

Writing a Cover Letter

This lesson is designed to help students learn about cover letters and how they can help them as they search for a job.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

1. Learn about cover letters
2. Find out the basic structure of a cover letter
3. Analyze what to include and exclude in a cover letter
4. Create a cover letter

ACTIVITIES

PART 1

Content Knowledge

Have students visit the *Resume Builder* on mefapathway.org in the *Create Profile* tab. If students do not currently have a completed resume within their MEFA Pathway account, allocate 10-15 minutes for students to fill out the Resume Builder. Through the Resume Builder, students will be able to create an objective and add that objective as well as their employment, education, honors and awards, activities, skills, and certifications to a resume.

Next, explain to students how resumes are used today and their purpose.

Now that students have a completed resume, introduce cover letters.

Ask the students if they have ever heard of a cover letter and what they think it entails. Explain to the students that a cover letter:

- Is a one-page document that introduces a job seeker's work history, professional skills, and personal interest in applying for a job.
- Is a potential employer's first impression of the applicant.
- Can be one of the most vital parts of an application.
- Will vary depending on who the audience is and the type of job being sought.

PART 2

Applying Information

Activity: Naomi is interested in applying for a receptionist position. From the list below, ask the students to help Naomi decide what qualities should or should not be included in her cover letter. Use the answer key at the end of this lesson for the discussion.

- Proficient in computers
- Practices ballet on the weekends
- Previously worked as a receptionist

Grade Level: 11-12

MEFA PATHWAY SECTIONS WITHIN THIS LESSON:

- Resume Builder

SUBJECT AREAS:

- Career Exploration

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Use the answer key at the end of this lesson for the discussion.
- Internet connection to work with the MEFA Pathway website

Email any questions to:
info@mefapathway.org

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LESSON PLAN

- Lives with her boyfriend and brother
- Maintains a friendly, caring, and positive attitude in stressful situations
- Enjoys dressing professionally
- Has professional phone etiquette

Ask students to reflect on this activity. What did they think about the various characteristics and whether or not they should have been included in a cover letter? Are there any other characteristics they would have included?

PART 3

Evaluating Information

Generally, cover letters should be short but to the point. Now that students have an idea of what a cover letter is and the types of characteristics to include and exclude, explain that a cover letter has three essential parts:

- **An opening:** expresses interest in the job
- **A middle:** explains why an applicant is right for the job
- **A closing:** restates an applicant's interest in the job, describes what documents accompany the cover letter, and notes how an employer can reach the applicant

Activity: Have students identify whether the sentences below belong in the opening, middle, or closing paragraph of the cover letter or if they don't belong. Use the answer key at the end of this lesson for the discussion.

1. With this letter is a copy of my resume. I can also provide you with references from past receptionist jobs.
2. I saw your advertisement online for a receptionist position at your office. I am very interested in the job.
3. I enjoy working with the general public and having a friendly, positive attitude, and can represent the company well.
4. I had to move back home to take care of sick family. I really need this job for the money.

PART 4

Critical Thinking/Creative Application

Now that students have an understanding of cover letters, students should create their own cover letter.

Activity: Naomi found this job posting in her local newspaper:

Receptionist for local hair salon needed. Applicant must be computer literate, comfortable working with the public, and highly organized. Previous receptionist experience preferred, but not required. This job is full-time and includes benefits and great pay. Applications without a cover letter will not be considered. Please send cover letter and resume to info@receptionistjob.com

Have students write a three-paragraph cover letter for the job posting Naomi found. Remind students that they will need to include an opening, middle, and closing paragraph.

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Writing a Cover Letter Answer Keys

Answer Key #1

Part 2: Applying Information

1. **Proficient in computers**

Yes, as most of her responsibilities might include work on a computer, Naomi should mention her computer proficiency as well as any programs that she's familiar with

2. **Previously worked as a receptionist**

Yes, Naomi has past experience in this work and it should be mentioned in her cover letter

3. **Lives with her boyfriend and brother**

No, who Naomi lives with is not relevant to the cover letter

4. **Enjoys dressing professionally**

No, a potential employer will most likely find out if Naomi dresses professionally within the interview

5. **Maintains a friendly, caring, and positive attitude in stressful situations**

Yes, as Naomi is going to be greeting clients, and as most jobs have the possibility of stressful situations, it is helpful to know that Naomi can handle stress with a positive attitude

6. **Professional phone etiquette**

Yes, as a receptionist, Naomi will most likely be spending a majority of her time taking calls so this characteristic should be included

7. **Does ballet on the weekends**

No, while this is a fun activity to learn that Naomi enjoys, it is not relevant to the job unless the job is at a dance studio

Answer Key #2

Part 3: Evaluating Information

1. *With this letter is a copy of my resume. I can also provide you with references from past receptionist jobs.*

Closing Paragraph: This sentence brings the applicant's cover letter to a close as well as refers to the resume the applicant included.

2. *I saw your advertisement online for a receptionist position at your office. I am very interested in the job.*

Opening Paragraph: The opening paragraph introduces the applicant to the employer and also allows the applicant to express interest in the job

3. *I enjoy working with the general public and having a friendly, positive attitude and can represent the company well.*

Middle Paragraph: In the middle paragraph, the applicant can describe to the potential employer qualities that make him or her the best person for the job—essentially what the applicant brings to the table.

4. *I had to move back home to take care of sick family. I really need this job for the money.*

Does not belong: This kind of personal information generally is not needed or appropriate to include in a cover letter.

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CATEGORY	EXCELLENT 4	GOOD 3	SATISFACTORY 2	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT 1
Content Accuracy	All content on the cover letter is accurate. There are no factual errors.	Most of the content is accurate but there is one piece of information that seems inaccurate.	The content is generally accurate, but one piece of information is clearly inaccurate.	The content is confusing or contains more than one factual error.
Sequencing of Information	The information is organized in a clear, logical way.	Most information is organized in a clear, logical way.	Some information is logically sequenced.	There is no clear plan for the organization of information.
Effectiveness	The cover letter includes all material needed to give a good understanding of the student.	The cover letter is lacking one or two key elements.	The cover letter is missing more than two key elements.	The cover letter is lacking several key elements and has inaccuracies.
Font Choice & Formatting	Font formats (size, bold, italic) have been carefully planned to enhance readability and content.	Font formats have been carefully planned to enhance readability.	Font formats have been carefully planned to complement the content. It may be a little hard to read.	Font formatting makes it very difficult to read the material.
Conventions. Student uses proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	The cover letter has no misspellings or grammatical errors.	The cover letter has 1- 2 misspellings, but no grammatical errors.	The cover letter has 1- 2 grammatical errors but no misspellings.	The cover letter has more than 2 grammatical and/or spelling errors.