



Engineering Co-op & Career Services  
[www.coop.eng.umd.edu](http://www.coop.eng.umd.edu)  
301.405.3863



# :: Cover Letters

# COVER LETTERS

The purpose of writing a cover letter is to get the employer to read your resume and invite you for an interview. While you will not need a cover letter when sending your resume through the Engineering Co-op Office, you should write this type of letter every time you respond to job advertisements on your own. Your goal is to show that your qualifications fit the employer's requirements for the position. Analyze the position description carefully and pick out key phrases. Try to match your letter point by point to the requirements by emphasizing key parts of your resume.

## Creating a Winning Cover Letter

1. **Keep It Short.** The ideal cover letter is about half a page long, and does not exceed one page. A concise letter demonstrates that you are focused and have strong communication skills. Aim for two to four brief paragraphs.
2. **State The Position.** The recruiter who reads your letter may be hiring for several positions. While candidates who e-mail their resumes often include the job title in the subject line of their e-mails, if the recruiter prints your attached letter and/or resume, such information may be lost. Clearly state the job title in the first paragraph of the letter, preferably in the first sentence.
3. **Personalize Each Letter and Explain Why You Want The Job.** Candidates should always answer the question, "Why do I want to do this work?" Ask yourself how the position fits into your overall career plans and what you find exciting about the particular position or company. Take the time to research each organization and personalize each letter. *This approach is much more effective than sending out hundreds of identical form letters.*
4. **Clearly Describe Ways You Will Contribute.** After carefully reading the job description, write a paragraph outlining one or two specific examples of how your skills and experiences will fit the company's needs.
5. **Match, But Don't Reiterate, Your Resume.** This is one point many job seekers find tricky. You should never claim experience in your cover letter that isn't reflected on your resume. At the same time, your cover letter shouldn't simply restate your resume. When you explain the ways you will contribute, refer to an experience or skill on your resume to show how you will add value to the company.
6. **Don't Say You're Not Qualified.** Even if you think the position is out of reach, your job is to convince the recruiter you are qualified. A confessional letter is not going to get you the interview. Keep the letter positive by focusing on your transferable skills and unique accomplishments.
7. **Keep The Tone And Content Professional.** Don't be a comedian, don't get too personal, and don't beg for the job.
8. **Tell The Reader What You're Going To Do Next.** Too many job seekers never follow up after sending a resume. Clearly explain in your letter the manner in which you will follow up and when you will do so. If the job listing includes a phone number, indicate that you will call within a specified time to discuss the possibility of an interview. If not, consider calling anyway, unless the ad specifically requests "no calls." You may also consider a follow-up e-mail if you sent your resume electronically.

9. **Proofread.** Using a spell check is not enough. Many recruiters will dismiss even the most qualified candidate if there is one typo in a cover letter or resume. Reread your letter two or three times, then give it to someone else who knows a thing or two about good writing. Even if your letter is free of typos, poor grammar also makes a bad impression.
10. **Read Samples and Personalize.** Read as many cover letters as possible and find ideas and wording that you like for your own letters. You can find cover letter and resume books in the Engineering Co-op Office and the Career Center Resource Room, located in 3100 Hornbake Library. Also, visit [www.careerlab.com/letters](http://www.careerlab.com/letters) for more examples.

## Business Letter Format

Your cover letter should be prepared on a computer and printed with a quality printer. Use standard business letter format.

### *Example:*

Your Street address  
 City, State Zip  
 Date of writing

Ms. Jane Doe  
 Title  
 Company  
 Street Address  
 City, State Zip

Dear Ms. Doe:

**First paragraph:** Explain why you are writing; identify the position and how you became aware of it. Explain why you are interested in the organization. Indicate in summary form your strongest qualifications for the position. If someone such as a professor, former employer, or family member referred you to the employer, this is also the best place to mention that person's name and to point out that he or she suggested you write.

**Second (and possibly third) paragraph:** Refer to your enclosed resume. Outline your strongest qualifications in more detail and show how they match the position requirements. As much as possible, provide evidence of your related work, extra-curricular, and academic experiences and accomplishments that are relevant to the position and/or potential employer. You may need an additional paragraph for this purpose, but keep your letter as brief as possible. It should not be more than one page long.

**Closing paragraph:** Request an interview and indicate how and when you can be contacted. Suggest that you will call to discuss interview possibilities. Thank the reader for his/her consideration.

Sincerely,

*(Handwritten signature)*

Your Name Typed

*Never underestimate the power of correspondence in your job search. Your cover letter, in particular, is an important marketing tool which highlights your most attractive qualifications as a potential employee and, if well written, will lead the employer to your resume.*

## Sample Cover Letter 1

10017 Brookstone Drive  
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772

November 21, 2004

Mary Larson  
Freddie Mac  
8250 Jones Branch Drive  
Mail Stop #A3E1  
McLean, VA 22102

Dear Ms. Larson:

I am writing to express my interest in a summer internship at Freddie Mac. I learned of your Technical Intern position through the Engineering Co-op & Career Services Office at the University of Maryland. My research on your web site has made me very excited about the opportunity to gain additional experience in the software and computer engineering field at Freddie Mac. The mission to provide low- to middle-income homeowners and renters with lower housing costs and better access to home financing is truly a valuable public service. After reading your advertisement I know that I would be an asset to your organization. In particular, the following characteristics and abilities may be of interest to you:

- **Programming.** As my resume indicates, I have completed courses in C/C++ and JAVA programming and have worked with platforms such as UNIX and Windows. In addition, as a Control Systems Intern, I assisted in the design and implementation of a control emergency shutdown and process visualization system with a team of 3 engineers. The project included extensive hardware design of digital and analog control boards and implementation of control algorithms, and programming in C/C++ and X86 Assembly.
- **Communication & Analytical Skills.** My experience from previous jobs and group projects has sharpened my communication skills and taught me valuable lessons in collaboration and initiation. In my most recent digital postal scale group project, I needed to take five opinions and establish a compromise that would satisfy the entire team. Our successful team effort gave us the honor of being one of the four groups to compete in a final design competition.

I am confident that my skills and qualifications will enable me to make a positive contribution to the summer intern program. Please feel free to call me if you have any questions (301)555-1234. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

*(Handwritten Signature Here)*

Keisha Taylor

### TECHNICAL INTERN NEEDED

Summer Intern Program Requirements:

- C++ Programming in UNIX and Windows platforms.
- Excellent communication and analytical skills due to the large amount of interaction with team members and customers regarding code-related issues.

Preferred: Experience with application design, coding and testing of new business initiatives. Analyzing and solving programming issues on assigned production and/or development systems. Java, J2EE, webMethods, Lotus Notes, Rational Tools, Sybase.

Mary Larson  
Freddie Mac  
8250 Jones Branch Drive  
Mail Stop #A3E1  
McLean, VA 22102

## Sample Cover Letter 2

### Jonathan Leonard

Local address: 4123 Hagerstown Hall • College Park, MD 20742 • (301) 314-5464

Permanent address: 3829 Belvoir Court • Newtown, PA 18940 • (215) 537-4177

E-mail address: sstudent@umd.edu

September 1, 2004

Mr. John Doe  
Co-op Coordinator  
Baltimore Gas & Electric  
1234 Main Street  
Baltimore, MD 20987

Dear Mr. Doe:

I am writing to apply for a cooperative education position in civil engineering so I can utilize my technical and interpersonal skills in the field of construction management. I learned of your co-op position through the Engineering Co-op & Career Services Office at the University of Maryland.

As my resume indicates, I worked for the Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO) for last summer. At PEPCO, I gained valuable experience working directly with contractors from the early stages of a project to its final completion. I also worked with design engineers within PEPCO and learned how to express my ideas clearly and concisely. I believe this combination of engineering and administrative experience has provided me with an excellent base from which to further develop my skills. My involvement in the Alpha Chi Sigma fraternity has also provided me with excellent leadership and service opportunities.

As you can see from my attached transcript, I am a senior at the University of Maryland. My overall grade point average is 2.9 but as you will note, last semester I received a 1.8 GPA. This was due to a motorcycle accident that required a lengthy hospital stay. At the time, I thought I would be able to keep up with my courses but unfortunately I miscalculated the extent of my discomfort and the time I would need to spend in physical therapy. I am now fully recovered and confident that my grades will improve dramatically. Please take my overall performance into consideration when you are reviewing my application rather than my most recent semester.

I hope you will find that my education and experience qualifies me for a cooperative education position with Baltimore Gas & Electric. I look forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

*(Handwritten Signature Here)*

Jonathan Leonard

Enclosure

#### **BGE Co-op Position**

Preferred Qualifications: College student, entering their junior or senior year, majoring in Civil Engineering, Architectural Engineering or Industrial Engineering with an interest in Construction Management. Prefer 3.0 GPA or above and some previous related work history.

John Doe  
Co-op Coordinator  
Baltimore Gas & Electric  
1234 Main Street  
Baltimore, MD 20987

