*Although these suggestions are general and widely applicable, there are exceptions to every rule. We highly recommend and welcome you to visit the Career Center for a consultation and critique with one of our career counselors.*

**Why write a cover letter?**

The purpose of a cover letter is to introduce yourself to an employer, encourage an employer to review your resume and consider you for an interview. It is your opportunity to make a great first impression! Therefore, a cover letter should always accompany your resume.

**What do I say?**

Rather than restating your resume, your cover letter should emphasize unique qualifications and personal characteristics that are relevant to that particular organization or job opportunity. A good cover letter should explicitly address **what you can do for the organization**, not what it can do for you. The most effective way to do this is to research everything possible about the organization.

*When writing in direct response to a position opening:*  
- Mention where or how you found out about the opening.  
- Address the requirements of the position – use similar language to the job description.

*When writing a targeted approach letter:*  
- State your purpose clearly – whether you are writing to gain advice on your career plans, obtain occupational information, or discuss future work possibilities.

**What is the format?**

Cover letters should typically be **one page with 3-4 paragraphs** (although there are exceptions). They should be saved as a pdf file or printed on the same high-quality paper as your resume for a consistent, professional appearance. Below are guidelines on what to include:

**Address, Date, and Salutation:**

- Your address and date at the top of the page  
- Name, professional title, and address of the person/organization to whom you are writing  
- Formal salutation: “Dear Mr. / Ms. _______: “ **You should address your letter to a specific person,** not the generic “To Whom It May Concern.” (If this information was not provided, simply call the organization and ask for the name of the person in charge of hiring or consult the website.)

**Opening Paragraph:**

- Begin by stating the purpose of the letter, not introducing yourself.  
- Tell the employer how you heard about the position/organization (Career Center, news media, alumni).  
- If you have previously met the employer, this is the place to remind him/her (i.e., “After speaking with you at the UNC Asheville Career Fair … “)
Second Paragraph:

- Research who the organization is serving, how it performs compared to competitors, what current trends affect that industry.
- **Answer the question “Why do you want to work for this company/organization/employer?”** (Show that you’ve done company research!)
- Indicate why you are interested in the organization, its products or services and the position.

Third Paragraph (can use a 4th paragraph if needed):

- **Answer the question “Why are you qualified for the position?”** (What unique attributes can you offer?)
- Describe how you will relate your previous skills and experience to the requirements of the position/benefit of the employer.
- Provide specific examples to support your qualifications. Indicate how your work and field experiences/internship experiences, research projects, volunteer activities, extracurricular background and career aspirations relate to the position and the organization’s interests and goals.
- Bulleting how your qualifications match their needs is often an effective method to use here.

Final Paragraph:

- **Arrange to follow up with the employer** on the status of your application/inquiry.
- Invite him/her to contact you should additional information be needed.
- Indicate your desire for a personal interview and your flexibility as to the time and place. For example, you may indicate that you will be in the city where the organization is located on a certain date.
- Repeat your phone number and/or e-mail in the letter.
- Thank the employer for his/her time and consideration.
- Formal closing: “Sincerely,” with your name signed and typed.

**I have a draft. Now what?**

Be sure that your cover letter...

- is in standard business letter format (one-inch margins, see two sample formats attached).
- is work-centered and employer-centered, not “me” centered. (i.e. focus on what you can do for them instead of what you want from the organization)
- clearly conveys your enthusiasm for the opportunity.
- uses confident language that sells your position as the best candidate.
- is written in your own style, using your own words.
- avoids colloquial language and clichés.
- does not read like a form letter or a letter sent to multiple employers.
- includes a current date, correct contact information for you and the employer.
- is signed!
- is free of punctuation, spelling, and typographical errors.
Sample letter in response to a job/internship opening:

Ima Jobseeker  
1 Main Street  
Asheville, NC 28801  

January 1, 20XX  

Mr. Great Employer, Sports Editor  
Our Town Times  
123 Newspaper Lane  
Asheville, NC 28801  

Dear Mr. Employer:  

I am writing to express my interest in the Copy Editor Position with the Our Town Times that is posted on UNC Asheville’s Career Center Website. As a native of Asheville and avid reader of the Times, I have been seeking an opportunity to work for your paper for quite some time and am excited about the possibility of serving in this position. The Times’ focus on local education and community building is of particular interest to me as an individual that regularly volunteers with a variety of local nonprofit organizations.  

My significant experience working with publications makes me an ideal fit for the position of Copy Editor. My interest in editing began in high school when I began my own publication, which I continue to publish. While in college, I worked as a sports writer for the school paper, The Blue Banner, and served as sports editor during my final semester. I found the job fulfilling and was able to fine tune my skills in reporting and editing.  

In addition to my experience with UNC Asheville’s Blue Banner, I also completed a copy editing internship at Living Magazine. In this position, my careful approach and dedication to the publication’s mission of informing the community about choices for healthy living was highly valued. Additionally, I have a strong work ethic. I graduated with distinction from The University of North Carolina Asheville with a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication while working 15 hours per week and serving in various campus leadership roles.  

I am confident that my professional experience and educational background would serve me well as Copy Editor for the Our Town Times. It would be my pleasure to work for a well respected and publication and to work with the Times’ award-winning staff. I look forward to the opportunity to interview with you to allow us to further discuss my qualifications for the position. If you have any questions or would like me to provide any additional information, please feel free to contact me at (555) 555-5555 or ima.jobseeker@gmail.com. Thank you for your time in considering my resume. I look forward to speaking with you soon.  

Sincerely,  

Ima Jobseeker
August 1, 20XX

Ms. Jane Doe, Marketing Coordinator
The Best Employer, Inc.
360 Employment Lane
Asheville, NC 28803

Dear Ms. Doe:

Dr. Anne Jones in the University of North Carolina Asheville’s Management Department suggested that I contact you regarding the possibility of a summer internship with The Best Employer, Inc’s marketing department. I know that several UNC Asheville students have completed successful internships with your company in the past and I look forward to pursuing such an opportunity. In researching the company, I am impressed by the department’s cutting edge marketing strategies and the awards won in recent years for advances in marketing technology.

In May 20XX, I will graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Management with a concentration in Marketing. I believe my education and experience would be a perfect match for the current initiatives Dr. Jones described to me. In particular, your desire to concentrate on an international market is one of my interests as I studied abroad for a semester in Madrid, Spain. While in Spain I was not only engrossed in the culture, but I also focused my coursework on international marketing techniques. Additionally, I was able to fine tune my language skills and feel comfortable with the speaking and writing the Spanish language.

This fall, I served as an Intern for Networking, Inc. I developed a customer satisfaction survey and used the results to come up with recommendations for improving customer service. I will formally present this project at the next board meeting. My coursework in the Management department at UNC Asheville has also involved creating several marketing plans that targeted regional, national, and international markets. These can be viewed at www.sallysample.com.

I am excited to learn more about how I could contribute to The Best Employer’s success. I will follow up with you next week in regards to the status of my application. In the meantime, you may reach me by phone (555) 555-5555 or by email at ssample@aol.com. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sally Sample