

Cover and Thank-You Letter Guidelines

While resumes may receive the majority of the spotlight when it comes to evaluating an candidate's application, and varying opinions exist whether a cover letter is necessary or not, the Graduate Career Services Center recommends students *always* include a cover letter in all applications.

The cover letter is your opportunity to express your interest in a company; your passion for the job function, industry, product or services; and highlight your skills and experiences most relevant to the position. It's also your moment to express yourself and inject a little of your own personality, while further demonstrating your communication skills.

Five Reasons to Write a Targeted Cover Letter

1. It is a mini-interview on paper.
2. It is your opportunity to make a good impression with the employer and make it to the next round.
3. It generates interest in your application by highlighting your suitability for and interest in the position.
4. It is an opportunity to showcase skills and accomplishments not included on your resume.
5. Employers may use the letter to assess your communication skills.

Four Steps to Write a Targeted Cover Letter

Step 1: Analyze the position and the company

- Underline key words or phrases in the job description that offer clues the employer wants or requires
- Identify why you are interested in the position and company
- Identify the recruiter or hiring manager for the position
- Identify any contacts you have within the organization

Step 2: Compare your credentials with the position

- List at least three key accomplishments or experiences relevant to the position
- Identify transferable skills that make you an ideal candidate:
 - Communication skills
 - Teamwork and interpersonal skills
 - Leadership skills
 - Work ethic traits (self-motivation, initiative, ambition, reliability, drive, stamina)
 - Logic, intelligence, proficiency in study

Step 3: Write the letter

- Use the cover letter template and checklist on the website
- The letter should answer the following questions:
 - Why are you interested in the position and company?
 - How are you qualified for the position?
 - Why should you be hired over other candidates?

Step 4: Proofread and review

- Complete the self-review using the cover letter checklist
- Have a career advisor and a friend review your letter

Content and Format: Component Parts

Contact Information Header (to match Tommy Trojan Resume format)

Date

Name of Contact Person

Title

Organization

Street Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr. (or) Ms. Lastname:

Opening Paragraph: **STATE YOUR REASON FOR WRITING** – Introduce yourself and the purpose of your letter: who you are and why you are writing. State what position you are applying for and why. Briefly mention how you learned of this opportunity or how the employer’s name was obtained. State what you know about the company/position that intrigues you. Explain why you are an ideal candidate and interested in this particular company. (Use the company’s specific name). Mention the names (1-3) of alumni in the company with whom you have networked.

Middle Paragraph or Bulleted List of Achievements: **EMPHASIZE YOUR STRONGEST QUALIFICATIONS – BASED ON THEIR NEEDS** - An overview of your competencies (talents, knowledge and skills) and unique strengths, stated in terms of the unique value you bring to the company. Support what you say by noting the positive results you achieved in internships, previous work or educational contexts. Map your competencies to the requirements/needs of the specific job of interest or organization. Sell yourself.

Closing Paragraph: **STATE EXPECTED ACTION** - Thank the reader of your letter. State how you may be contacted if your phone number and email are not listed above. Note what you will do to follow up. Remember to state when you will be calling (approximately one week after you send the letter).

Sincerely,

Your signature (Four blank lines for this)

Your typed name

EXAMPLE – PLEASE DO NOT COPY

THOMAS (TOMMY) TROJAN

630 Childs Way, Suite 310, Los Angeles, CA 90089 · (213) 740-0803 · tommy.trojan.2018@marshall.usc.edu

December 11, 20XX

Ms. Jane Smith
Sr. Recruiter, MBA & Graduate Programs
Leapfrog
333 Anystreet Road
El Segundo, California 90245

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am passionate about becoming an Associate Brand Manager at LeapFrog. Recently I spoke with an alumna, Vinitha Ramanathan, and discussed her experience working for LeapFrog, which has further inspired me to pursue a post-MBA career with your firm. I will be graduating with an MBA from the University of Southern California, Marshall School of Business in May of 2018.

My background includes key facets of brand management to support success in the ABM role, creating an ideal combination of experiences you seek: a growth-oriented view of strengthening the unique product positioning of the brand portfolio from creating a five year strategic roadmap for the Nordstrom loyalty program; a strong analytical, problem-solving ability from utilizing quantitative consumer data at Hall & Partners; and a keen creative sense that resonates with consumers from developing digital communication at Warner Bros.

Unique Product Positioner: Analyzed consumer usage behavior, visit frequency, and basket size for acquisition and retention opportunities as lead in a product performance analysis of the Nordstrom's loyalty rewards portfolio.

- *Result:* Determined market opportunities for 51% member growth by 2018 and a roadmap to obtain an 11% increase in new customer acquisition in 2014.

Strong Analytical Problem Solver: Synthesized large quantities of data into meaningful, actionable results that provided insight into consumer trends and strategic direction for future communication at Hall & Partners.

- *Result:* Increased blue chip client's market share by 1.5% and unaided brand awareness by 6%.

Creative Thinker: Developed engaging consumer content for digital communication that effectively targeted audiences through demographic and behavioral actions to prompt website traffic with Warner Bros.

- *Result:* Increased consumer traffic to e-commerce website by 20%, open rates by 40%, and subscriptions to a key fan newsletter by 10%.

LeapFrog has been a part of my life since my younger brother was born over a decade ago. As an avid consumer of toys as both a big brother and an uncle, I enrolled in business school with the intent to pursue a career in the business of toys. It was when I attended the 2015 Toy Fair in New York that I had the opportunity to truly understand Leapfrog from a business perspective. I watched as the LeapFrog team won multiple awards for innovation and was energized by their charisma and creativity.

I truly believe LeapFrog is a company where I can contribute with my passion for the business of toys, aptitude for strategic thinking, and devotion to innovation. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Thomas (Tommy) Trojan
MBA Candidate
USC Marshall School of Business

EXAMPLE – PLEASE DO NOT COPY

TRACY TROJAN

630 Childs Way, Suite 310, Los Angeles, CA 90089 · (213) 740-0803 · tommy.trojan.2018@marshall.usc.edu

February 21, 20XX

Ms. Kirsten Gates
Program Manager, Financial Solutions
Hewlett-Packard Company 3000 Hanover Street
Palo Alto, CA 94304-1185 USA

Dear Ms. Gates:

I am a student in the full-time MBA program at the USC Marshall School of Business. I am writing to express my interest in the MBA Summer Finance Internship at Hewlett-Packard. Through my ongoing conversations with you and Adejoke Shodeinde beginning at the Consortium's Orientation Program, I believe my strengths in analysis, building relationships, and communication make me a great fit for the Hewlett-Packard team.

Data management and information technology continue to evolve rapidly in an increasingly competitive industry. As Hewlett-Packard continues to transform, not only will its expertise in hardware, software and service remain valuable, but its strong culture of innovation, teamwork and integrity will position the company to remain a leader in the industry.

Some of the expertise I have cultivated through my professional experience include:

Analytical Skills: As an HR consultant, I analyzed a Fortune 500 client's industry and unique workplace to evaluate options and provide recommendations about a wide range of employee relations issues, including policy development, performance management, recruitment strategies, compliance and allegations of workplace impropriety often in the face of having ambiguous evidence.

Building Relationships: An essential element to consulting is the ability to partner with clients. Recently I partnered with five of the senior managers to establish a mentoring program spanning both cross-functional teams as well as verticals within the company. The employee retention rate increased by 20% over the first year of the program, with an added increase of 25% in retaining female employees.

Communication Skills: I am adept at processing complex and detailed information and distilling it in a comprehensible format verbally or in writing. Furthermore, I am skilled at drafting detailed reports in which clarity and completeness are critical to support conclusions regarding sensitive employee matters.

I am excited about the opportunity to sit for an interview to discuss in more detail how my background will position me as a valuable member of Hewlett-Packard.

Sincerely,

Tracy Trojan
MBA Candidate, Class of 2018
USC Marshall School of Business

Thank-You Notes

Thank you letters are a must.

Regardless of how important you feel the informational interview, phone screen, campus interview, or onsite interview may have been, it is imperative to send an acknowledgement to the employer. Thank you notes may be in the form of formal letters, thank you cards sent through the mail, or email. Each type of thank you acknowledgement sets a specific tone, so evaluate your situation carefully before choosing an appropriate method. A rule of thumb: If you and the employer have communicated via email as part of the interview process, an email thank you note is acceptable. However, it should be professional and contain the same information as a written note.

Remember to thank the employer for their time, reiterate your interest in the position, any specific details about the job that may have been mentioned by the employer. You may also mention anything to differentiate yourself from the next candidate, and reiterate your interest in future communication or follow up.

Thank-You Note Sample Text

Dear Mr. Flanton,

I want to thank you for the time you spent with me this past Thursday discussing the Investment Banking position. After our in-depth conversation regarding the structure of the Public Finance team, and the continued professional development employees receive, my interest in the position has grown. I am confident my internship experiences with Goldman Sachs, and the knowledge I gained on Mock and Biddle's model portfolio during my graduate research project, have prepared me well for a full-time position with Mock and Biddle.

I look forward to the next steps in the interview process and hope to hear from you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Mark Uberski

Dear Ms. Miller,

I enjoyed our conversation regarding the internship opportunity available this summer in the Insurance Marketing department at Edward Jones. Our discussion surrounding the importance of applying the four P's of Marketing (Price, Product, Place, and Promotion) heightened my enthusiasm and eagerness to become a part of the Edward Jones Insurance Marketing team.

I look forward to the potential of successfully contributing to your team. Please feel free to contact me at 213-555-1212 for additional information.

Regards,

Lauren Smith

Formatting Emails

Subject: Write an Informative Subject Line (You may reference the job title.)

Dear Ms. Smith:

When using email for business correspondence, keep the following tips in mind:

- Include an appropriate salutation. Use titles for customers, prospective employers, and others you don't know well. Reserve informal salutations such as "Hi" for people you know well.
- Use bullets for information that can be presented in list form.
- Use correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- Keep your email concise.
- Consider sending lengthy messages as an attachment – write a brief executive summary email to describe the attachment.
- Avoid sending negative or confidential information by email.
- End with a positive goodwill statement.
- Use an appropriate closing. Reserve informal closings such as "Later" for people you know well.
- Include contact information in your signature. Many organizations, like USC Marshall, ask that employees end with a branded signature.

Sincerely,

Tommy

Tommy Trojan
MBA Candidate 2018
Marshall School of Business
University of Southern California

Cover Letter Checklist

Proofread and Advisor Review:

- Once the letter is complete, proofread twice!
- Ask a peer to proofread your resume. If English is your second language, ask a native speaker to review as well.
- Email at least one cover letter to your career advisor to review before applying to jobs or internships.

Overall Appearance:

- One page, 10-12 point font, left justified.
- Appropriate length: approximately ½ to ¾ of the page is the body of the letter.
- The letter is a unique, individualized letter written specifically to that recruiter/company/position.
- Proofread twice: no spelling or grammatical errors, company and recruiter name is spelled correctly, and the company name throughout the letter is consistent.
- Varied sentence structure to avoid starting every sentence with “I.”

Your Contact Information and Date:

- Copy the header from your Tommy Trojan resume including your name and full contact information.
- The correct date is included, located above the addressed-to block and salutation.

Addressed-to Block and Salutation:

- The addressed-to block is left justified, and includes the full name of the recruiter, title, company name, and address. (Check the listing in MCSO – nearly all postings include this information.)
- Double-check the spelling of the recruiter name (check gender if necessary), and company name. (EY is EY, not Ernst & Young, for example.)
- The salutation is formatted as follows: “Dear Mr. (or Ms.) Lastname:” Always address the salutation using the recruiter’s last name, and use a colon. (Omit the quotation marks above.)
- Do not include the company phone number, the recruiter’s email address, or a “RE:” in the address block.

Opening Paragraph:

- Indicate you are a student and in which graduate program in the USC Marshall School of Business, AND/OR indicate your connection to the addressee, who referred you, or mention your related past (and years of) experience.
- Identify the position using the exact job title from the posting, and indicate your interest in the company/position.
- Name 1-3 contacts with whom you’ve networked and what insights you’ve gained about the company or position.
- Indicate your interest and identify key relevant skills you bring as a candidate.
- Don’t include “My name is . . .” since your letter includes your contact header above and name in the signature below.

Middle Paragraph:

- Indicate at least three specific and relevant accomplishments that each relate to a skill highly desired in the candidate.
- Quantify your successes using numbers, monetary figures, or percentages to emphasize achievements, not just tasks.
- Utilize active, accurate, and descriptive action verbs that relate to the desired skills.
- Indicate international experience, industry knowledge, and technical skills, if applicable.

Closing Paragraph:

- Include a thank you to the reader.
- If applying to an on-campus interview, you may indicate “I look forward to meeting you.”
- Close using “Sincerely,” 3-4 blank lines, followed by “name, MBA Candidate Class of ####, USC Marshall School of Business” in block format. Or, “name, MS Candidate Class of ####, USC Marshall School of Business.”