

Career & Professional Development Center
College of Natural Sciences
Morrill III, Room 215
www.cns.umass.edu/careers

Cover Letter Guide



UMass**Amherst**

Multiple forms of correspondence are important during your job search. While your resume is your primary marketing tool, other documents serve as key supporting materials and create an overall picture of who you are.

Whether in traditional letter form or transmitted via email, all correspondence should be professional in language and tone and use traditional business letter formatting. Use the same style font as on your resume and be sure the font is large enough to be easily read – between 10-12 pt.

Correspondence Types

Correspondence for job seekers can include cover letters for internships or full-time positions, email outreach, and “prospecting” or letters of inquiry. Letters and emails should be individually written and tailored to the specific opportunity.

Email Communications

Whenever contacting a prospective employer via email, communicate with the same care as you would in a formal business setting or other professional document. An email message to a prospective employer is not casual and should never simply indicate “see attached resume.” You want to be brief, but not stale. Format an email with appropriate salutations, proper spelling and grammar and a professional signature line.

- In the subject line, make the reason for your email clear and succinct: “Application for Analyst Internship.” Pay attention to whether or not they ask you to put specific phrases, job reference numbers or names in your subject line. If you are networking, put your shared contact name in the subject line, to catch the reader’s attention. For example: Professor Deborah Henson suggested I contact you
- **Proofread!** Spellcheck won’t catch words spelled correctly but misused (ex. “their” instead of “there”). Review your emails carefully for tone and grammar before sending them
- Don’t use emoticons or other common email or text messaging expressions. Avoid all caps, which can be interpreted as “yelling”, or all lowercase letters, which is overly casual
- Your email address should also convey a professional tone: “bigpartyanimal@gmail.com” will not impress
- Include your first and last name in the name of files that you attach to an email (ex. JosephJonesResume.doc). Many employers save all attached documents to an applicant folder; you want them to be able to locate your documents easily. Do not call your cover letter, CoverLetter.doc.

Cover Letters

The cover letter introduces you and your resume and is a vital part of the application process. It should be no longer than one page – a letter that is longer runs the risk of not being read, and should be sent only if requested.

A well-developed cover letter can get your resume read; conversely, a poorly written or missing cover letter may hinder your consideration for a position. It is important to write in a way that communicates genuine enthusiasm and interest for the position and the employer. **Each letter should be personalized for the organization, individual, and position**, including keywords from the job posting, and should not just repeat what is already in your resume. **Do not use a template that has not been properly tailored to the specific job.** Your cover letter should reflect the requirements and skills the company is seeking in the job description.

The proper form of a cover letter (see template on following page) includes your contact information at the top, followed by the date, followed by the company/employer information. Whenever possible, avoid using “Dear Sir/Madam” or “To Whom It May Concern” as salutations. A cover letter should be addressed to an individual by name or a department when applicable, or at the very least, address your letter “Dear Hiring Manager”. You may want to visit the company’s website to see if you can find the specific contact name. It is also acceptable to call the organization’s front desk to inquire to whom you should direct your letter or the name of the position supervisor. Going this extra step is a good way of demonstrating your interest in the position. A cover letter is typically three to four paragraphs, including:

Introduction paragraph

This is where you introduce yourself and specify the position for which you are applying. Indicate how you found the position: for example, through an online job posting, CareerConnect, market research, or a referral by a current employee. Explain what about the organization and position appeals to you. This is where you highlight that you've done your research by mentioning one of the employer's recent accomplishments, projects, or tenets of their mission statement. Finally, complete the paragraph by stating, in one sentence, why you would be a strong candidate for the position. This shouldn't be a long paragraph; 4-5 sentences will suffice.

Body paragraph(s)

This is where you summarize your qualifications *in relation to the position for which you are applying*. You want to **demonstrate what you have to offer the employer (not what you hope to gain from them)**. Tie your skillset and experience to two or three themes or qualifications that the employer has stated it is looking for in an applicant. Emphasize your abilities; do not simply restate points from your resume. Use this opportunity to explain more about your skills. Expand on where you developed them, how you have used them to accomplish a notable result, why you are adept at utilizing them. Weave together your academic background, activities, and work experience to provide the reader with a more robust picture of what you can bring to the organization. This should be the longest and/or most in-depth paragraph(s) of your letter.

Conclusion paragraph

This is where you restate your interest in the organization and summarize, in a sentence or two, what you have to offer. Provide your contact information again and indicate any next steps you plan to pursue. For example, you may indicate plans to follow up with a phone call at a certain time or a day, or request a meeting to discuss the position in detail. Finally, be sure to thank the reader for his/her time and consideration.

Keep copies of all the application materials you send out. If you hear nothing after a couple of weeks, you can follow up with the employer to inquire if any further information is needed and to reiterate your interest.

Keep in mind, there is more than one right way to write a cover letter. Solicit feedback from as many people as possible to gain a clearer sense of how to approach yours.

Prospecting Letter/Letter of Inquiry

A prospecting letter can be an effective way to explore possibilities and gain information about an organization, or even to uncover hidden job opportunities. A prospecting letter should outline your strongest qualifications. Within the letter be sure to indicate your source of information and do some personal marketing. You can request an informational interview and should express appreciation for the reader's consideration. A prospecting letter should include the following:

- Indicate your interest and reveal the source of the information you have about the employer
- Outline your strongest qualifications. Focus on broader occupational dimensions to describe how your qualifications, experience and motivation match the work environment, demonstrating how you could be an asset
- Your suggested action plan. Request an interview and indicate that you will call during a specific time period to discuss interview possibilities, and express appreciation for the reader's consideration

Plan Your Customized Cover Letter

Who is the contact receiving your application? (Name, Title, Company Name and Address)

HINT: Instead of "Dear Hiring Manager," do some internet sleuthing to find the name of the recruiter or dept head.

Name or Title of the Internship or Job? (Include Job Number if in the description)

How did you learn of the position? (UMass Career Services, company website, job fair, recruiter)

What is your personal brand that makes you memorable? How are you different from others in your major?

(interdisciplinary, experienced, a people-person, ability to learn software quickly, etc.)

HINT: You have the info below from doing the "Customize Your Resume" handout.

What Does the Employer Want?

List the skills & qualities in the job description
(or deduce the valuable skills for such a position):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What's Your Best Evidence Match?

List resume entries, experiences, classes; *anything*
that proves and demonstrates your wanted skills:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Include all info from the top box in your letter setup, greeting and introductory paragraph. Express excitement and passion for the position and your readiness for it.

In your middle paragraphs, draw explicit links between your experiences and which elements of the job description each fulfills. (e.g. My participation in the DataFest competition gives me direct experience in doing data analysis to enhance sales).

Don't ignore weak or absent skill matches. Explain the closest thing you have done and express a willingness to learn that skill on the job or before it begins. (e.g. I have used Gimp photo-editing software, so I am confident that I could quickly learn to do similar tasks in Photoshop).

Below is a sample Internship description, followed by a Customized Cover Letter tailored to the position for a Junior Math Major. Highlighting in bold is shown for emphasis so you see how to look for key skills the employer is seeking.

Intern - Product/Pricing Analytics, MAPFRE Insurance

Location: Webster, MA

Job Summary

MAPFRE Insurance is offering a unique opportunity to highly motivated college students who thrive in a **team-oriented, fast-paced** and enjoyable work environment. If you're ready to learn about the insurance industry and have a strong work ethic, this is a great way for you to start your career. As an intern at MAPFRE Insurance, you'll find yourself tackling real business projects that make an impact on our company. You will learn about departmental and corporate functions and have opportunities to network with other MAPFRE employees and interns in the program. Interns will also participate as a team in a **Day of Caring community service project** and work together to plan and **implement an end of summer recognition and reflection ceremony**.

This is a twelve week summer internship from May 22 to August 10, 2017. Interns will typically work Monday through Thursday. Interns must commit to the schedule for the summer and participate in planned training and activities.

Candidate must be **enrolled in an accredited college** degree program. Must be able to provide own transportation.

Department-specific responsibilities, project description, deliverables, etc.:

Utilizes Microsoft Excel, PowerPivot, Power Query, Access or other database and spreadsheet applications to produce functional reports and exhibits. **Interprets and summarizes the data** for Product Management, **identifying positive and negative trends** and working with Product Analysts and Managers to **develop strategies to address and/or capitalize on these trends**.

Will be involved in developing new reports, from beginning to end, using various report creating techniques and methodologies. These will include, but not limited to, developing Key Performance Indicator reports, Dashboards reports, and other **reports that include key metrics to help measure the performance of individual product lines**.

Job Requirements:

College Level Preferred:

Undergraduate (**Rising Junior or Senior**)

Majors and/or Coursework Preferred:

Business Related, Actuary, **Data Analytics, Statistics, Mathematics**

Preferred Qualifications: Microsoft Office Proficiency

Strong database skills

Solid written and verbal communication skills Math aptitude

Analytical and problem solving abilities

On the next page is a Sample Cover Letter customized specifically for this job description.

123 Triangle Street
Amherst, MA 01002

February 1, 2017

Joan Crosby
Human Resources Coordinator
MAPFRE Insurance
44 Gore Road
Webster, Massachusetts 01570

Dear Ms. Crosby,

I am applying for the Product/Pricing Analytics Intern position as posted on the University of Massachusetts Amherst Career Services website. I am **currently a junior at UMass**, pursuing a Bachelor of Science Degree in **Mathematics** with a concentration in **statistics**. My experience with **solving analytical problems** in the classroom has ignited a desire to apply my skills to real world scenarios. I am very passionate about the possible opportunity to assist in the work of the insurance industry **providing people with a sense of security** in their business and personal lives. I am a quick study, a detailed-oriented self-starter, and an excellent team member.

My involvement in **statistics driven coursework** and extracurricular activities has provided me with a solid understanding of the importance of data analysis to the success of any business. This past April, I attended the Five College DataFest where students had the chance to **work in teams to assess the raw data provided by TicketMaster and to draw conclusions about the company's product**. This experience allowed me to gain a deeper appreciation of how the analyzation of specific information can be used to answer targeted questions, **allowing for vital business growth**. While studying abroad this past fall semester at University College of Cork, Ireland, I gained further knowledge in **data analysis and the financial applications of math** while also developing an international perspective which can be vital in today's business world.

Outside of the classroom, I have gained important experience in **teamwork** and **communication** in **fast paced environments** through my various jobs in the service industry. My work as a New Students Orientation Leader, this past summer, provided me with essential leadership and organizational skills. This opportunity also allowed me and my fellow team members to share an enjoyable few months **creating a welcoming community for incoming students**. My educational success and life experiences have prepared me to utilize my abilities to make a contribution in a professional environment. An internship with MAPFRE Insurance would be the perfect opportunity to apply my skills to a meaningful real world setting. I look forward to discussing the position with you further and learning more about the company at the University's upcoming career fair. If you need any additional information please feel free to contact me at (413) 123-4567 or at pmantanelli@umass.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Polly Mantanelli

NOTE: You do NOT need to boldface key skills in your cover letter. But printing and underlining them in the job description itself will help you ensure you are addressing the employer's specific needs.