Drive  
Waukegan, IL 60085

Employer Address

Dear Ms. Lockridge:

First Paragraph

After speaking with Emily Richards about her past summer in the internship program, I am very interested in your Human Resources Summer Internship position. I worked with employee benefits this past summer and was very interested in the human resources aspect. I have obtained many leadership opportunities while working as a Business Writing Consultant Assistant Coordinator at Purdue's Writing Lab that would be valuable in a career at Uline.

Middle Paragraph

As Business Writing Consultant Assistant Coordinator at Purdue's Writing Lab, my primary role is to help train new tutors for the Writing Lab. I work directly with the Business Writing Coordinator teaching classes and participating in mock tutorials to allow students to obtain hands-on experience tutoring business documents. I also organize educational workshops to refresh the skills of current Business Writing Consultants. My position as a Boiler Gold Rush Team Leader also challenged me to use my enthusiastic personality to motivate incoming freshmen to be involved in campus activities. As a Human Resources Intern at Uline, I could use all of these leadership skills while learning more about recruiting and hiring practices.

Conclusion

Thank you for considering me for this position. I would love to discuss these and other qualifications with you. If you have any questions, please call me at 765-450-7583 or e-mail me at slo@purdue.edu.

Sincerely

*Stacy Lolkus*

Stacy Lolkus

Closing

Enclosure: Résumé



## **Double and Triple Check Before Sending**

- Check for spelling errors and typos  
-- professionalism is a must
- Don't go over a page
- Always customize your cover letter. Don't forget to change your target's contact information
- Maintain a friendly and professional tone throughout the letter
- Do not use casual or unprofessional language
- Make your letter easy to read  
-- begin paragraphs with topic sentences



## Review Carefully

- Include where you heard about the position.
- Also what position (including all relevant job numbers or classifications for the job listing) you are applying for.
  - most cover letters go to the human resources department first.
- Be specifically applicable to the position you are applying for.
  - is it specific or is it a generic mass-produced letter?
- Include important responsibilities even if they were not primary duties.



## Extra Tips

- Be sure to send both resume and cover letter to the prospective employer.
  - don't laugh, you would be surprised at the number of people who are not timely with this last step
- Be aware of how you use words
  - **Weak Language**
    - I worked as a ramp agent at Comair.
  - **Strong Language**
    - As a ramp agent, I assisted in loading baggage, oversaw fueling the aircraft, and stocked commissary items on the aircraft.





## Extra Tips

- Appeal to company values, attitudes, goals, projects
- Appeal to what clearly matters to the company
- Explain how you will help organization
- Elaborate on the information in your resume
- Provide evidence of your qualifications
- Proofread carefully for grammatical and typographical errors
- Keep records of what you sent to whom on what date



## Summary

- Introduction Paragraph - how you found the position (any name that referred you)
- Middle Paragraph - highlight your skills and how these match the position (can use a chart)
- Closing Paragraph - thank the reader for their time, indicate how and when you will follow up
- Salutation - “sincerely” or other appropriate choice, then your signature and typed name



## It All Adds Up

### Cover Letter + Resume = Industry Job Search

- Paragraph 1 - Express interest in opportunity + How you found out about it
- Paragraph 2 - What you have to offer to the potential employer; specific matches between your qualifications and the job
- Paragraph 3 - Follow up and Next Steps



# Resources

- <http://www.quintcareers.com/covres.html>

This is the introductory link for all of the articles and resources available on quintcareers.com for cover letters. There are some exceptional resources including a critique checklist, information on the three types of cover letters, and many links for tips and success ideas.

- [http://www.quintcareers.com/cover\\_letter\\_basics.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/cover_letter_basics.html)

This link shows the three types of cover letters and specifics for each.

- [http://www.quintcareers.com/cover\\_letter\\_checklist.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/cover_letter_checklist.html)

This is another method to help you review your cover letter to make sure it is accomplishing the objective.



# Resources

- [http://www.quintcareers.com/cover\\_letter\\_samples.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/cover_letter_samples.html)

This site shows samples for different types of positions, different formats for the letters and different audiences. Might be good for those who need some inspiration to get started or those who are looking for something a little different.

- <http://jobstar.org/tools/resume/cletters.php>

Another website offering suggestions and advice on cover letters. It gives generic information, but provides a list of additional resources including university career center websites.

- <http://www.smartbiz.com/article/articleview/55/1/8/>

This Smartbiz.com article gives lists of career cover letter blunders to avoid. Definitely worth a look!

- [http://www.quintcareers.com/transferable\\_skills.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/transferable_skills.html)

This is an article reviewing the concept of transferable skills and how to use them in your cover letters and resumes.