



HOW-TO GUIDE:

Writing a

# COVER LETTER

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CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

# Goals for Cover Letter Writing

## Goal One: Understanding what a Cover Letter *IS NOT*

- A cover letter is not a narrative version of your résumé
- It is not a place to talk about how you will benefit from the position you are seeking
- It is not more than one page, nor is it addressed generically “to Whom it May Concern,” or “Dear Sir or Madam.”
- It is not a “template” letter used each time you apply

## Goal Two: *Necessary* aspects of a cover letter

- An original letter, directed to a specific opportunity
- A professionally formatted letter that is addressed to a specific person, if possible, or at least a specific position
- Demonstration that you understand the position and have researched the company
- A short story introducing yourself as a candidate; something that draws the reader in
- A focus on what you are offering the employer in terms of qualifications and fit for the organization
- A well-written document, without spelling or grammar errors, that serves as a writing sample

# Drafting the Cover Letter:

## First Step: Know what you are applying for

- It is imperative when drafting a cover letter that you have a good understanding of the position, qualifications, and the mission/values of the organization—research them!
- Analyze your experiences and abilities in this context and decide if you are competitive for the position, *from the employer's viewpoint!*

## Second Step: Introduction

- The introduction of a cover letter should begin with a brief story, one that ties you, your abilities, and passions to the position you are seeking
- It should be relatively brief but also include the position you are seeking
- It should focus on what you are offering, rather than what you are getting
- The following example, cut from a real cover letter, is an excellent introduction

Dear Director of Recruiting:

When I was 14, an infomercial came on talking about a book promoting organic foods and living a healthy life. Immediately, I was hooked onto eating healthy and not wanting to eat at restaurants or fast food anymore. As it turned out, the book was a complete scam, however through the experience my passion was born and hasn't looked back since. As the years have gone on, my knowledge has gotten better and has expanded into sustainable living and reducing the pollution to our planet. As my parents, professors, and myself started asking what I am going to do after college, it became clear that I had to work in an area that supports sustainability and drives my passion. Tesla Motors promotes a mission that wants to accelerate sustainable energy and together I believe I can be a perfect fit in the culture Tesla has created.

## Third Step: Qualifications

- This section connects your abilities to the position, by summarizing what you can do and connecting it directly to parts of the job description
- You should avoid rewriting your résumé; let the résumé stand on its own
- You should show that you can analyze the position, determine the main points that need to be addressed, and show that you have the capability to perform
- The example below, cut from a real cover letter, shows how to compose the qualifications section

As indicated in my résumé, I have worked carefully to ensure proper following of procedures, efficient case management, and clear communication. My education has taught me to critically read and write in a manner that will aid in research as well as communicating with donors. I have developed the necessary tools to provide effective case management through data tracking and maintaining schedules. Through my different experiences in a college office and a foster care agency I have learned to be flexible and help provide service to people with different needs. I can efficiently prioritize tasks and meet deadlines by keeping a calendar. I believe in making people feel comfortable and providing clear communication. I can quickly and efficiently transfer these skills and abilities to The Salvation Army to help meet its needs.

### Fourth Step: Fit with the organization

- It is not sufficient to be capable of doing a job; you also need to fit well with the organization
- The cover letter should introduce your personality, personal mission, and values that correspond with those of the organization
- This requires that you research the organization's website, network with current or former employees, and look for particular phrases in the position description that gives you insight into the "personality" of the organization
- The example below, cut from a real cover letter, shows a connection between the applicant's passion for the organization and how it will help serve the organization

Further, I also have a strong desire to work in this position. At the first DCI show I saw, I was positively blown away by the passion and the sheer amount of hard work each drum corps poured into their shows. Though I've seen many more shows since then, I am impressed more and more each time. This commitment to excellence has always inspired me, and it is to this ideal that I aspire in all that I accomplish, as evidenced by my GPA. I have a great amount of respect for the students and staff members alike who work hard to make DCI possible. Though I may not be a performing member of a corps, it thrills me to know that I can still be a part of that excellence that first inspired me years ago by working behind the scenes.

### Fifth Step: Closing

- The closing should provide a brief synopsis of the letter
- You should not include new information or ideas; those are better served in the previous sections
- Thank the reader for reviewing your letter and résumé
- *Ask for an interview!* Do it gracefully, but use the word, "interview" in your letter
- It is fine, but not necessary to include your contact information at the end of the letter; you can include it in the header at the top
- Always close your letter with "Sincerely," rather than with any other closing
- The example below, cut from a real cover letter, shows an effective closing

It would truly be a pleasure to join the team at Bluegrass Community Foundation in the upcoming semester. I am confident that my skills and interests will prove resourceful for achieving the mission of improving *our* community. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to interview as to further review my qualifications for the Community and Rural Outreach internship position. Thank you.

Sincerely,

### Sixth Step: Submitting your application

- Edit your letter and be sure there are no grammatical or spelling errors
- Follow the job posting's instructions for submission
- Whenever possible, submit your cover letter, along with a competitive résumé, as a PDF document so that format issues will not occur on the recipients' computers

# Assessing your Cover Letter:

Use the following rubric to assess the quality of your cover letter; the more 5's, the stronger your letter is:

Points	Poor 1	2	3	4	Excellent 5
<b><u>FORMAT</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No addresses</li> <li>Non-Business style paragraphs</li> <li>Addressed "To Whom it May Concern or Dear Sir or Madame"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address of writer, but not recipient</li> <li>Indented paragraphs</li> <li>Not addressed to recipient</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addresses appear</li> <li>Business format</li> <li>Not addressed to recipient</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addresses appear</li> <li>Business format</li> <li>Addressed to a position, but not a person</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addresses appear</li> <li>Business format</li> <li>Addressed to recipient</li> </ul>
<b><u>INTRODUCTION/ CLOSING</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not mention what is applied for or where position was found</li> <li>Does not ask for interview</li> <li>Does not thank reader</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focused on what the writer wants</li> <li>Does not mention where position was found</li> <li>Does not ask for an interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focused on what writer wants</li> <li>Mentions referral or posting location</li> <li>Does not ask for interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writer offers to help organization</li> <li>Mentions referral or other inside knowledge</li> <li>Does not ask for an interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opens with story</li> <li>Writer offers to help organization</li> <li>Mentions referral or other inside knowledge</li> <li>Writer solicits an interview professionally</li> </ul>
<b><u>QUALIFICATIONS SECTION</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited or non-existent</li> <li>Shows no capacity to do the job.</li> <li>Shows no understanding of position.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simple rewrite of the résumé.</li> <li>Shows no connection to the job.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rewrite of the résumé</li> <li>Makes some connection to the job.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focuses on ability to do the job.</li> <li>Includes a lot of résumé experiences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connects to needs of job.</li> <li>Shows capability</li> <li>Mentions some examples, but directs reader to the résumé.</li> </ul>
<b><u>"FIT" SECTION</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No mention of company</li> <li>"Generic" cover letter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shows rudimentary understanding of company</li> <li>No mention of personal qualities that connect.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rudimentary understanding of company.</li> <li>Some focus on personal qualities/connection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shows strong understanding of company</li> <li>Makes good connections between person and company</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Well written connection between company and personal mission.</li> <li>Shows how you belong there.</li> </ul>
<b><u>WRITING AND MECHANICS</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poorly Written</li> <li>Littered with spelling/grammar errors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weak sentences</li> <li>Poor paragraph structure</li> <li>Errors in spelling/grammar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better writing</li> <li>Some awkward sentences, but good overall</li> <li>Some errors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No errors</li> <li>Good writing</li> <li>Good paragraphs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No errors</li> <li>Strong, intelligent, purposeful writing</li> </ul>

# Examples of well written Cover Letters

- **The two letters on the following pages, along with the résumé the applicants submitted, yielded them an interview**
- **Review the job postings prior to reading the letters to see how the applicants responded to them.**

## **Lexington-Fayette Human Rights Commission**

### INVESTIGATOR I

Performs routine investigation involving discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations pursuant to Federal, State and Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government Ordinances 199-94 and 201-99 under the supervision and direction of the Supervising Investigator and Executive Director. This is an entry-level position. Bi-lingual candidate is preferred, but not required.

### MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS:

1. Bachelor degree in Business, Psychology, Personnel, Labor Relations, Social Work or any equivalent combination of experience and training which provides the required knowledge, skills, and abilities. Basic keyboarding and word processing skills also desired.
2. Possession of a valid driver's license or have the ability to provide your own transportation.

EXAMINATION will be a pass/fail oral and written examination.

The Lexington-Fayette Urban County Human Rights Commission offers an outstanding benefit package with includes: three (3) weeks vacation and three weeks (3) sick leave per year.

An LFUC-HRC application with required documents to verify your education, training or certification/licenses must be submitted by the deadline date. Applicants must be able to perform all essential job functions as identified in the job posting.

The position will be open until a qualified applicant is hired.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CALL (859) 252-4931 OR WRITE

Raymond Sexton, Executive Director

Lexington-Fayette Human Rights Commission

342 Waller Ave., Suite 1A-Lexington, KY 40504

## Civil Rights Defender

859-555-0042 / [crdefender17@transy.edu](mailto:crdefender17@transy.edu)

The applicant uses her resume header at the top of the letter.

February 26, 2017

Mr. Raymond Sexton, Executive Director  
Lexington-Fayette Human Rights Commission  
342 Waller Ave., Suite 1A, Lexington, KY 40504

The letter is addressed to a specific person. Do this whenever possible. Use the organization's website to look up the name.

Dear Mr. Sexton:

Identifying how you found out about the position, especially when it's a person connected to the organization, is very important.

My International Affairs degree has opened my eyes to the worldwide struggle of basic human rights. While my education has focused on a wide view of human rights issues, I believe that the first step is to look to protect individuals here in Lexington. This is the reason for my interest in Lexington-Fayette Human Rights Commission's Investigator I position that I learned about through the Transylvania University Young Alumni Association. I believe I can help fulfill the needs of the HRC by applying my experience in following procedures, efficiently managing cases, clearly communicating to all parties, and diligently and objectively investigating the human rights issues involving the people of Lexington-Fayette.

The applicants makes it about what she can offer the organization, rather than what she would receive.

As indicated in my résumé, I have worked closely with several supervisors in order to ensure proper following of procedures, efficient, case management, and clear communication. My education has taught me to investigate documents and situations. I have developed the necessary tools to provide an objective analysis of an occurrence and establish a position. Through my different experiences in a college office and a foster care agency I have learned to be flexible and help provide service to people with different needs. I can efficiently explain to people how processes work as well as work through issues that people may face. I believe in making people feel comfortable and providing clear communication. Through my campus involvement I have learned how to help outgoing individuals as well as shy and quiet individuals. I have successfully helped students learn the rules and responsibilities of members as well as develop solutions to problems as they occur.

The applicant refers to her resume, but does not "rewrite" the resume into the cover letter.

My passion behind my major at Transylvania University is to ultimately help people. I believe in providing basic rights for all. This passion helps me get along well with others and helps me create a welcoming environment for people to work in. Along with my passion, I am a quick learner and pick up skills easily. These abilities allow me to make smooth transitions and to use time efficiently.

With my experience and abilities I can fulfill the responsibilities needed by Lexington-Fayette Human Rights Commission. I hope you will consider my application for the Investigator I position. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to interview. If it is necessary to reach me, my contact information is above. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Civil Defender

## Farm to Kitchen Coordinator

This gives great information on the mission/values of the organization that should be referenced in the letter.

### A Joint Position with FoodChain & GleanKY, Lexington, KY

FoodChain forges links between our community and fresh food through education and demonstration of sustainable food systems. Our program goals are to improve access to fresh food, educate and demonstrate innovative growing techniques, offer cooking classes focused on health and affordability, increase local food distribution, and make a difference through job training and living wage employment. GleanKY gathers and redistributes fresh fruits and vegetables to nourish Kentucky's hungry. This position will be a bridge between these two organizations in order to increase efficiency of local food distribution in central KY. Bulk and surplus foods will be brought into the FoodChain Kitchen in order to be lightly processed and distributed to GleanKY recipient sites, utilized in food and nutrition education, and sold through the FoodChain Kitchen.

Staff is needed to manage the logistics between sources (growers and grocers), transporters, processors, and consumers, as well as ensure effective communication between FoodChain and GleanKY. This person will launch the FoodChain-GleanKY partnership and facilitate the flow of food through the new infrastructure in order to better serve the needs of our food insecure neighbors. In addition, staff is necessary to build relationships with the end users of the food—to both gather stories and perform informal and formal assessments to guarantee the partnership's measurable goals are attained. Information gathered will be attractively and clearly presented for the public in order to encourage replication and improvements.

### Responsibilities: \_\_\_\_\_ Multiple action words that can also be used in the résumé.

- Coordinating with GleanKY staff and FoodChain's Kitchen Manager to bring gleaned produce in from area farms and redistribute processed goods
- Devise, utilize, and disseminate a tracking system to log source of input goods, how they were processed, and their end-point
- Keep detailed financial records of input costs and revenues associated with the processed food in close collaboration with FoodChain's Kitchen Manager
- Maintain and develop partnerships with producers, feeding recipients, and other like-minded organizations to minimize food insecurity in our region
- Work to coordinate communication and field questions from the general public, including promotions with press and media, that appropriately represents the missions of both organizations
- Participate in regular meetings with key GleanKY and FoodChain staff to ensure effective communication and mutual mission benefit

Assume you will need most if not all of the "preferred qualifications" to be strongly considered for the position.

### Preferred Qualifications: \_\_\_\_\_

- Good collaborator and excellent self-manager
- Good interpersonal skills and a consistent, solution-oriented attitude
- Ability to operate effectively in a demanding, public, constantly evolving team environment requiring high energy and flexibility
- Excellent verbal and written English communication skills
- Independent problem-solver and multi-tasker
- Ability to apply best practices to electronic record-keeping, process tracking, and documentation to communicate results and issues easily and effectively
- Familiarity with seasonal production and farming culture
- Ability to relate to people of diverse backgrounds



## Food Chain

(859) 555-1780 / [fxchain17@transy.edu](mailto:fxchain17@transy.edu)

May 4, 2017

**Ms. Becca Self**

Founder and Executive Director, FoodChain

**Ms. Stephanie Wooten**

Executive Director, GleanKY

Dear Ms. Self and Ms. Wooten:

My name is Food Chain and at the end of May I will be graduating from Transylvania University with a self-designed Bachelor of Arts Degree in Nutrition & Sustainability. My sophomore year of college, I enrolled in a course titled "Current Trends in Nutrition" and it was that semester that something sparked inside of me. I suddenly found myself reading books by Michael Pollan, Fred Bahnsen, and other food activists in my spare time. These books showed me alternative ways that I could get involved in helping those who are food insecure gain access to fresh, healthy food through community gardens and sustainable agriculture programs. Nutrition is one of the most important aspects of our lives and what we eat has the ability to govern the way we think and feel. My experiences at Transylvania have led me to want to make that information and nourishment available to everyone in a way that benefits both the human body and the planet we live on.

This whole paragraph opens into a narrative that will directly appeal to the mission of the organization to which the applicant is applying.

After reading the description of the duties and responsibilities of the "Farm to Kitchen Coordinator," I believe that my passions and experiences make me the person for the job. As a Type 1 Diabetic, nutrition has always been important to me and it was not until I volunteered with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) that I became aware of how many people do not have access to the fresh, healthy food that keeps the body healthy. This realization led me to an internship with the Anathoth Community Farm and Garden in North Carolina that allowed me to serve the community around me in a way that would both benefit the environment and provide fresh food for those that are food insecure. I learned skills such as how to develop partnerships with feeding recipients and other like-minded organizations to help minimize food insecurity and I became knowledgeable about farming culture through daily hands on farm experience and weekly classes covering the details of seasonal production.

It is not necessary to include personal information like this, but in this case, it directly relates to both her passion for the work and relevant experience.

I gained additional expertise in representing JDRF by going to corporate organizations to brief them on what the organization does as a non-profit in order to secure sponsorships. I also created and managed databases of contacts to provide further outreach: both for education and fundraising. These public outreach and organization skills will be useful in helping to keep detailed financial records of input costs and revenues associated with processed food. In addition, my work in the William T. Young Campus Center has allowed me to learn how to properly interface with guests in a way that is both professional and kind and it will be pertinent to my ability to coordinate with both GleanKY and FoodChain staff in terms of fielding questions from and communication with the general public.

All of these experiences have culminated with me discovering that I am passionate about all people having knowledge about and access to food that is both healthy for their bodies but also healthy for the Earth and I believe that this position will be a great fit for both myself and for GleanKY and FoodChain. I am looking forward to the opportunity to speak with you in an interview about how I can contribute to the good work that GleanKY and FoodChain are doing in our community. Thank you so much for your time and consideration!

Always ask for an interview in a cover letter! And, of course, be sure to thank the reader.

Sincerely,  
Food Chain

Use "Sincerely" when closing a letter, even if it is being sent to someone you know.