

## WRITING EFFECTIVE COVER LETTERS (aka Letters of Interest)

### Key concepts

- It should convince the employer that you are the best match for the job. Make the letter so compelling that the employer can't resist wanting to interview you.
- Always research the employer, position, project and supervisor so you can show why you are the best person for the job. Call with questions or use web site(s), journals, faculty or other sources (e.g. a friend who has worked for them). The more you know about the position or the supervisor, the better you will be able to sell yourself.
- Rewrite your cover letter to match each job announcement.
- Always send a cover letter with a resume.
- Don't repeat your resume; instead highlight skills or information about you that may not be apparent in the resume or expand on points that are particularly relevant to this job.
- Address your letter to a named individual if at all possible.
- Tell what you can do for the organization, not what it can do for you.
- Be enthusiastic.
- Highlight accomplishments and what they meant to you ("I was proud of my team which surveyed more miles than any other group" instead of "as my resume shows, my team surveyed 10 miles of stream")
- Proof-read! Spell check won't pick up all errors. Have someone else proof-read also.
- Your writing skills, or lack thereof, can make or break you.
- Read your letter aloud to check for awkward sentence structure.
- Include information about your extracurricular activities if you can show transferable skills ('I am an avid hunter and frequently navigate to remote sites using a map and compass' or 'I am an avid nature photographer and could set up permanent photo points to document your restoration projects')
- Make every word count; remove all wordy phrases such as "in order to".
- Shorten long sentences into two sentences. Break long paragraphs into two.
- Use active voice and strong verbs ("I adapted my experience from field sampling class to develop a better survey technique" instead of "my experience from field sampling classes was used to develop a better survey technique")
- Don't start every sentence or paragraph with "I"
- Write so that it sounds like you and shows your personality.

**Format:** One page, 3-5 paragraphs.

Top: Your address, their address, date and salutation (Dear Ms. Jones,)

First paragraph: Open with a simple, creative statement that 'hooks' their interest. Use this paragraph to briefly introduce yourself. Identify the job (job title, announcement number, etc.) or type of work (e.g. Stream Surveyor, Port Sampler). You might include information on how you heard of the job, dates you are available to work...

Middle paragraph(s): Tell them why you are right for this job. Describe relevant work, school, volunteer or life experience (e.g. grew up in area, spent every weekend fishing for past year) without repeating your resume. Most skills, abilities and strengths emphasized in your cover letter should be different from those in your resume. Describe how you would be a valuable addition to the team. Tell them what makes you different from every other student. Include a discussion of your relevant courses only if specific coursework was required, your coursework was unusual or you have limited work experience and can describe your courses in terms of the transferable and applicable skills you learned. Include a discussion of your non-professional work if you can describe it in terms of the transferable and applicable skills you learned ("as a waitress I learned to remain organized and professional under pressure").

Explain why you want this job or want to work for this employer/organization/person. Focus on why you think the job/project is important in terms of conservation or management instead of why it's important to you. Be as specific as possible so you demonstrate your knowledge of the job or organization and indicate your respect for the work or the organization (note accomplishments, history, status, or leaders). You might include how this job fits your academic/career goals.

Final paragraph: End on a positive but assertive note that puts you in control and insures that you communicate with the employer again. You want to contact them instead of waiting for them to contact you (e.g. "I will call you next week to answer any questions you may have; in the meantime, you may reach me at 999-9999" or "I will contact you on Monday to set a time we can meet."). Always follow-up as you said you would. Always thank them considering you and/or your application.

Bottom: Use a standard closing ("Sincerely,"). Type and sign your name (bold, confident, legible signature). Indicate "enclosures" so they don't lose your resume.

Jason Junior  
University Boulevard  
Corvallis OR 97331

Sandy Smith  
State Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Agency OR 99999

September 26, 2007

include date

always  
identify  
position

RE: Stream Surveyor position, Hines Oregon

write to a particular person

Dear Ms. Smith,

confident  
unusual  
opening  
sentence

The professional background, experience and skills listed in your advertisement are only the beginning of what I can bring to this position and State Department of Fish and Wildlife (SDFW). While my resume shows previous experience integrating private lands access with effective data collection (Stream Surveyor, Ecotrust Inc., Summer 2003) it does not fully reflect the role I served on our survey crew. My crew preferred to have me make all initial landowner contacts because more landowners allowed access to their lands when I asked permission than when others on the crew asked. This ability to build trusting relationships with landowners is a trait I look forward to using as a Stream Surveyor with SDFW in Hines, Oregon. Another reason I am the best person for this position is that I grew up in Hines. I can relate especially well to local private landowners, including ranch-owners, because I lived in the Hines community for 19 years. My background as a "local" offers opportunities to build lasting relationships of trust with private landowners. In addition, I have hunted, fished and camped extensively throughout the Malheur basin thus am familiar with the landmarks, landscape and habitat.

highlight  
skills not  
in resume

show your  
interest &  
research  
effort

I am interested in working for SDFW as a stream surveyor in Hines because of the type of data you are collecting and the positive effect this data can have on maintaining native desert fish species. I recently read your report "Stream Habitat Data from Southeastern Oregon 2003". I was surprised to see the limited amount of habitat occupied by redband trout and would like to play a part in identifying habitat that this species could occupy in the future. In addition, I enjoy working with people as well as fish and look forward to returning home to work with "neighbors".

show you  
value job,  
not just  
habitat,  
trout  
to you

I plan to be in Hines during Spring Break, March 10-15. I will call you early next week to see if you have additional questions about my application and to see if we can meet while I am at home. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

take initiative  
to follow up

Jason Junior  
resume enclosed

always indicate  
resume  
enclosed

10 January 2007

Felicia Freshman  
OSU Dorm  
Corvallis OR 55555  
541/555-5555  
[ffresh@onid.orst.edu](mailto:ffresh@onid.orst.edu)

*catchy opening*

*introduce yourself*

*show enthusiasm*

Marine mammals are some of the most amazing creatures in the sea. They have been my passion since I saw a pod of killer whales in Yaquina Bay six years ago. I have continued this interest academically and am now a Freshman in the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Science at Oregon State University. When I saw your announcement for an internship working with marine mammals, I immediately began working on this letter. There is nothing I would rather do than work as a summer Marine Mammal Intern at the Oregon Coast Aquarium.

*show what you know even if you lack work*

*identify position applying to*

I have done extensive extra-curricular reading about marine mammals and marine systems because they are so interesting. Throughout high school all of my special projects in science classes were about marine mammals. I am continuing this at Oregon State University where I am specializing in "marine mammal conservation". In my many trips to the Aquarium to observe harbor seals, California sea lions and sea otters, I have learned a great deal about their natural history and would like to share this with others.

*show you value the work*

The husbandry work that your Interns perform is critical to survival of the individual mammals at the Aquarium. Through my work experience at Burger King I learned first-hand the importance of measuring portions precisely, a skill important in diet preparation for captive animals. In addition, at Burger King, I learned to interact with many different clients and this will help me work with the variety of visitors to the Aquarium.

*use work experience creatively & to match job*

If I am selected as an Intern, I will execute my duties with enthusiasm and professionalism. I would love to meet with you to talk about the Internship and marine mammals. I will call next week to arrange an appointment that is convenient for you. Thank you so much for considering my application.

*specify when and how you will follow up*

Sincerely,

Felicia Freshman  
Enclosure

*indicates resume enclosed*