GUIDE TO WRITING COVER LETTERS

I  STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Choose appropriate paper.** The paper you use for your cover letter should match the paper you use for your resume in size, weight, and color. Use 8 ½ x 11 paper in white, off-white, ivory, or light gray, with a bond weight of 24 lbs.

2. **Use standard business-letter format.** Begin with your name and address in a single-spaced block. Below this, type the date. Next, the recipient's name and address should appear in a second, single-spaced block.

3. **If possible, address the letter to a specific individual.** Begin the letter with "Dear [title and last name]" followed by a colon. If necessary, call the company to request the name and title of the person responsible for hiring.

   If you cannot address your letter to a specific individual, the traditional practice is to use the salutation *Dear Sir or Madam*. Note, however, that some women now find the term *madam* offensive. Some authorities, therefore, recommend simply eliminating the salutation if you cannot address your letter to a specific individual. *Do not* begin the letter with *To whom it may concern*.

4. **Introduce yourself.** Your opening paragraph should indicate what position you are applying for and how you heard about it. If you have a specific contact (alumnus, family member, etc.) at the organization, this is the place to mention it. Close this paragraph with a sentence or two explaining why you are interested in the position.

5. **Sell yourself.** Indicate why you are qualified for the job and what you have to offer the employer. Mention a few specific accomplishments that demonstrate your qualifications. Avoid generalizations. Highlight key points of your resume, but do not merely repeat it. Remember that the employer is not concerned with why the job is right for you, but rather with why you are right for the job.

6. **Conclude assertively.** Your concluding paragraph should state that you would welcome an interview to discuss the position further. Indicate that if you do not hear from them in two or three 1. weeks, you'll follow up with a call or email to learn where they are in the hiring process. Don't forget to thank the recipient for taking the time to review your application.

7. **Close appropriately.** Below the last paragraph, type *Sincerely*, followed by a comma. Leave four blank spaces for your signature, then type your full name. Below your typed name, type the word *Enclosure* (indicating that you have enclosed your resume).

II  IMPORTANT TIPS

1. **Do not exceed one page.** Ever. Enough said.

2. **Adopt a positive tone.** Use clear, assertive language, including strong verbs, to describe your activities and accomplishments. You want to come across as confident, but not cocky.

3. **Use a formal but conversational style.** Avoid using big words and complex sentences just to sound impressive. Rather, keep your vocabulary simple and your sentences concise. Never use instant message abbreviations!

4. **Demonstrate enthusiasm and creativity.** The cover letter is an important aspect of your sales pitch! It should motivate the reader to learn more about you, that is, to read your resume and offer you an interview.
5. **Do your homework.** The letter should be tailored to the specific organization and position to which you are applying; avoid generic language that could be used to address any employer. Do some research on the company to learn about its mission, values, needs, and goals. As you present your qualifications, show how you would fit into the organization.

6. **Proofread carefully.** Typos, spelling mistakes, and poor grammar tell employers that you are a sloppy worker and a poor communicator. Even one such mistake can reduce your chances of getting hired. Proofread your letter very carefully. Ideally, you should have others review it as well.

7. **Do not fold your cover letter.** Enclose it with your resume in a 9” x 12” manila envelope.

### III SAMPLE LETTER

Joe Miner  
1234 Miner Lane  
Rolla, MO  65409

27 April 2012

Jane Doe  
Director of Human Resources  
Generic Miners Incorporated  
1234 Mining Road  
Rolla, MO  65409

Dear Ms. Doe:

I am graduating from the Missouri University of Science and Technology in May 2012 with a BS in mining engineering, and I am interested in a full-time project manager position with Generic Miners Incorporated. Your presentation about the uses of a pick ax was enlightening. My recent internship involved the handling of a multitude of mining tools, and I hope to gain more experience in the use of tools and equipment designed specifically for miners.

My education and experience have given me skills that would be valuable to Generic Miners Incorporated. In particular, [add information about relevant activities, including academic projects or research, coop or internship experience, extracurricular activities, etc.]. Further, my excellent performance in mining engineering courses demonstrates my aptitude and enthusiasm for the field.

I would be particularly excited to work with your company because of your support for the use of slide rules by miners and your recent research in how to prevent pick ax accidents in the work place. In addition, my advisor, Prof. Bob Builder, who has worked with your company in the past, told me about Generic Miners Inc.’s involvement in alternative pick ax materials research. Everything I have learned about Generic Miners Inc. suggests that it is a progressive company not content with mediocrity; this quality is very important to me.

I have enclosed my resume, and I would be grateful for the opportunity to talk with you about the project manager position. I will contact you in a couple of weeks to learn where you are in the hiring process. In the meantime, you may reach me at 573.555.1234 or by email at joeminr@mst.edu. Thank you for taking the time to review my application. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Joe Miner

Enclosure
WHERE TO FIND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The sample cover letter included in this booklet was adapted from that available through the Career Opportunities and Employer Relations office at Missouri S&T. That letter and others are available in their Student Career Guide, available at:


In addition, the following websites offer useful information and good sample letters:

• The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL):
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/549/01/

• The Career Development Center at Stanford University:
http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/cdc/resumes/cover-ltr-writing

• Monster.com publishes numerous articles about cover letters:
http://resume.monster.com/coverletter/home.aspx