

Alumni Career Services

Bentley Business Correspondence Kit



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Cover Letters

Introduction

A great cover letter can differentiate you from other candidates. It presents your education, skills, and experience in a different way than your resume, and allows you to focus more precisely on the needs of the employer. Even if the cover letter is not required, it's generally a good idea to provide one. A well-written cover letter will:

- Convince the reader to read your resume
- Demonstrates your work ethic and commitment to going above and beyond (especially if the cover letter is not required)
- Showcase your accomplishments in a way that is relevant to the position
- Showcase additional accomplishments that are not on your resume
- Create a positive first impression and stand out from other applicants
- Demonstrate to the reader how you fulfill the company's needs
- Explain any gaps in employment

Helpful Tips

- Use the job description's vocabulary in your cover letter
- Keep it short, and focused on what you can do for the employer
- Demonstrate the match between your qualifications and the criteria listed in the job description (See Sample of "Traditional Cover Letter" and "T-Style Cover Letter")

Additional Resource

Quint Careers Website:

<http://www.quintcareers.com/covres.html>

http://www.quintcareers.com/cover_letter_tutorial.html

Cover Letter Do's

A prospective employer will review your cover letter (and resume) with one question in mind: "what can you do for me?" The most important thing to keep in mind when writing a cover letter is to keep it focused on the employer (and the position) instead of on you. The second most important thing to keep in mind is that people are busy, and there are many applicants for each position. Keeping your cover letter targeted and concise will make you stand out.

Most cover letters are submitted electronically, usually as an attachment along with your resume. They may be read on-screen or the printed; choose standard fonts and clean formatting that will be effective on both platforms. Be sure to create your cover letter with both spell-check and grammar check turned on.

Helpful Tips

- Identify your audience and target your letter by imagining yourself in the prospective employer's position
- Keep it short and to the point by eliminating all unnecessary details
- Write in active voice (check later section for more information)
- Read the cover letter at least three times, then put it aside and reread once more
- Have others read your letter to edit and proofread

Try to answer the question the employers will be asking themselves as they read your letter: "Why should I hire this person? What value can this person add to our company?"

Personalize your cover letter with Dear Mr. or Ms. X (last name). Utilize LinkedIn, the company website, and any other tools and connections possible to get the name of the hiring manager. Always research whether the person is male or female. Never assume someone's gender based on his or her first name. (For example, Randy and Sandy are names that can be used by both males and females). If you are unsure, call the company's main number and ask.

Use the generic "Dear Hiring Manager" only as an absolute last resort. Your resourcefulness in tracking down the name of the hiring manager is an example of taking the extra step and will differentiate you.

Some people create one cover letter and use it for everything. It is far more effective to write a targeted cover letter. Generic cover letters don't make a very good impression – in fact they may give the impression that the writer couldn't be bothered to do a little research and spend some time writing a more focused letter.

Be sure to save your cover letter with the name of the company and the date so that you can quickly find it when you are called in for an interview!

Cover Letter Don'ts

- Don't send generic cover letters
- Don't use a generic greeting like "Dear Sir/Madam" – It is too impersonal; instead use LinkedIn, Google, and the company website as well as Bentley library resources to find the name
- Don't use a generic salutation unless it is a last resort – in that case address it to "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Recruiter"
- Don't exceed one page—letter should be three or four paragraphs maximum
- Don't lose focus of your message – convey it as concisely as possible, with brief sentences and short paragraphs
- Do not overuse "I"; particularly when starting sentences
- Don't be vague in your close – request an interview
- Don't just restate your resume; take this opportunity to provide additional information and reach your skills to their needs
- Don't use fancy fonts or fonts smaller than 11 pt.
- Don't make your margins less than half inch – if you have that much text, you're not focused enough

Template for a Traditional Cover Letter

Your Name
City, State , Zip Code

Date

Mr. or Ms. Name of Recruiter
Recruiter's Title
Company or Organization
Street Address
City, State and Zip Code

Dear _____:

Paragraph One: Opening and Introduction (i.e., why you are interested in them.) Who you are, why you are writing and how you learned of the open position.

- If someone referred you in the company and the person WILL speak highly of you, then don't hesitate to mention their name. Be sure to get prior approval when using someone's name in the cover letter.
- Convey enthusiasm and eagerness to work for the company
- Research the company and find something very compelling to say about why you want to work for them. Avoid very "general" statements such as "I would like to work for an industry leader"
- Summarize in ONE sentence the value you can add to the company.
- Use the job description as a guideline and make the MATCH between what the buyer wants and what you, the seller, have to offer.

Paragraph Two: Prove you are the best person for the job (i.e., why they should be interested in you.)

- Give evidence of your skills and accomplishments
- Provide several accomplishments with astounding detail.
- Showcase different accomplishments than those on your resume.
- Be sure to demonstrate knowledge about the company and the issues they are facing. The organization is looking for you to do the matching work for them. If you can understand their needs and communicate your ability to solve their problems you will be more likely to get an interview.

Paragraph Three: Closing Paragraph and Next Steps

Restate your eagerness about working for the company; request an interview.

Employers are impressed by candidates that take initiative and persevere.

Thank the reader for their time and attention.

Sincerely,

(Two spaces)

Your Signature

Your Name (Typed)

Sample Traditional Cover Letter

Ms. Susan Holmes

200 Lexington St. • Waltham, MA 02154 • 781-891-2000 • sholmes@bentley.edu

Date

Mr. John Smith
Vice President of Corporate Marketing
XYZ Software Inc.
285 Appletree Way
Boston, MA 02215

Dear Mr. Smith:

Mr. Steve Johnson suggested I write to you regarding my interest in the Marketing Manager position posted on your company website. Forrester Research ranked XYZ Software as the market leader for web-based learning, and I am eager to work for a company on the leading edge of Internet software development. I am currently a second-year MBA student at McCallum Graduate School of Business at Bentley University. After attending your company information session, I am confident I can make an immediate contribution to XYZ Software by applying marketing skills that I have developed during my previous work as well as my academic studies.

As Marketing Manager at eLearning Magazine, I helped the company develop and implement marketing programs to compete effectively in a crowded marketplace. Using qualitative and quantitative market research, I analyzed the firm's strategic position and recommended market and partner opportunities to strengthen its competitive advantage. Several of these partner agreements have led to increased sales opportunities and revenues for XYZ Software. I also developed targeted PR campaigns, which greatly enhanced eLearning's image in the magazine and trade show market.

Prior to my experience at eLearning Magazine, I managed lead generation programs for ABC Software in Boston, which resulted in a 25% increase in total leads generated over a one-year period and an increase in direct sales revenues of \$1.5M.

I am eager to work in the eLearning marketplace and bring my marketing and communications experience to XYZ Software. I welcome the opportunity to learn more about your needs and provide you with additional details regarding my background and how I can contribute to your organization. I am available for an interview at your convenience. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Susan Holmes

(Online application systems differ; some systems will allow you to attach a Word document for your cover letter and resume separately, while others require that you cut and paste the text. It's always a good idea your files in a PDF and an unformatted .TXT file to accommodate the application system.)

Sample T-Style Cover Letter

Ms. Susan Holmes

200 Lexington St. • Waltham, MA 02154 • 781-891-2000 • sholmes@bentley.edu

Date

Ms. Nancy Bigwig
Corporate Recruiter
Fidelity Investments
123 Congress St.
Boston, MA 02215

Dear Ms. Bigwig:

Forrester Research ranked XYZ Software as the market leader for web-based learning, and I am eager to work for a company on the leading edge of Internet software development. I am applying for the position of for Human Resources Representative as posted on eRecruiting.

I have recently earned my MBA from the McCallum School of Management at Bentley University, and am pursuing a position in the financial services sector that will utilize my extensive HR background. I am particularly excited about this position as I am aware of Fidelity's new HR initiatives in the area of management training and am confident that I can contribute to this endeavor. The following highlights of my background show that I am well qualified for the position:

Your Requirements:	My Qualifications:
Coordinate Conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Planned monthly recruiting events which were very well attended and yielded 17 new top performers last year• Planned and executed quarterly employee meetings• Coordinated annual industry conference which 92% of attendees rated as "excellent"
Recruiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attended career fairs at 12 area colleges where our booth was among the busiest• Developed relationships with area universities through collaboration and serving as a resource for student events• Analyzed the most effective advertising platforms and developed targeted ads
Counseling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Counseled employees on topics including harassment, effective management and professional development
Maintenance of Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintained web page job descriptions and job postings• Reviewed and recommended new Applicant Tracking System

Throughout my professional and educational careers, I have earned recognition including "Most Valuable Team Player 2011" at my company, and professional accolades from SHRM and the Association of Employment Professionals.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss the position of Human Resources Representative and my fit at Fidelity. I am most easily reached on my cell phone, which is 617 – 123 – 4567. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best Regards,

Susan Holmes
781-891-2000
sholmes@bentley.edu

Thank You Letters

Did you know that a recent study showed that 22% of hiring managers were *unlikely* to hire a candidate who did not send a thank you letter? Give yourself this competitive edge!

Sending an email thank you note has become standard practice. This guarantees your note will be received quickly. Be sure to get business cards from everyone with whom you meet to have correct email addresses. Take the time to write a different message to each person; no one likes to receive a generic thank you note. Note: if you've interviewed with multiple people, it is very likely that they will compare your thank you notes; they will know if you sent the same one to all of them.

The thank you note is also your last marketing opportunity, especially to reinforce skills mentioned during the interview. For example, if you learn during your interview that the company is moving to a software platform on which you are quite experienced, reiterate that in your thank you letter.

While an email thank you is the fastest and most common, there is still a lot of power in sending a handwritten note. The downside is that it takes so long; the upside is that it shows you really went to a lot of trouble. Here's our recommendation: sending email within 24 hours, and also send a handwritten note to reinforce your candidacy even more. Use Bentley notecards (available at the bookstore), write neatly (we recommend you think carefully about what you want to say; check your spelling and grammar, and even write it out a couple of times for practice before using your notecards).

Helpful Tips

- Separate thank you letter should be sent to each person with whom you interviewed
- Be sure to ask for a business card from each person with whom you meet
- Don't send the same letter to each person with whom you met
- Be memorable by mentioning something specific which you discussed with each individual
- Build rapport highlighting an accomplishment discussed, or introduce a new one that builds on discussion; be sure to include any pertinent information not brought up during the interview

Remember, the thank you letter is often a sales letter in disguise. It gives you the opportunity to emphasize the match between your background and the employer's interests. Always focus on what **YOU CAN DO FOR THEM**. The thank you letter should not exceed one page. Keep it short.

Sample Thank You Letter for Job Interview

Ms. Susan Holmes
200 Lexington St.
Waltham, MA 02154

Date

Mr. John Smith
Vice President of Corporate Marketing
XYZ Software Inc.
285 Appletree Way
Boston, MA 02215

Dear Mr. Smith:

Thank you for the generous amount of time you gave me earlier this week to discuss the position of Marketing Manager at XYZ Software. I enjoyed our conversation, especially our discussion on using web based software for teaching adult learners in university continuing education programs.

During our meeting, we discussed the possibility of targeting several vertical markets as a further means of enhancing XYZ Software's competitive positioning. I agree with your assessment and am eager to explore several industries in which I have significant experience. At *eLearning* magazine, we focused our marketing programs on three key industries: technology, financial services, and government. At ABC Software, our greatest success was achieved by targeting the top 500 firms in the health care and technology sectors.

I am very eager to collaborate with the team at XYZ Software and am confident my previous experience and skills in marketing programs would be an asset to your organization. If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you again for your time. I am looking forward to meeting with you soon to discuss next steps.

Sincerely,

Susan Holmes
781-891-2000
sholmes@bentley.edu

Informational Interview Correspondence

The informational interview is not as much an interview as it is a networking opportunity. It is an interview with an individual working in a career you would like to learn more about. It is appropriate to network with people to get more information about an industry, and individual role, a company, or your career path. You're attempting to discover what the person's job is like, what they do, what responsibilities they have, and what it's like to work in their job at their company. It is never a conversation about a job.

The most effective way to reach out and request an informational interview is to call instead of e-mail. Remember that e-mail is easy to send and even easier to ignore.

View the online networking module of the Strategies for Career Success series for detailed information and call scripts to request informational interviews.

Template for an Informational Interview

The process outlined below can be used to create the script for your phone call to the individual with whom you wish to network. A phone call is far more personal than an e-mail. It's easy to find the phone number of the organization that employs the person with whom you wish to speak. Find the company's general number and ask to be transferred to the individual.

It's very likely that you will reach the person's voicemail, so be prepared with the scripted message that is brief and clear. Make sure you leave your contact information; saying your phone number twice is a good idea.

People are busy; recognize that the individual may fully intend to call you back but get caught up with other tasks. Once you've left a voicemail message, do not leave another. Instead, call a few times – hopefully you will catch them at their desk. If you reach voicemail again, don't leave another message.

You can also use this information to e-mail a request for an informational interview. This is a more impersonal communication and easier to overlook.

Paragraph One: Introduction

- Be friendly and approachable
- Who you are, who referred you and why you are calling
- Be specific that you are requesting an interview for INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES
- Be clear on the time commitment involved
- Be specific about why you are seeking out this individual

Paragraph Two: The Details

- The scope of your career exploration
- How you arrived at this point – education, prior experience, etc.
- Why do you seek this individual's input?
- Where do you want to go and why?

Paragraph Three: Conclusion

- Recognize that people are busy and be flexible about meeting time and location
- Always remember that individuals grant these interviews out of the kindness of their heart and/or to return a business favor

A face-to-face, in person meeting is always preferable to phone, but if that is not possible, then a phone call will have to suffice.

Sample Email Request for an Informational Interview

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Professor John Doe of the McCallum Graduate School of Business at Bentley suggested I contact you as part of my career exploration. I read your recent article on global mergers and acquisitions in CFO magazine. I welcome the opportunity to discuss your thoughts further on this topic, since it is of particular interest of mine as well.

I am a second year MBA student at the McCallum Graduate School at Bentley University, with a concentration in Finance. Before graduate school, I worked in finance in the technology and medical device industries. I am interested in working as an analyst in an investment management firm after graduation.

I know how busy you are, and I appreciate you making time to meet with me. I welcome the opportunity to meet in your office, at your convenience, for 20 minutes.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Susan Holmes
781-891-2000
sholmes@bentley.edu

Template for Thank you Letter for an Informational Interview

If the busy executive makes time to meet with you the courteous thing to do is send a thank you letter. Keep the tone of the letter warm and enthusiastic even if your meeting was more neutral. Keep the tone business-like and collegial; avoid sounding too formal and rigid or overly informal.

Standard practice today is to email the thank you letter; best practice is to send it within 24 hours. If the person with whom you met was particularly helpful, you may want to follow up with a handwritten note on your Bentley notepaper.

Keep your note short and mention a couple of specific topics in which your host was particularly interested.

Helpful Tips

- Send the thank you note within 24 hours of your meeting. This prompt response shows you have a good sense of business protocol. If the person is inclined to recommend you to someone else, your timely response will indicate that you will repeat the behavior and not embarrass him or her.
- Tailor and customize the note to the person with whom you met. If they gave you help in a specific area, be sure to mention that fact. Be sincere. Here are some sample phrases:
 - Thank you for your help.
 - I sincerely appreciate your assistance
 - Your help is greatly appreciated
 - Your advice on XYZ is greatly appreciated
- Keep your note short and gracious.
- Focus on content. Remind the person why you met, what you gained from the meeting, and the steps you plan to take from the recommendations
- Make sure they have all your contact information
- If the person indicates they would like to be kept in the loop regarding your career moves, keep them posted as you interview and send a note when you land a job

The closing.

You can add another thank you again in the closing paragraph. Some suggestions include:

- Thanks again for all you have contributed to strengthening my career.
- Thank you again for providing additional contacts to my referral network.
- Thank you for introducing me to Mr/Ms X.
- DO NOT, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, ASK FOR A JOB. Keep the focus on informational issues.

Sample Thank You Letter for an Informational Interview

Ms. Susan Holmes
200 Lexington St.
Waltham, MA 02154

Date

Mr. John Smith
Vice President of Corporate Marketing
XYZ Software Inc.
285 Appletree Way
Boston, MA 02215

Dear Mr. Smith:

Thank you again for meeting with me this morning to explore careers in technology marketing. I know how busy you are and very much value your input. Your advice on networking within the technology community was most helpful. I have already ordered a subscription to *Mass High Tech* and the *Boston Business Journal*. I will also visit the various websites you recommended during our meeting.

I so much appreciate your offer introducing me to Ms. Susan Philbin and Mr. Mark Jones. As we agreed, I will await your email confirming that you have contacted them before I reach out to them directly.

Once again, thank you for the guidance during my career exploration. I will keep you informed as my search progresses.

Sincerely,

Susan Holmes
781-891-2000
sholmes@bentley.edu

Template Letter/Note to a Networking Contact

Employers hire people, not resumes. And they especially hire people who have made a good impression on them. Gracious and timely correspondence always puts you in the best light. The purpose of this note is to thank the person for taking the time to meet with you and to begin building a relationship. You want to be on their radar screen when they hear of a position that would be a good fit for you.

Common practice is to send this type of note via email, so obviously the recipient will have your email address. Make sure your signature line also includes your phone number. Create a catchy subject line to increase the likelihood that the recipient will open and read your note. Examples include:

- Following up on our meeting last night....
- Thank you for your time!
- A pleasure meeting you

Remember that networking is a two-way street – make sure you give as well as receive. You two have contacts, experiences, and knowledge that will be of interest to the person with whom you network or to someone they know. Examples include:

- Offer to meet with one of their contacts on an informational basis regarding your past work positions
- Consider providing contacts to them for a business project on which they are working
- Researching an area of interest to them and sending them articles that you find

Sample Email Letter to a Networking Contact You Made

To: Mr. John Doe - Vice President – XYZ Software Company

From: Susan Holmes

Subject: International Travel

Dear John:

Just a quick note to say what a pleasure it was to speak with you last night at the Bentley Alumni Networking event. I enjoyed hearing about your international travels for XYZ Software Company and the great people you have met around the world.

As promised, attached is the article I referred to during our conversation. I found it on <http://www.bentleyworldtravel.com>, which is an excellent source for international travel tips.

Your thoughts on the increasing impact of Asian markets on the software industry were very compelling. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further. I would also like to take you up on your kind offer of guidance on my career exploration. Do you have some open time in the next few weeks?

I will follow-up with a phone call later this afternoon, or please reach out at your convenience.

Thanks again for your time.

Best regards,

Susan Holmes
781-891-2000
sholmes@bentley.edu

Writing in Active Voice

One very effective way to make all your business correspondence concise, direct and energetic is to use a sentence construction style called "active voice". Sentences written in active voice begin with who is performing an action, followed by the action taken. Here are some examples:

- I threw the ball.
- You are making too much noise.
- Ben will eat popcorn and watch a movie tomorrow evening.

In each of these sentences, the subject (I, You and Ben respectively) performs the action of the verb (threw, making, will watch). The sentences are punchy, direct and make it clear who's doing what.

But compare that with passive voice – here's an example of the same sentence written in the passive voice. What do you notice?

- The ball was thrown by me
- Too much noise is being made by you
- Tomorrow evening, a movie will be watched and popcorn be eaten by Ben

Why is the Active Voice So Important?

Because sentences in the active voice have energy and directness, both of which will keep your reader engaged!

Sentences written in the active voice are also less wordy than those in the passive voice – and cutting unnecessary words always improves business writing.

Use active voice when you want your writing to be simple, direct, clear and easy to read. If you're not very confident about your writing, using the active voice can be an easy way to improve it.