

## COVER LETTER GUIDE

### A Tool to Generate Interviews

A cover letter is a marketing document that is just as important as your resume. The purpose of the cover letter is to build interest in your resume and to generate interviews. It allows you to:

- Demonstrate your knowledge of the company
- Mention the connections you made within the company
- Exhibit relevant experiences, skill sets, and your ability to communicate effectively
- Express your enthusiasm and highlight your most attractive features as a potential employee

The bottom line is that a well thought out, *tailored* and *brief* cover letter is a polite way to show your interest, skills, and previous networking connections to the company. However, *do no harm!* A well-written letter can help you stand out. A poorly written letter can do the same, only negatively.

### General Guidelines

**Write to an individual by name.** If necessary, go to company research databases, check the website, or call the company to get a name. Verify any information you obtain from published lists, because it may no longer be accurate – people, positions, and titles change frequently.

Remember that the standard U.S. salutation uses the title (Mr. or Ms., as appropriate) followed by only the last name. A colon (not a comma) is used in business letter salutations.

Dear Mr. Jones:

**Catch the reader's attention.** Start with a name that the reader will know (when you have a connection) or start with a personal statement when possible.

“Caroline Williams suggested I write because...”

“I enjoyed our conversation at the Jones School Partio on Tuesday...”

**Focus on the reader as an individual and a representative of the company.** Concentrate on his or her needs, current business issues and concerns, not your concerns for personal development.

For example, never write “This would be a great opportunity for me.” To motivate the reader you need to address the company. Demonstrate that you have researched the company and its needs. Tailor your letter to respond to those needs.

**Link specific parts of your background to the skills needed for this job.** Do not repeat your resume, except in general terms. Consider the following example in response to a job description calling for someone familiar with metrics and project management:

“As an Associate Intern at Ernst & Young, I conducted a high-level review of project management practices in the process industries (petrochemicals, chemicals, and oil and gas) that resulted in defining best practices for project execution for a major drilling contractor. I also engaged with an international E&P firm to develop a stage-gate project management system reflective of their capital project needs and priorities.”

**Avoid telling the reader that you are a “great fit” for this job** – instead, **demonstrate** how you would fit and how you would add value. What is the difference between telling and demonstrating? Consider:

“I’m a great cook.” vs. “I really enjoy cooking and have won the Houston Chef’s cook-off award for the past three years.”

**Keep it short.** You should have about half a page of text. Get to the point quickly and clearly and make sure you are adding important information that is relevant to the position.

**Be conversational and personable.** Avoid stock expressions such as “Attached please find,” “At your earliest convenience,” etc.

**Use Spell Check and proofread carefully!** A misspelling can easily cost you an interview.

## Cover Letter Framework

Cover letters can be written using a variety of formats, but generally there are three main components or paragraphs:

**Opening Paragraph:** Orient and motivate the reader. Describe who you are and why you want to work there.

**Middle Paragraph(s):** Provide **specific evidence** that you are knowledgeable about the company and its needs. Second, demonstrate how you would be able to meet the specific demands of this position by highlighting your transferable skills.

**Closing Paragraph:** Establish momentum for next steps and thank reader/reviewer for their time and consideration. Reiterate interest in the position or passion for the company.

Your Name  
Address | City, State Zip  
Phone number | E-mail address

Date

Mr. or Ms. Recipient's First and Last Name (check the spelling!)

Title

Company Name

Street or P.O. Box Address

City, State Zip

Re: the position you are applying for (e.g. Financial Analyst Internship)

Dear Ms. (Mr.) Last Name:

The **first paragraph** orients and motivates the reader. If a common acquaintance suggested that you contact this person, you should mention that acquaintance. If you are applying for a specific position (such as on the company website or a Symplicity posting), name the position. Use the first paragraph to tell why you are interested in *this company* or *this position*. **Focus on your reader as an individual or as a representative of the company.** Concentrate on his or her needs, current business issues and concerns, not your concerns for personal development.

The **body** of your letter has two objectives: Provide **specific evidence** that you are knowledgeable about the company and its needs, and **demonstrate** how you would be able to meet the specific demands of this position by highlighting your transferable skills. It is important to stay focused on the needs of the reader. Review the job description. What desired skills did they highlight? Some examples might include analytical skills, effective team leadership, and demonstrated verbal and written communication skills. **Link specific parts of your background to the skills needed for this job.** Do not repeat your resume bullets word for word. Instead, pick one of the achievements or experiences you highlight and go into detail. You can use a paragraph to demonstrate your skills, or you can use bullets (see examples below).

The **closing paragraph** establishes momentum and reiterates your interest and fit within the company. Why are you excited to work there? Close with a brief statement of good will or positive regards for the person, such as "Thank you for your time and consideration." If you are emailing your application to a specific person, you can express next steps for following up. But make sure that you set a calendar reminder and follow up according to the timeline you laid out.

Sincerely,

Your Signature

**ELLEN SMITH**

6342 Brighton St. | Houston, TX 77005  
Esmith@rice.edu | 713.123.4567

January 25, 2013

Ms. Alex Lisowski  
ConocoPhillips  
600 North Dairy Ashford Road  
Houston, TX 77079

RE: Financial Analyst MBA Internship

Dear Ms. Lisowski:

I enjoyed our conversation at ConocoPhillips' on-campus presentation and am writing to express my interest in the Financial Analyst MBA Internship. Attending the information session and the Alumni-Student Lunch last month gave me the opportunity to learn more about the company and fueled my interest in ConocoPhillips' MBA Development Program. After speaking with Kenny Brunette and reviewing the position description, I am confident that my skill set makes me a strong candidate for this position.

Prior to my MBA studies, I worked as an engineering consultant for Dow Chemical Company developing analyses and models for energy- and infrastructure-focused projects throughout the world. For example, I performed engineering design work for oil and gas platforms in the Gulf, LNG facilities in Africa, and offshore wind turbine farms in North America. To meet the extensive data analysis requirements, I taught myself Visual Basic (VB) programming and consequently developed numerous solutions that greatly reduced analysis and quality control time.

As a complement to my strong data analysis and modeling skills, I led numerous high-profile offshore investigation and construction projects on the East Coast. In this capacity, I employed my leadership, teamwork, and communication skills to handle ever-changing offshore conditions and project details under constrained schedules. And, lastly, I used my self-taught data analysis skills to formulate personal investing solutions, which I've used for a number of years to complement my investment decision-making process. My strength in data analysis, my teamwork skills, and my financial modeling capabilities could greatly complement an equity research team at ConocoPhillips.

I would welcome the opportunity to interview for the Financial Analyst MBA Internship and discuss how I can best assist ConocoPhillips and your present needs. I will follow up with you next week, but you may contact me any time if you have any questions at 713.555.6233 or esmith@rice.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration for this position.

Sincerely,

*Ellen Smith*

Ellen Smith  
Enclosure: resume

**SAMMY OWL**

1600 Main Street | Houston, TX  
sam.owl@rice.edu | 713.123.4567

January 8, 2013

Mr. Joe Howard  
Recruiting Coordinator  
Wood Mackenzie  
1234 N.W. St.  
Houston, TX 77002

RE: Energy Consultant Rotational Program

Dear Mr. Howard:

I am a 2<sup>nd</sup> year Rice MBA student with a passion for the energy industry and working on complex problems in a team setting. Wood Mackenzie's industry-leading research, history of demonstrated results, and commitment to employee development has led to my interest in the Energy Consultant Rotational Program. Working as an Associate Intern at Ernst and Young this past summer allowed me to develop consulting experience with oil and gas firms, as well as a solid foundation in both project management theory and application in an oil and gas setting. I know that I can add value as an Energy Consultant in the following areas:

- **Strategy Development and Planning:** I honed my skills in strategic planning while working as a consultant to multi-million-dollar non-profit organizations. In 2010, I created a three-year strategic plan to raise \$2 million for a new school. In less than three years, we reached and exceeded our goal, and the client is set to break ground next year.
- **Analysis:** As a Software Implementation consultant, I developed fit-for-purpose configurations of well data tracking software for four E&P firms across the US. I worked closely with drilling & completions engineers, workover specialists, and office personnel to define requirements and understand the work processes for well operations to best configure reporting, analysis, and data entry tools
- **Oil and Gas Experience:** As an Associate Intern at Ernst & Young, I conducted a high-level review of project management practices in the process industries (petrochemicals, chemicals, and oil and gas) that resulted in defining best practices for project execution for a major drilling contractor. I also engaged with an international E&P firm to develop a stage-gate project management system reflective of their capital project needs and priorities.

My experience, both academically and professionally, has been characterized by a devotion to teamwork and leadership; I would be thrilled to use these qualities to add value to Wood Mackenzie. Thank you for your consideration. I welcome the opportunity to meet your recruitment team and, hopefully, discuss my qualifications further.

Sincerely,

*Sammy Owl*

Sammy Owl  
MBA Candidate, Class of 2013

## Providing References

Be ready with names and contact information of at least three references. It is important to **contact your references in advance** and ask their permission to list them as a reference.

Your reference sheet should have your name and contact information printed at the top, matching your resume header. For each contact, mention the nature of the relationship (e.g. Former Supervisor, Client, Colleague) and provide a phone number and email address.

Once you have a reference list, you should update your contacts when a potential employer asks for your reference list. Send your references the most updated copy of your resume, a copy of the job description, and a few talking points that you'd like them to highlight.

Only submit a reference list when requested to do so by an employer.

### EXAMPLE:

#### **SAMMY OWL**

1600 Main Street, Houston, TX  
sam.owl@rice.edu | 713.123.4567

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#### REFERENCES

#### **Ryan Bennett**

Principal Financial Analyst, KBR  
email@company.com, 713-555-1234  
Supervisor

#### **Jim Norris**

Associate, Alvarez & Marsal  
email@alvarez.com, 713-123-4567  
Colleague

#### **Sara Hunter**

Associate, Alvarez & Marsal  
email@alvarez.com, 713-987-6543  
Colleague