Cover Letters

Include a cover letter with your resume unless you have been instructed otherwise. A cover letter speaks to an employer, while a resume is a historical record of your skills, experiences, and accomplishments. The cover letter allows you to show your personality – to become a real person, to show off your most prized qualifications, and to communicate exactly what you want and how you can contribute.

Cover letters allow you to showcase your writing skills. They should be designed in a way that is not only reader friendly, but also persuasive and easy to edit. Many people spend too much time on cover letters and never really create an effective one. A short, concise letter usually makes a stronger impression on an employer than an excessively long one. If you are struggling to come up with something to say, you probably should not say it.

Sell yourself in each section of the cover letter. If you do not have information in a section that sets you apart from others, keep that section short and get the reader quickly to the section where you do stand out.

The following cover letter format is recommended in most situations:

Section #1
Grab the reader's attention by starting with the name of the person who referred you to the position or a description of your interest in the company. If you know something about the company that is unique (you were associated with the company in some way, or you are impressed by some aspect of the company), then you might want to mention this here. Once you have identified a contact within the company or explained your familiarity with the company, then you can get right to the point by telling the reader what you want (to which position you are applying).

Section #2
It is important to get the reader to this section quickly. This is where you list your most prized qualifications for the position. Even though the cover letter should show some personality, this is a section where you want to cut out the fluff and verbiage and make it easy for a recruiter to see your qualifications. Most recruiters will not take the time to dig through paragraphs of information to figure out your qualifications. Therefore, it is recommended that you use a bullet format when listing your credentials and accomplishments. Remember to start each bullet with a strong, descriptive adjective or verb; do not just list points from your resume.

Section #3
In this section, you need to let the employer know what action you will take or what action you are asking them to take. When you are not working within a very structured job search process, it is recommended that you take the initiative to tell the employer that you will be calling them within a week to see if you can arrange a convenient time to meet. If you specify a time period, you must remember to follow up within that time frame! However, if the employer or job announcement has specified a very clear process for applying, then you should follow the employer's lead.
Cover Letter Process/Checklist

BEFORE YOU START TO WRITE:

- Establish a connection:
  - Referred by someone
  - Attended a talk or currently following a project
  - Impressed by company’s position or approach
- Make a list of job requirements and desirable qualities
  - Look In:
    - Description of job/organization
    - Organization’s website
    - Job requirements/duties
- Make a list of your top selling points
  - List skills that are specific to the job in addition to skills that are general and transferable
- Come up with specific examples to illustrate your top selling points
  - Bullet Format:
    - Ex: Solid GIS Foundation – Three years of work experience with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as a GIS Analyst. Attended the seventh annual GIS Specialist Conference.
  - Paragraph Format:
    - Ex: As a volunteer with the Peace Corps, I managed a team of seven volunteers and scientists through the construction of a domestic rainwater harvesting system in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. I helped design and build the structure, coordinate with local government for implementation, and train local residents how to use and maintain the system.
- Match job requirements with your selling points
  - Categorize your qualifications; space is precious, and cover letters should be short and concise
  - Leave no stone unturned; ‘cutting’ text should come later
- Determine what works best in bullet format and what works best in paragraph format
  - Bullet format is conducive to one skill or selling point that is illustrated by one example
  - Paragraph format is conducive to selling points where several skills can be demonstrated through one experience (such as the Group Project), which may take several sentences to explain

START WRITING:

Structure:

- Introductory Paragraph
  - Establish a connection or describe your attraction to the company
  - State the position and compliment the company, while demonstrating knowledge of the company
  - Sell yourself (1-2 lines max); express confidence that you are the right candidate for the position
- Bulleted Section
  - Insert selling points to match the job requirements that work best as bullets
- Paragraph Section
  - Use paragraphs depending on the length of the qualification and what you want to highlight
  - Paragraphs can come before and/or after a bulleted section
- Closing Paragraph
  - Include 1-2 lines max of selling/summary points
  - Mention that you have attached your resume (optional)
  - Re-state position to which you are applying/express interest in being interviewed
  - Mention further contact in the close
  - Final close/thank you line

AFTER THE FIRST DRAFT:

- Cut excess language
- Peer review
- Check several times for typos and mistakes
Cover Letter Examples

On the following pages, you will see four examples of strong cover letters and one example of an e-mail inquiry. Each document emphasizes a different approach and/or format.

Example #1 is a letter that is written for two different internships with the same company. The letter is effective because the internships for which the student is applying are similar, and therefore, the student’s skills are transferable. This student categorized his experiences and used the paragraph and bullet formats effectively. The first and second paragraphs focus on concrete examples of a strong educational background and a leadership experience, respectively. The bullet section is organized, and each starts with a strong adjective. Also, each skill is qualified with a brief description instead of standing alone.

Example #2 is a well organized letter. The writer immediately establishes a connection in the first sentence. In addition, the writer is specific about what she can offer the company and demonstrates that she understands the company’s mission. Bullets and paragraphs are used to explain academic and professional experiences. The writer provides important details, such as her role in the group project and the names of computer programs with which she is proficient.

Example #3 is an effective letter. Pay attention to the format of the bullets. Bolding each qualification draws the reader’s eye to these impressive selling points. Providing a brief description helps highlight exactly what makes the experience impressive. Also, this writer ended the letter with a description of an action she will take to follow up with the employer.

Example #4 shows a letter which incorporates intangible/soft skills. It draws the reader’s attention to major accomplishments listed in bullet points towards the beginning. It then summarizes transferrable skills in a paragraph directly below the bulleted section. Sometimes a description of intangible skills allows your reader to understand why you would make an excellent employee.

Example #5 is a letter which uses a paragraph format, rather than a bulleted format. This is effective, because it allows the applicant to thoroughly explain his experiences. The writer effectively matches himself to the employer’s requirements and conveys his enthusiasm for the position. Like Example #1, this letter is another great illustration of how a successful writer can draft one document that applies to two different available positions within an organization.

Example #6 also uses the paragraph format effectively. The writer incorporates the perfect balance of technical experience and soft/transferrable skills. This letter highlights that the applicant is well-rounded and excited about the opportunity.

Example #7 is an e-mail that may be sent to an employer to ask about job opportunities in general, rather than targeting a specific position. Sometimes an e-mail can be a great way to start a conversation with a potential employer. When you are not applying to a specific position, an e-mail to the organization can act as an indication of interest. You can attach a resume and cover letter (depending on how much information you have about the organization and its need to fill positions), or simply send the e-mail and wait for a reply. Once you receive a reply about an open job, you can tailor your cover letter to address all of the requirements and preferred skills.
18 February 2005

Frank Gonzalez  
Toyota Motor Sales College Relations  
19001 South Western Avenue  
Torrance, CA 90509-2991

Dear Frank Gonzalez:

After attending your career information session at the Bren School last week, I became very interested in the Environmental Coordination Office and Environmental Health and Safety internship opportunities with Toyota Motor Sales. My strong technical background and experience in the automotive industry, coupled with my environmental goals and graduate education, reinforces my belief that I am an excellent candidate for both positions.

I am currently pursuing a Master of Environmental Science and Management degree from the Bren School at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Through this graduate program, I seek to combine the Bren School’s interdisciplinary program focused on policy, economics, and environmental science with my technical undergraduate degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Arizona.

While pursuing a Mechanical Engineering degree, I formulated and managed a senior design project in which a team of 15 students designed and built an ethanol powered racecar to compete internationally. I developed a solid foundation and understanding of the intersection of automotive and environmental concerns. I learned first hand what is required to lead a complicated project from conceptualization to realization. I wish to bring this same drive and passion to Toyota.

Please consider some of my credentials:

- Proven management and leadership qualities as evidenced by my leadership roles in student groups.
- Solid engineering background and familiarity with corporate automotive culture.
- Excellent writing skills. Published in the SPIE (optics) journal.
- Outstanding verbal communication skills. Adept at speaking to large groups and speaking intelligibly about highly complex and technical issues.
- Extensive expertise with all Microsoft (MS) applications. Provided instruction for co-workers and fellow students.
- Strong familiarity with ISO 14001 standards.

With Toyota being an international corporate leader with respect to the environment, I am very excited about an opportunity to work with its team as an intern. I believe that my skills, interests, and experience align with both job descriptions.

I have enclosed my resume to give you a more thorough description of my background and highlight some additional qualifications for the position. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding my credentials. Thank you for considering my application.

Sincerely,

Jon Jonson

Attachment
March 15, 2004

Dear Joan Wester:

Lisa Larrabee suggested I contact you regarding the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Specialist position at the Jones & Stokes Compton office. I am interested in applying technologies, such as GIS and Relational Database Management Systems (RDMS), to generate innovative environmental solutions. I am well aware of Jones & Stokes’ reputation of providing creative solutions to environmental problems. With my education, experience, and training, I believe I can contribute to the multidisciplinary, problem-solving philosophy of Jones & Stokes.

I am currently finishing my Master of Environmental Science and Management degree at the Bren School at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The School’s rigorous interdisciplinary curriculum, coupled with my technical program of study and diverse work experience, has provided me with the skills necessary to thrive in a work setting that requires both individual initiative and group effort to succeed. My professional experience includes two successful internships with the United States Geological Survey’s (USGS) Water Resources Division and the Volcano Hazards Program in which I performed detailed modeling tasks and developed staff reports.

In addition, I have a number of other relevant qualifications:

- Trained in the use of ESRI’s ArcGIS software and the use of the geodatabase data model.
- Graduate level coursework in GIS, statistics, watershed management, web architecture, database design, systems modeling, and fate and transport of pollutants.
- Strong familiarity with HTML, Java, and Visual Basic programming languages.
- Participated in Project Management and CEQA/NEPA professional workshops.

To help give you a more thorough understanding of my experiences, I have enclosed my resume for your review. If you agree that I am a strong candidate for the GIS Specialist position, I welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the contributions I could make to Jones & Stokes. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sally Smith

Attachment
March 7, 2006

Doug Wieten
Manager of Environmental Compliance
Environmental Coordination Office
Toyota Motor Sales, USA
Torrance, CA 90501

Dear Doug Wieten,

Thank you for your visit to the Bren School earlier this week. While attending your presentation, I discovered that the summer internship in the Environmental Coordination Office of Toyota closely aligns with my interests and offers me an invaluable opportunity to put my knowledge to work. After reviewing the announcement sent by Dave Parker, gathering information from your presentation, and exploring the Toyota Motor Sales, USA website, I believe my background is an excellent match for your requirements.

I am currently pursuing a Master of Environmental Science and Management degree with a specialization in Corporate Environmental Management at the Bren School at the University of California, Santa Barbara. As such, I have a thorough understanding of environmental compliance and reporting issues. Furthermore, through previous employment, I have demonstrated my ability to coordinate activities and facilitate effective communication within the workplace. I now wish to integrate my skills through a relevant internship. With my rigorous academic training and diverse professional experience, I believe I can be a valuable asset to the Environmental Coordination Office at Toyota this summer.

Please consider my qualifications:

- **Interdisciplinary education** - Graduate level coursework in corporate environmental management, industrial ecology, conservation planning, and statistics.
- **Extensive experience with database and information systems** – Created several databases to catalogue information using Microsoft Access and Excel in professional and academic settings.
- **Strong familiarity with ISO 14001 Standards** – Gained through independent research and the BSI Management Systems Training Catalogues.
- **Excellent Writing Skills** - Experience and comfort producing a variety of written documents, including Environmental Impact Reports (EIRs), memos, literature reviews, scientific analysis papers, and recommendation summaries.
- **Refined communication and presentation skills** - Organized and facilitated community forums.
- **Computer proficiency** – All Microsoft applications, internet research, and web design.

I have enclosed my resume to give you a more detailed description of my background. If you agree that I am a strong candidate for this position, I welcome the opportunity to speak with you and further discuss your requirements. I plan to follow up with you on Monday to confirm that you received all of my application materials. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sandy Write

Attachment
August 13, 2008

Mr. Ken B. Richards
Vice President
Eco Consulting, Inc.
523 Briar Avenue
Louisville, Kentucky 12345

Dear Mr. Richards,

After reading Eco Consulting, Inc.’s commitment to business practices, operations, and projects that protect people and the environment, I am interested in pursuing the Environmental Research Analyst position in the Louisville office. As a recent graduate of the Bren School of Environmental Science & Management, I specialized in Corporate Environmental Management. By moving beyond the conceptual framework that I am learning in school and applying my knowledge in a professional setting, I can benefit your team.

A review of your job description suggests I should be a very viable candidate for the Environmental Research Analyst position. Please consider my qualifications:

- Master of Environmental Science and Management, Bren School – University of California, Santa Barbara
- Three years as an Environmental Consultant, CH2M Hill
- Undergraduate Degree in Environmental Studies with a Business minor
- Experience generating a variety of documents, including Environmental Impact Reports (EIRs), memos, literature reviews, scientific analysis papers, and business recommendation summaries.

As a consultant, my creativity and resourcefulness in identifying and presenting alternate environmental solutions won the confidence and trust of the senior management team. I was frequently chosen as the Lead Environmental Scientist on major project assignments. Communication and interpersonal skills are two of my major assets.

If you agree that I am well-qualified for this position, I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you. I am excited about the opportunity to support Eco Consulting, Inc.’s vision and contribute to its future.

I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Geraldine Enviro

Attachment
March 4, 2007

Shelley Conner  
Director, Human Resources  
Renewable Energy, Inc.  
6305 Wind Lane  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Dear Shelley Conner,

It is with great enthusiasm that I submit my application for the “Environmental Coordinator” and “Permit Associate” positions at Renewable Energy, Inc. I am very excited about the prospect of working with Renewable Energy in expanding its wind power business, and I believe I can offer you valuable skills in these positions.

My current graduate program at the Bren School of Environmental Science and Management has prepared me well for the advertised positions. The Bren School focuses on issues of energy and climate change, and as these are problems of a multidisciplinary nature, I have taken courses in environmental science, economics, policy, and management. Additionally, my specialization in Conservation Planning has prepared me for conducting the type of development projects that the advertised positions entail in an ecologically-friendly and sustainable manner.

In addition to my studies at the Bren School, I can also offer Renewable Energy, Inc. experience with environmental consulting, a background in science, and specialized experience with renewable energy. This past summer, I worked with a small environmental planning firm in Santa Barbara and gained experience working in the field on biological surveys and construction monitoring, as well as developing environmental reports.

Earlier in my career, after earning my Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry, I spent several years working with the Research and Development (R&D) of fuel cells and other energy-related devices. In this field I became familiar with the science of renewable energies and also gained skills in writing, editing, and technical communication. Since leaving R&D I have further developed my writing skills through several years of freelance copyediting and other research, writing, and editing projects.

I have attached my resume for your review, along with a writing sample and three personal references. I am available to begin work after graduation, starting around the third week of June. Working with your company and helping develop renewable energies would be a rewarding experience. Moreover, my professional experience and current coursework is an excellent match for these positions, and I believe I can make significant contributions to your company. I hope to have the opportunity to talk with you more about my specific skills and interests.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

Joshua Tree

Attachments
Dear Joanna Fish,

As a Marine and Coastal Resources Management graduate student at the Bren School of Environmental Science and Management—University of California, Santa Barbara, I was excited to see the current employment opportunity for the Program Coordinator at Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans (PISCO). This position struck me as an ideal opportunity for communicating science in a groundbreaking environment. I have always wanted to find a meaningful career in ocean conservation that allows me to work closely with scientists from different disciplines. I have worked alongside PISCO researchers at UC Santa Barbara in the past, and I would feel honored to contribute once again to this exciting multi-disciplinary endeavor.

I have a solid background in marine biology and biological oceanography, as well as extensive experience working in a large research group, such as the Long Term Ecological Research Program (LTER) in the Santa Barbara Channel. As a technician in an oceanography laboratory, I understand the importance of details and successful experimental design. My graduate career has provided me with much exposure to environmental management and policy, and I am acutely aware of the current issues associated with the protection of the marine environment.

During my graduate program, I worked on a year-long group project thesis focusing on socioeconomic impacts of the newly implemented Marine Protected Areas in the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary (CINMS). Completing my Master's thesis in a group was an enriching experience that provided me with thorough training in a team-oriented setting. As a CINMS intern over the past several months, I have gained considerable experience in public speaking, meeting facilitation, and data analysis. I have also had the opportunity to work closely with governmental agency personnel, marine environment stakeholders, and scientists.

In addition to my experience and training, I believe you will find my passion about science and marine conservation a great asset to the PISCO team of scientists. If you agree that I am a strong candidate for the Program Coordinator position, I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you. I have attached my resume and list of references for your review.

Thank you very much for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Helene Scalliet
Dear Jim Foley,

David Parker, Director of Career Development for the Bren School, suggested I contact you regarding possible opportunities with XYZ Corporation. Last spring, I had the opportunity to talk with Jennifer School, Senior Environmental Scientist, at the AEP/Cal NAEP Conference in Santa Barbara about different opportunities at XYZ. After my conversation with Jennifer, along with completing an in-depth analysis of XYZ for an Environmental Strategy course, I became very interested in joining XYZ’s Santa Barbara office.

I am graduating in June with a Master of Environmental Science and Management degree, specializing in Water Resources Management, from the Bren School at UCSB. I have strong field experience and coursework in wetland ecology, watershed planning, storm water management, and water quality issues. With my work experience and academic preparation, I believe I can make a strong contribution to XYZ. I have attached my resume to facilitate discussion concerning how I may fit into your organization. I plan to follow up with a phone call next week to confirm that you received this. I look forward to speaking with you.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jan Waters