

COVER LETTER

GUIDE



Dartmouth College Center for Professional Development
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DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

PURPOSE OF A COVER LETTER

The ultimate goal of the cover letter is to distinguish you from other candidates and persuade the reader(s) that they should take the next step with you, and set up an interview. It's also an opportunity to demonstrate how the position and organization align with your experience and professional interests.

To effectively meet this goal, a cover letter needs to answer three key questions for the recipient:

1. What are the applicant's *most relevant* experiences, competencies, skills, and accomplishments *as they relate to the position*?
2. Does the applicant understand the industry and the organization's needs—and can s/he add value as a strong contributor?
3. Why is the applicant interested in the position, and is this person someone who would fit within our organization's culture and work environment?

At the end of the day, the subject of a cover letter isn't you *per se*—it's your ability to help the organization advance their mission and further their agenda. A cover letter that demonstrates your awareness of this need and situates you as a potential "value add" will attract significantly more attention than one that simply rattles off accomplishments without linking them to the position. Successful cover letters go beyond simple descriptions of your skills and background: they also tell the reader *how you can help them*.

TYPES OF LETTERS

There are two primary types of letters associated with applying for or seeking an employment or internship opportunity.

1. Cover Letter – commonly used when answering a posted advertisement for a position.
2. Solicitation Letter – commonly used when seeking an opportunity with an organization that does not have a formal posted position.

GETTING STARTED

Step 1: Research the Position, Company/Organization and Industry

- Review and highlight key qualifications and responsibilities of the position.
- Research the company/organization to fully understand their defining characteristics—go beyond the organization's website and delve into relevant databases available through Baker-Berry or the Center for Professional Development.
- Determine the industry's key purpose and understand the company/organization's positioning within it.
- Identify keywords and trends for the company/organization as well as the position/sector in which you are applying.
- Consider setting up an informational interview with any alumni or contacts involved with the organization via the Dartmouth Career Network.

Step 2: Plan the letter

- Outline your previous professional experiences that most *directly* relate to the position description and company culture.
- Review your resume for strong *transferable* experiences that will help you be successful in the position.

- Identify *knowledge competencies* from coursework that are related to the posting and/or organization.
- There's no need to rehash your entire resume. Selectively discuss only 2 to 3 key experiences that best represent skills, knowledge, and outcomes that are relevant to the position.
- Focus on the employer's interests and needs, NOT your agenda
 - Avoid overusing "I" statements such as "I am responding...", "I am interested...", "I have developed...", etc.
 - Go beyond description and build a case for yourself :include statements that demonstrate to the recipient that you are able to translate your experience into the role they need filled.
- Personalize and customize each letter to every individual position. Do not send templates or copy and paste.

Step 3: Basic Cover Letter Structure and Etiquette

- **Contact Information:** formal business letters include the name, address, and contact information for both the writer and the addressee.
 - **Your Contact Information:** Use the same header from your resume.
 - **Company Contact Information:** In block format, include the name & title of contact person, company name, and street address complete with city & state.
 - **Date:** include the date that you are submitting the documents.
- **Salutation:** Always address the letter to an individual/committee
 - Dear (Mr./Ms.) Last Name (do not use Mrs. or Miss)
 - Alternate Title examples:
 - Dear Human Resources Director:
 - Dear Hiring Manager:
 - Dear Selection Committee:
 - Dear Search Committee:
 - Avoid general and vague salutations such as:
 - Dear Sir or Madam:
 - To Whom It May Concern:
- **Introductory Paragraph:** clearly describes your interest in the company/industry, the position you are applying to, and succinctly states what you bring to the position.
 - **Engage your reader immediately with a sentence that grabs their attention:** "Can your fast-growing market research division use an interviewer with 1 ½ years of field survey experience, a B.A. in English with strong communication skills, and a real desire to succeed? If so, please consider me for the position of xxxxxx."
 - **Reference an individual with whom you have communicated from the organization:** "After discussing the fascinating mission of XXX company, with (name of individual), I was further driven through my desire to make a difference, to apply for the position of xxxxx". NEVER put a person's name in a cover letter without their permission.
- **Middle Paragraph(s):** clearly describes how your selected experiences will be beneficial to your employment in the said position. In one or two paragraphs, you will highlight key strengths and abilities from previous experiences and/or education.
 - **Summarize your relevant qualifications:**
 - **Emphasize your accomplishments:**

- **Suggests desirable personal qualities:**
- **Augments your resume:** do not rehash your resume, but include additional information not available in the succinct bullets to help the reader understand the relationship between your experience and the position applying to.
- **Concluding Paragraph:** this paragraph will reiterate your interest and enthusiasm in the position. Furthermore, it should ask for a specific action ("I look forward to speaking with you further as to how my xxxx skills/experience will be beneficial to xxxx organization in the xxxx position") and facilitate a reply (by giving your contact information). Always reference your resume.

Step 4: Formatting – cover letters should follow standard business format and layout.

- **Paper size & color:** 8 ½ x 11 " & neutral in color (white, ivory or gray) to match resume paper, if submitting a hardcopy.
- **Format:**
 - Margins (0.7 to 1")
 - Single-spaced paragraphs
 - If submitting electronically, save as a PDF, unless specified otherwise
 - Use the same header as your resume
 - Left-align format
 - Font (10 – 12 pt font) in the same style as your resume
 - No longer than one page

THE DO'S:

- **Always** link your experience back to the position you're applying for.
- Determine the 2 to 3 experiences that are most relevant to the position.
- Develop your experience descriptions by focusing on key accomplishments and contributions; don't forget to highlight outcomes, to demonstrate "fit" for the position.
- The content should augment your resume information, adding highlights relevant to the position being applied for.
- Utilize key action verbs when developing your story/argument.
- Be **CONSISTENT**: utilize a readable font type and sizes consistently throughout the document to provide a good professional look to your cover letter.
- **Always** save your resume as a PDF when submitting online or emailing.
- Review your cover letter thoroughly for spelling and grammatical mistakes; a great self-editing trick is to read it out loud or have another person read it out loud to you.
- Coursework can be discussed in a cover letter but be explicit as to its relevance to the position, such as skills developed (i.e. critical thinking, analytical ability, communication, etc.) and/or knowledge, tools, or material germane to the position.
- Place your contact information clearly at the top of the cover letter. The address and contact information should match your resume's; you can also use the header from as your resume.

THE DON'TS:

- Don't write one generic cover letter that you use for every position you apply for: reviewers are more inclined to follow up with candidates who expresses genuine interest .
- Don't assume that readers know what you did or how you contributed to a particular position—make sure you provide context that makes its relevance clear.

- *Don't brag or oversell your accomplishments—you want to convey an image of competence and success—not ego and arrogance.*
- *Don't undervalue yourself either—while humility is a good quality it is important to portray confidence in your ability.*
- *Don't use a font smaller than 10 point or margins smaller than 0.7" margins.*
- *Don't rehash the entire resume; relate your experiences to the position.*

Introductory Paragraph

- A. Why are you writing? What is your objective?
- B. Who are you? Frame your background as it relates to the position.
- C. Why are you interested in this position/company? How will it enhance your professional interests? Why should they read further?

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am writing to apply for the Communications Intern position posted through Dartmouth's Center for Professional Development. As a junior, studying English with a minor in Art, Company X particularly attracts me for its forward thinking approach to the use of communication through new technologies. My strong written and verbal communications skills, leadership experience, and ability to work as part of a team make me a strong candidate to contribute to company X's vision for enhancing the use of social media in political campaigns.

The Body

- A. Where did you develop the skills and/or attributes required for the position? Use specific language gleaned from the job description.
- B. List specific accomplishments that demonstrate the skills required.
- C. Why should they hire you? Summarize your personal attributes and illustrate how they would allow you to contribute to this organization or optimally perform in the workplace.
- D. Add any additional information about the organization or industry that entice you and fit well with your background.

My internship in the Public relations department with Senator Gillibrand enhanced my writing and persuasive marketing skills. In this role, I composed and edited press releases and press summaries, distributing them to media outlets. Senator Gillibrand was very pleased with the arguments and images that were portrayed through my writing as I captured her political stance thoroughly. My ability to write in a manner portraying the organization's values and impact will be vital in contributing to the success of projects your firm undertakes.

Further, coursework in digital publishing, coupled with my previous internship in Public Relations and Marketing, allowed me to create a positive online presence for Company Y. We significantly increased Y's visibility on popular social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, increasing "click-throughs" by almost 20%.

The Closing

- A. Reiterate your interest and why you are a strong candidate.
- B. State what your next step(s) will be or request a follow up action.
- C. If requested, address salary history or requirements.
- D. Close with a statement of appreciation. Thank the employer for her/his time and consideration.

I am confident that my experience in communications and public relations would serve to enhance the mission of Company X. Please find my resume enclosed with this letter. I look forward to speaking with you about my fit within the Communications Intern role. Thank you for considering my candidacy for this position.

Sincerely,

Student A

COVER LETTER SAMPLE #1**JAMIE JONES**

HB 3000 Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH 03755 • Jamie.L.Jones.14@dartmouth.edu • 876-543-2100

[Linkedin.com/in/jamieljones](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jamieljones)

December 7, 2013

Ms. Judi Handel, Director of Human Resources
MacNeil, Gray & Rice
One Washington Mall
Boston, MA 02108

Dear Ms. Handel:

I was excited to see that McNeil, Gray & Rice recently advertised its need for a Publicist/Writer on LinkedIn. You are looking for a candidate who is a strong communicator, a talented newspaper editor, and who has experience within the field of corporate and public relations. My experience with *The Dartmouth* and a Fortune 500 client would be an asset to your firm's mission of optimizing strategic communications for corporate clients. McNeil, Gray & Rice, in particular, attracts me because of its track record with technology firms—a personal and professional interest of mine.

I am an experienced communicator who has written for our college paper, *The Dartmouth*, for the past four years. Two years ago I became *The Dartmouth's* Opinions Editor—a position awarded to me in recognition of my ability to hit tight deadlines, pay fastidious attention to detail, and exercise careful judgment in professionally covering the sensitive topics we often feature. Furthermore, a goal to expand online readership was enhanced by well-written consumable online pieces, for which I was a main contributor. I will bring the same energy and enthusiasm to the Publicist/Writer position with McNeil, Gray & Rice.

Last fall, I further developed these skills during an internship within Rudder Finn Inc.'s Corporate & Public Trust practice. I had the privilege of working with a Fortune 500 client on a campaign to publicize its charitable work within communities affected by Superstorm Sandy. Throughout my internship, I developed my proficiency in creating compelling messaging, maintaining professional contacts at key media outlets, and evaluating ways to reinforce a firm's brand identity—all skills that could be put to work at your firm. Notably, in this field results are critical: I am proud that the press releases issued by our team were featured in six different papers including two nationals. Additionally, one of the human interest stories I personally researched and developed was picked up by two different local news stations.

My goal is to build upon my experience in strategic communications in a position that leverages and further enhances my skills in writing, editing, journalism, and new digital media. I also appreciate that the firm's size would allow for work with a wide range of clients as part of a tight-knit, cross-functional team. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss the position over the phone or in person. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

J. Jones

COVER LETTER SAMPLE #2

SEBASTIAN HOUSE

HB 234, Hanover, NH 03755 • Sebastian.A.House.16@Dartmouth.EDU • 213-555-1212
www.linkedin/in/sebastianhouse

January 30, 2014

Amy J. Connolly, Vice President of Global Recruitment and Development
 EF Education First
 1 Education Street
 Cambridge, MA 02141

Dear Ms. Connolly:

I am keenly interested in the 360 Global Management Trainee position as listed with Dartmouth College's Center for Professional Development. My academics and volunteer experience both reflect my deep interest in education and cultural awareness. I would welcome the opportunity to bring this passion to EF, especially in a role that would build upon my experience in managing service learning experiences in other cultures.

The position certainly demands a passion for experiential education; however the successful candidate must also bring an equal focus on analytical, managerial, and leadership skills. As a candidate, my top key attributes are:

- **Demonstrated competencies in service learning:** My volunteer work has exposed me to various models used by learning-based non-profits. I have experience serving as a volunteer, community liaison, and leader in three different organizations. Leading mission-driven endeavors (as opposed to for-profits) has cultivated my ability to focus on people and impact, the quality of the experience for volunteers, and on cultivating lasting relationships between communities and workers.
- **Entrepreneurial approach to problem-solving:** For example, when our Dartmouth-sponsored service trip to Nicaragua found itself without vital construction materials due to an unexpected glitch, I was able to negotiate—in Spanish—with two local businesses, to provide use of their trucks to procure supplies and unexpectedly paid for some materials in exchange for having their names included on the community center we built.
- **Full suite of quantitative and qualitative research skills:** As a psychology major, I am versed in research methods including survey and interview techniques as well as statistical packages such as Excel and SPSS. All of these methodologies could be put to use for assessing program outcomes at EF.
- **Written and verbal communication:** As the Tucker Foundation Intern for Faculty Engagement, among other positions, I would bring to EF plenty of exposure in communicating with stakeholders and interest groups both "up" and "down" the organizational chart. Similarly, my research work in psychology demonstrates my ability to communicate nuanced ideas in a clear, concise, and compelling manner.

Through my commitment to service I have developed a lifelong vision to grow into a leadership role within the nonprofit education sector. I am confident that the mission of EF aligns easily with my professional values, experiences and goals. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss the position when you visit campus next month.

Sincerely,

Sebastian House

COVER LETTER SAMPLE #3**SARAH SMITH**

HB 2000 Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH 03755 • Sarah.A.Smith.15@dartmouth.edu • 321-654-9876
Linkedin.com/in/sarahasmith

December 7, 2013

Grace Yoon, Campus Recruiter
Oliver Wyman
1166 Avenue of the Americas, 29th Floor
New York NY, 10036-2708

Dear Ms. Yoon:

It was a pleasure meeting you at Oliver Wyman's "Women in Consulting" event last month; your description of OW's culture resonates with my own values around teamwork, respect for people and process, and idea development. I am excited to apply for the Summer 2014 Management Consulting Intern position as recently posted at Dartmouth. I look forward to building upon our conversation and discussing my fit and interest both in consulting and being a part of the OW team.

Having developed a set of core analytical and problem solving methods through my coursework in Economics and Mathematics, I would be well-positioned to excel with the responsibilities and tasks expected of interns at OW. Through core Economics courses, I developed comfort in using multivariate regression as well as its application in various pricing models. I regularly apply these concepts to current real world problems through my work as a Research Assistant. In particular, my current research focuses on the impact of performance incentives on risk assessment and lending within commercial banking—a topic that is particularly pertinent following the global financial crisis. My abilities to analyze real world data and use it to build a set of recommendations would be assets to a team helping clients develop strategies.

In addition to my analytical skillset, I successfully demonstrated the ability to create and implement a program once a need was identified. At Dartmouth, I serve as the Vice President of the Women and Business club, in which capacity I founded a volunteer program that does financial education programming at the Upper Valley Haven, a non-profit serving people struggling with poverty. Through this program, Dartmouth students are paired with Haven residents for 8 weeks to build basic financial literacy through a series of workshops and exercises. I will bring the same sense of initiative and creativity to a position at OW.

My analytical and research background in finance and strategy, comfort with client work, and experience as a team contributor and collaborator draw me to the mission and culture of Oliver Wyman. I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss how my qualifications could benefit your work in strategy and organizational transformation.

Best Regards,

Sarah A. Smith

SOLICITATION LETTER SAMPLE**Abigail W. Shawinigan**

Hinman Box 330, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH 03755
123-345-6789 abigail.w.shawinigan.15@dartmouth.edu
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Mr. Morry Levine
Comcast SportsNet New England
42 3rd Avenue
Burlington, MA 1803

December 18, 2013

Dear Mr. Levine:

After meeting with Shane O'Neal, who previously interned with Comcast SportsNet New England, I am writing to request an opportunity to speak with you about the possibility of interning with your production team. I have extensive experience working with athletic recording systems and am actively looking for opportunities to expand my professional background beyond college athletics. I have followed CSN New England since its acquisition by Comcast in 2007, and it would be an honor to work on behalf of one of the fastest-rising and strongest sports networks in the nation.

For the past two years, I have been responsible for logging games, cutting tape, and producing promotional videos for Dartmouth College Athletics, including football, men's basketball, and men's baseball. I have progressed from basic recording to advanced editing for player analysis and sports-specific promotional features. While we use a variety of editing software, I am most experienced with Final Cut Pro, which I see CSNNE.com uses for a majority of its editing needs. Much of my work can be viewed on the Dartmouth Athletics YouTube channel ([hyperlink here](#)).

Furthermore, as a Computer Science and Film Studies double major, I had the opportunity to create technically-savvy, artistic shorts. Through various projects I produced a number of vignettes ranging from 30 seconds to 5 minutes. I find that I thoroughly enjoy the processes associated with film production and editing as well as the prospect of creating a piece that will engage an audience in a meaningful way. In my work in the arts, as with sports, I pride myself on getting the right shot and then enhancing and editing it into a polished sequence. I am confident that the combination of my experience with Dartmouth Athletics and my academic background would allow me to excel in meeting the demands of the SportsNet production team.

I am available to work up to full-time hours from March 25th through June 15th, 2014. If you feel Comcast SportsNet NE could use an aspiring AV editor and technician, I would welcome the chance to talk about how I might fit in with your team. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to speaking with you further about a potential internship opportunity.

Sincerely,

A.W. Shawinigan