**Cover Letters**

***All cover letters should:***

**Explain why you are sending a resume**.   
Don't send a resume without a cover letter.    
Don't make the reader guess what you are asking for; be specific: Do you want a summer internship opportunity, or a permanent position at graduation; are you inquiring about future employment possibilities?

**Tell specifically how you learned about the position or the organization** — a flyer posted in your department, a web site, a family friend who works at the organization. It is appropriate to mention the name of someone who suggested that you write.

**Convince the reader to look at your resume.**   
The cover letter will be seen first.   
Therefore, it must be very well written and targeted to that employer.

**Call attention to elements of your background** — education, leadership, experience — that are relevant to a position you are seeking. Be as specific as possible, using examples.

**Reflect your attitude,** personality, motivation, enthusiasm, and communication skills.

**Provide or refer to any information specifically requested** in a job advertisement that might not be covered in your resume, such as availability date, or reference to an attached writing sample.

**Indicate what you will do to** **follow-up**.

**In a letter of application** — applying for an advertised opening — applicants often say something like "I look forward to hearing from you." However, if you have further contact info (e.g. phone number) and if the employer hasn't said "no phone calls," it's better to take the initiative to follow-up, saying something like, "I will contact you in the next two weeks to see if you require any additional information regarding my qualifications."

**In a letter of inquiry** — asking about the possibility of an opening — don't assume the employer will contact you. You should say something like, "I will contact you in two weeks to learn more about upcoming employment opportunities with (name of organization)."  Then mark your calendar to make the call.

Page margins, font style and size

For hard copy, left and right page margins of one to 1.5 inches generally look good. You can adjust your margins to balance how your document looks on the page.

Use a font style that is simple, clear and commonplace, such as Times New Roman, Arial or Calibri. Font SIZES from 10-12 points are generally in the ballpark of looking appropriate. Keep in mind that **different font styles in the same point size are not the same size**. A 12-point Arial is larger than a 12-point Times New Roman.

If you are having trouble fitting a document on one page, sometimes a slight margin and/or font adjustment can be the solution.

Serif or sans serif? Sans (without) serif fonts are those like Arial and Calibri that don't have the small finishing strokes on the ends of each letter. There is a great deal of research and debate on the pros and cons of each. Generally sans serif fonts are used for on-monitor reading and serif fonts are used for lengthy print items (like books); serif fonts are considered more formal.

Should your resume and cover letter font style and size match? It can be a nice touch to look polished.

**Sample cover letter format guidelines:**

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| *(Hard copy: sender address and contact info at top.* ***Your address and the date can be left-justified, or centered****.)*  Your Street Address City, State Zip Code Telephone Number E-mail Address  Month, Day, Year  Mr./Ms./Dr. FirstName LastName Title Name of Organization Street or P. O. Box Address City, State Zip Code  Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Last Name:  Opening paragraph: State why you are writing; how you learned of the organization or position, and basic information about yourself.  2nd paragraph: Tell why you are interested in the employer or type of work the employer does (Simply stating that you are interested does not tell why, and can sound like a form letter). Demonstrate that you know enough about the employer or position to relate your background to the employer or position. Mention specific qualifications, which make you a good fit for the employer’s needs. (Focus on what you can do for the employer, not what the employer can do for you.) This is an opportunity to explain in more detail relevant items in your resume. Refer to the fact that your resume is enclosed. Mention other enclosures if such are required to apply for a position.  3rd paragraph: Indicate that you would like the opportunity to interview for a position or to talk with the employer to learn more about their opportunities or hiring plans. State what you will do to follow up, such as telephone the employer within two weeks. If you will be in the employer’s location and could offer to schedule a visit, indicate when. State that you would be glad to provide the employer with any additional information needed. Thank the employer for her/his consideration.  Sincerely,  *(Your handwritten signature [on hard copy])*  Your name typed  Enclosure(s) (refers to resume, etc.)  *(****Note: the contents of your letter might best be arranged into four paragraphs. Consider what you need to say and use good writing style****. See the following examples for variations in organization and layout.)* |

Cover letters generally fall into one of two categories:

1. **Letter of application:** applying for a specific, advertised opening. See:

[Sample 3.1:  letter of application following personal meeting, hard copy version](http://www.career.vt.edu/JobSearchGuide/CoverLetterSamples.html#Sample31)

[Sample 3.2: letter of application for advertised position, e-mail version](http://www.career.vt.edu/JobSearchGuide/CoverLetterSamples.html#Sample32)

[Sample 3.3: letter of application for advertised position, e-mail version](http://www.career.vt.edu/JobSearchGuide/CoverLetterSamples.html#Sample33)

[Sample 3.4: letter of application for advertised position, hard copy version](http://www.career.vt.edu/JobSearchGuide/CoverLetterSamples.html#Sample34)

1. **Letter of inquiry:** expressing interest in an organization, but you are not certain if there are current openings. See:

[Sample 3.5:  letter of inquiry about employment possibilities, e-mail version](http://www.career.vt.edu/JobSearchGuide/CoverLetterSamples.html#Sample35)

[Sample 3.6:  letter of inquiry about internship opportunities, hard copy version](http://www.career.vt.edu/JobSearchGuide/CoverLetterSamples.html#Sample36)

**Information-seeking letters and follow-up**

To draft an effective cover letter, you need to indicate that you know something about the employing organization.  Sometimes, even with research efforts, you don’t have enough information to do this. In such a case it is appropriate to write requesting information.

See [Sample 4.1:  Information seeking letter, hard copy version](http://www.career.vt.edu/JobSearchGuide/CoverLetterSamples.html#Sample41).

**After you receive the desired information** you can then draft a follow-up letter that:

**Thanks** the sender for the information;

**Markets** why you would be a good job candidate for that organization based on the information; and

**Explains** why you are sending your resume.

This means it does [what all cover letters should do](http://www.career.vt.edu/JobSearchGuide/CoverLetterSamples.html#allshould), as explained at the start above!

See [Sample 5.2:  Follow up letter to information seeking meeting](http://www.career.vt.edu/JobSearchGuide/CoverLetterSamples.html#Sample52).

**Sample 3.1 — Letter of application, hard copy version**

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| E-2 Apartment Heights Dr. Blacksburg, VA 24060 (540) 555-0101 abcd@vt.edu  February 22, 2011  Dr. Michelle Rhodes Principal, Wolftrap Elementary School 1205 Beulah Road Vienna, VA 22182  Dear Dr. Rhodes:  I enjoyed our conversation on February 18th at the Family and Child Development seminar on teaching elementary children and appreciated your personal input about balancing the needs of children and the community during difficult economic times.  This letter is to follow-up about the Fourth Grade Teacher position as discussed at the seminar.  I will complete my M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction at Virginia Tech in May 2011, and will be available for employment as soon as needed for the 2011-12 school year.  My teacher preparation program at Virginia Tech has included a full academic year of student teaching. Last semester I taught second grade and this semester am teaching fourth grade. These valuable experiences have afforded me the opportunity to:   * Develop lesson plans on a wide range of topics and varying levels of academic ability, * Work with emotionally and physically challenged students in a total inclusion program, * Observe and participate in effective classroom management approaches, * Complete in-service sessions on diversity, math and reading skills, and community relations.   My experience includes work in a private day care facility, Rainbow Riders Childcare Center, and in Virginia Tech’s Child Development Laboratory.  Both these facilities are NAEYC-accredited and adhere to the highest standards.  At both locations, I led small and large group activities, helped with lunches and snacks, and implemented appropriate activities.  Both experiences also provided me with extensive exposure to the implementation of developmentally appropriate activities and materials.  I enthusiastically look forward to putting my knowledge and experience into practice in the public school system. Next week I will be in Vienna, and I plan to call you to answer any questions that you may have.  I can be reached before then at (540) 555-7670.  Thank you for your consideration.  Sincerely,  *(handwritten signature)*  Donna Harrington  Enclosure |

**Sample 3.2  — Letter of application, e-mail version**

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| Subject line: ***(logical to recipient!)*** Application for sales representative for mid-Atlantic area  April 14, 2010  Mr. William Jackson Employment Manager Acme Pharmaceutical Corporation 13764 Jefferson Parkway Roanoke, VA 24019 jackson@acmepharmaceutical.com  Dear Mr. Jackson:  From the Acme web site I learned about your need for a sales representative for the Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina areas. I am very interested in this position with Acme Pharmaceuticals, and believe that my education and employment background are appropriate for the position.  You indicate that a requirement for the position is a track record of success in meeting sales goals. I have done this. After completion of my B.S. in biology, and prior to beginning my master’s degree in marketing, I worked for two years as a sales representative with a regional whole foods company.  My efforts yielded success in new business development, and my sales volume consistently met or exceeded company goals. I would like to repeat that success in the pharmaceutical industry, using my academic background in science and business. I will complete my M.S. in marketing in mid-May and will be available to begin employment in early June.  Attached is a copy of my resume, which more fully details my qualifications for the position.  I look forward to talking with you regarding sales opportunities with Acme Pharmaceuticals. Within the next week I will contact you to confirm that you received my e-mail and resume and to answer any questions you may have.  Thank you very kindly for your consideration.  Sincerely,  Layne A. Johnson 5542 Hunt Club Lane, #1 Blacksburg, VA 24060 (540) 555-8082 [lajohnson@vt.edu](mailto:lajohnson@vt.edu)  Resume attached as MS Word document *(assuming company web site instructed applicants to do this)* |

**Sample 3.3 — Letter of application, e-mail version**

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| Subject line: ***(logical to recipient!)*** Application for marketing research position #031210-528  March 14, 2010  Ms. Charlene Prince Director of Personnel Large National Bank Corporation Roanoke, VA 24040 cprince@largebank.com  Dear Ms. Prince:  As I indicated in our telephone conversation yesterday, I would like to apply for the marketing research position (#031210-528) advertised in the March 12th *Roanoke Times and World News*. With my undergraduate research background, my training in psychology and sociology, and my work experience, I believe I could make a valuable contribution to Large National Bank Corporation in this position.  In May I will complete my B.S. in Psychology with a minor in Sociology at Virginia Tech. As part of the requirements for this degree, I am involved in a senior marketing research project that has given me experience interviewing and surveying research subjects and assisting with the analysis of the data collected. I also have completed a course in statistics and research methods.  My experience also includes working part-time as a bookkeeper in a small independent bookstore with an annual budget of approximately $150,000.  Because of the small size of this business, I have been exposed to and participated in most aspects of managing a business, including advertising and marketing.  As the bookkeeper, I produced monthly sales reports that allow the owner/buyer to project seasonal inventory needs. I also assisted with the development of ideas for special promotional events and calculated book sales proceeds after each event in order to evaluate its success.  I believe my combination of business experience and social science research training is an excellent match for the marketing research position you described.  Enclosed is a a copy of my resume with additional information about my qualifications.  Thank you very much for your consideration.  I look forward to receiving your reply.  Sincerely,  Alex Lawrence 250 Prices Fork Road Blacksburg, VA 24060 (540) 555-1234 [alex.lawrence@vt.edu](mailto:alex.lawrence@vt.edu)  Resume attached as MS Word document |

**Sample 3.4 — Letter of application, hard copy version**

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| 1000 Terrace View Apts. Blacksburg, VA 24060 (540) 555-4523 stevemason@vt.edu  March 25, 2010  Ms. Janice Wilson Personnel Director Anderson Construction Company  3507 Rockville Pike Rockville, MD 20895  Dear Ms. Wilson:  I read in the March 24th *Washington Post* classified section of your need for a Civil Engineer or Building Construction graduate for one of your Washington, DC, area sites. I will be returning to the Washington area after graduation in May and believe that I have the necessary credentials for the project.  Every summer for the last five years I have worked at various levels in the construction industry. As indicated on my enclosed resume, I have worked as a general laborer, and moved up to skilled carpentry work, and last summer served as assistant construction manager on a two million dollar residential construction project.  In addition to this practical experience, I will complete requirements for my B.S. in Building Construction in May.  As you may know, Virginia Tech is one of the few universities in the country that offers such a specialized degree for the construction industry. I am confident that my degree, along with my years of construction industry experience, make me an excellent candidate for your job.  The Anderson Construction Company projects are familiar to me, and my aspiration is to work for a company that has your excellent reputation.  I would welcome the opportunity to interview with you. I will be in the Washington area during the week of April 12th and would be available to speak with you at that time. In the next week to ten days I will contact you to answer any questions you may have.  Thank you for your consideration.  Sincerely,  (handwritten signature)  Jesse Mason  Enclosure |

**Sample 3.5 — Letter of inquiry about employment possibilities, e-mail version**

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| Subject: ***(logical to recipient!)*** Inquiry about software engineering position after completion of M.S. in computer engineering  December 12, 2009  Mr. Robert Burns President, Template Division MEGATEK Corporation 9845 Technical Way Arlington, VA 22207 [burns@megatek.com](mailto:burns@megatek.com)  Dear Mr. Burns:  Via online research in Hokies4Hire through Career Services at Virginia Tech, I learned of MEGATEK. Next May I will complete my master of science in computer engineering. From my research on your web site, I believe there would be a good fit between my skills and interests and your needs. I am interested in a software engineering position upon completion of my degree.  As a graduate student, I am one of six members on a software development team in which we are writing a computer-aided aircraft design program for NASA. My responsibilities include designing, coding, and testing of a graphical portion of the program which requires the use of ZX-WWG for graphics input and output. I have a strong background in CAD, software development, and engineering, and believe that these skills would benefit the designing and manufacturing aspects of template software.  Enclosed is my resume with further background information.  My qualifications equip me to make a contribution to the project areas in which your division of MEGATEK is expanding efforts.  I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss a position with you, and will contact you in a week or ten days to answer any questions you may have and to see if you need any other information from me.  Thank you for your consideration.  Sincerely,  Morgan Stevens 123 Ascot Lane Blacksburg, VA 24060 (540) 555-2556 [mstevens@vt.edu](mailto:mstevens@vt.edu)  Resume attached as MS Word document |

**Sample 3.6 — Letter of inquiry about internship opportunities, hard copy version**

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| 2343 Blankinship Road Blacksburg, VA 24060 (540) 555-2233 StacyLeeGimble@vt.edu  January 12, 2010  Ms. Sylvia Range Special Programs Assistant Marion County Family Court Wilderness Challenge  303 Center Street Marion, VA 24560  Subj: Wilderness Challenge internship position  Dear Ms. Range:  This semester I am a junior at Virginia Tech, working toward my bachelor's degree in family and child development. I am seeking an internship for this summer 2010, and while researching opportunities in the field of criminal justice and law, I found that your program works with juvenile delinquents. I am writing to inquire about possible internship opportunities with the Marion County Family Court Wilderness Challenge.  My work background and coursework have supplied me with many skills and an understanding of dealing with the adolescent community; for example:   * 10 hours per week as a volunteer hotline assistant for a local intervention center. After a 50-hour training program, I counseled teenagers about personal concerns and referred them, when necessary, to appropriate professional services for additional help. * Residence hall assistant in my residence hall, which requires me to establish rapport with fifty residents and advise them on personal matters, as well as university policies. In addition, I develop social and educational programs and activities each semester for up to 200 participants.   My enclosed resume provides additional details about my background.  I will be in the Marion area during my spring break, March 6-10.  I will call you next week to see if it would be possible to meet with you in early March to discuss your program.  Thank you for your consideration.  Sincerely,  (handwritten signature)  Stacy Lee Gimble  Encl. |

**Sample 4.1 — Information seeking letter, hard copy version**

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| 23 Roanoke Street  Blacksburg, VA 24060 (540) 555-1123 K.Walker@vt.edu  October 23, 2010  Mr. James G. Webb Delon Hampton & Associates 800 K Street, N.W., Suite 720 Washington, DC 20001-8000  Dear Mr. Webb:  Next May I will complete my bachelor’s degree in Architecture at Virginia Tech, and am researching employment opportunities in the Washington area. I obtained your name from Professor (lastname) who teaches my professional seminar class this semester. S/he indicated that you had volunteered to provide highly motivated graduating students with career advice, and I hope that your schedule will permit you to allow me to ask for some of your time and advice. I am particularly interested in historic preservation and have done research on the DHA website to learn that your firm does work in this area. I am also interested in learning how the architects in your firm began their careers. My resume is enclosed simply to give you some information about my background and project work.  Within two weeks I will call you to arrange a time to speak to you by telephone or perhaps visit your office if that would be convenient. I will be in the Washington area during the week of November 22. I very much appreciate your time and consideration of my request, and I look forward to talking with you.  Sincerely,  (handwritten signature)  Kristen Walker  Encl. |

**Sample 5.2 — Follow-up letter to information seeking meeting, e-mail version**

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| Subject: ***(logical to recipient!)*** Thank you for meeting Tuesday, Nov. 23  November 26, 2010  Mr. James G. Webb Delon Hampton & Associates 800 K Street, N.W., Suite 720 Washington, DC 20001-8000 [webb@delon.com](mailto:webb@delon.com)  Dear Mr. Webb:  Thank you so much for taking time from your busy schedule to meet with me on Tuesday. It was very helpful to me to learn so much about the current projects of Delon Hampton & Associates and the career paths of several of your staff. I appreciate your reviewing my portfolio and encouraging my career plans. I also enjoyed meeting Beth Ormond, and am glad to have her suggestions on how I can make the most productive use of my last semester prior to graduation.  Based on what I learned from my visit to your firm and other research I have done, I am very interested in being considered for employment with DHA in the future. I will be available to begin work after I graduate in May 2011. As you saw from my portfolio, I have developed strong skills in the area of historical documentation and this is a good match for the types of projects in which your firm specializes. I have enclosed a copy of my resume to serve as a reminder of my background, some of which I discussed with you when we met.  During the next few months I will stay in contact with you in hopes that there may be an opportunity to join your firm. Thank you again for your generous help, and I hope you are enjoying a pleasant holiday.  Sincerely,  Kristin Walker 23 Roanoke Street Blacksburg, VA 24060 (540) 555-1123 kwalker@vt.edu |