COM 3401

**Cover Letters**

In this class, each student will develop, revise, and submit both a one page cover letter applying for a (real) job posting, as well as a personal resume tailored to fit that specific job posting. Like the resumes, I suggest highlighting the most impressive aspects of your education and previous employment experience, and tailoring your cover letter to fit the job description. This short document will provide the minimum critical specifications for your cover letter.

**What is a cover letter?**According to [About Careers](http://jobsearch.about.com/od/coverletters/a/aa030401a.htm) a cover letter is a document sent out with each resume that goes into your skills and abilities in more detail than the resume. The letter should give specific details on why you are uniquely qualified for the job as it is described in the job listing.

For the purpose of this class, the cover letter is an old-fashioned letter, written in prose rather than bullets as is the resume. Like the resume, the letter should be easy to read, crystal clear, and neatly formatted. You should avoid flashy graphics, special paper and too much informality.

There are as many ways of writing a cover letter as there are job postings. That said, here are some absolute rules:

* The cover letter must be entirely free of any spelling, punctuation or grammatical errors
* The cover letter must be entirely factual, with no fabricated entries
* The cover letter shouldn’t be any longer than one page
* Your cover letter should specifically address the job requirements in the listing

Beyond that, I do have some advice that is strongly recommended, practically identical to the resume:

* Be specific; provide concrete examples to illustrate
* Show, don’t tell. Give them specifics instead of vague generalities
* Explain jargon or technical terms; acronyms
* Avoid overused clichés

Your cover letter may be the first thing the employer sees, so make it count. Try to seek a balance between a formal style, while letting you, as a person (your personality) peak through. Focus on how you can help the employer satisfy their needs—not only on what you will get from the experience. Use the job description to guide the wording you will use. Don’t tell, show. In other words, give your reader specific, concrete examples to illustrate the claims you are making about yourself.

Consider the “flow” of your letter. Let the next sentence follow through on the last one. In other words, consider the meaning of each sentence and write the next sentence to address any questions that may arise from the previous one. When you make a claim, follow up with specifics to illustrate. Avoid non-sequiturs, those sentences that seem to appear out of nowhere, with no logical relation to the last sentence. When you have come to the end of what you want to say about one topic, give a sentence to summarize what the point you are making, and what the words in that paragraph should suggest to the reader and lead them to believe. When you are done with one topic (say, your work experience) and want to write about another (say, your education), start a new paragraph and let the first sentence of that new paragraph help the reader transition between the two topics. For example, “Studying technical writing at City Tech has helped me build on the skills I acquired at my internship.” This technique, called a segue (pronounced *seg-way*), is something that writers use to gesture to the reader that their focus will presently shift.

One of the greatest values that I see is bilingualism and multilingualism. I would emphasize this even more, and how this skill can make the difference in certain situations. For example:

“When a frustrated Spanish speaking customer returned a product, my manager asked me to translate, and we resolved the situation easily.”

Be aware of cultural differences and explain how your multilingual abilities make you more aware and sensitive to diversity.

Avoid clichés. For example: *I’m a people person; I have strong customer service relationships; I have outreach experience; Motivated self-starter; Outstanding time management skills*. If possible, avoid “first person” claims about your skills and try to attribute them to feedback you have received. For example:

“~~I am an excellent communicator”~~

“I handled customer complaints as calmly and patiently as possible, which led my supervisor to remark on my excellent communication skills.”

~~Motivated self-starter~~

“Initiating and installing the suggestion box in employee break room helped boost morale and provided for a new channel of communication with management.”

~~Excellent time management skills~~
“Restocked shelves between sales, eliminating the need for an extra cashier.”

About ‘references available by request’—some hiring managers don’t like that. Ask your references if you can list them on your resume.

Remember, I can’t describe what you do. You need to. All I can offer are general suggestions about how to do so. Like with the resumes, search [google](https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=cover%20letters) to find thousands of helpful articles on the topic with copious examples.