Cover Letters

Drop-in advising hours for cover letter reviews is held in the Career Center Monday - Thursday 2:00-5:00
Friday 2:00-4:00.
Take advantage of this time and use the Duke Career Guide-you'll find much more advice as well as samples.

While a resume is a summary of your qualifications, the cover letter is your sales pitch to the employer. The cover letter gives you the opportunity to draw an employer’s attention to the skills and experience outlined in your resume, expand upon information which particularly matches you to the position for which you wish to be considered and highlight special achievements which might otherwise be overlooked.

A well-written cover letter can make a significant difference in successfully arranging an interview or meeting with a potential employer. The key is to approach the letter as though you were the employer reading it. Be sure the letter gets right to the point. Pick the items from your resume that differentiate you from other candidates. Your cover letter should speak of what you have done and, as important, what you can do for the company.

The structure of the cover letter consist of an introductory paragraph, a middle paragraph for reflecting your unique strengths matched to the employer’s needs, and a concluding paragraph stating your planned course of action. Be sure the middle paragraph is more than a listing of the items on your resume; this is your chance to explain what you gained from your experiences and to brag! Use the last paragraph to be proactive and follow-up.

Paragraph Samples

Paragraph 1

In a recent article in The Wall Street Journal, I learned that ABC is expanding/initiating/developing...
I was very impressed with what John Doe told me at the Duke Career Fair about the...
The description on your Web site of ABC’s ... was perfect for my career interests because...
Professor Whoever [or any network contact] suggested I write to you when we were discussing my career interests because...

Paragraph 2
I have selected a combination of courses where I can apply my...skills. I chose a history major because ... and elected courses which... Last Fall I decided to test my interest in..., and designed a special internship [describe how you did it and give details about what it was].
I now know...because... My work with the Whatever Group has been especially rewarding/challenging because... A major problem of...was resolved by... I believe my resume shows my high energy level/ability to prioritize academics, activities, and work/experience at juggling responsibilities/ability to meet deadlines/etc. by...

Paragraph 3
I will be home for Winter Break and will call you next week to arrange a convenient time in early January when we can meet to talk about summer opportunities for me at ABCD.