

Cover Letters I

The **BIG** Idea

- How does a good cover letter catch the interest of an employer?

AGENDA

Approx. 45 minutes

- I. Warm Up: You're The Boss!
(10 minutes)
- II. Model Cover Letter
(10 minutes)
- III. Assist Anthony (20 minutes)
- IV. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

MATERIALS

STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:

- Student Handbook page 63, You Decide!
- Student Handbook page 64, Cover Letter Format
- Student Handbook page 65, Model Resume: Anthony Martino
- Student Handbook page 66, Anthony's Experience
- Student Handbook page 67, Campus Security Job Ad

Facilitator-created resource with 4 job ads (See **PREPARATION.**)

Overhead projector

Chart paper and markers

OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, the student(s) will:

- Understand the purpose and parts of a cover letter.
- Distinguish strong and weak elements of a cover letter.
- Use a cover letter to highlight experiences of interest to an employer.

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students discover that a well-crafted, professional cover letter can put them ahead of other applicants. By reviewing both strong and weak samples of cover letter elements, students recognize how an effective letter catches an employer's attention. Students then create a sample cover letter in preparation for writing their own.

PREPARATION

- The following handouts need to be made into overhead transparencies or copied onto chart paper:
 - **Student Handbook page 64, Cover Letter Format**
 - **Student Handbook page 65, Model Resume: Anthony Martino**
 - **Student Handbook page 66, Anthony's Experience**
 - **Student Handbook page 67, Campus Security Job Ad**
- For **Activity II, Model Cover Letter**, find job ads from a local newspaper or website that require both resume and cover letter. Paste these on a sheet of paper. Make copies, one for each student in your largest class, or create an overhead transparency on which job requirements are clearly visible.
- List the day's **BIG IDEA** and activities on the board.
- Write the day's vocabulary word and definition on the board.
- Write questions from **Activity III**, item 5, on the board or chart paper.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A strong resume and effective cover letter are both essential in a job search. For high school students who lack the experience of college graduates or seasoned workers, a professional cover letter provides an opportunity to convince an employer that the skills they've acquired in school and through extracurricular activities make them viable job candidates. Through the cover letter, students can provide specific examples of how they might apply their skills—gained inside and outside the classroom—to the job at hand. For example, if a job requires Spanish fluency, they can point to the fact that they speak Spanish at home. Identifying and emphasizing marketable skills relevant to the job are key to a successful cover letter.

VOCABULARY

Cover Letter: a letter that you send to accompany your resume when you apply for a job.

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

DO NOW:

If you prefer, you may choose to use **Student Handbook page 63, You Decide!** as a DO NOW. Give the students five minutes to complete it. Once they complete the page, continue with the Warm Up discussion.

In **Activity III, Assist Anthony**, you may wish to enliven the letter-writing task by creating a class competition for “best letter.” Once pairs have completed their work, have them join with 2 or 3 other pairs to read their letters aloud and select the most effective example. Winners of this round read their letters to the entire class, with a prize going to the most convincing letter.

If you think your students will struggle with any aspect of **Activity III**, you may wish to complete Anthony’s cover letter as a class, choosing a recorder to write down the class’s suggestions on chart paper or the overhead projector.

If you feel that two lessons on cover letters is more than your students need, you may prefer to combine this lesson with Lesson 7.

ACTIVITY STEPS

I. Warm Up: You're the Boss! (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Last week, you updated your resumes to make sure you included all your experience that would be of interest to an employer. For the next two weeks, we'll be discussing another job-hunting tool: the cover letter. Unlike your resume, which simply states the facts, a cover letter gives you a chance to introduce yourself to the employer and describe why you'd be a great fit for the job.
2. [Use the overhead projector to display the want ads you've assembled, or distribute copies to the class.]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Many job ads require both a resume and a cover letter. What kinds of jobs are likely to require both? [Let students review the ads before responding.] Why? (*Jobs that require writing often ask for a cover letter as a way to gauge an applicant's ability.*) If you're writing to follow up on a networking contact or a cold call, a cover letter is even more important, because you'll want to explain who you are and why you're sending a resume.

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Let's see how a cover letter might be helpful from an employer's perspective. Open to **Student Handbook page 63, You Decide!** Here, you'll find two examples from different parts of a cover letter. This happens to be two versions of a letter Chris Jones has written to the person hiring counselors at Camp Madison. In each pair, one example is stronger. As Chris's potential employer, circle the stronger example – the one that would make you want to hire him. On the line below each pair, write a sentence explaining why you think your choice is the better one.
3. [Allow students five minutes to complete the activity. Give a one-minute warning to wrap up. When time is up, have students share their answers with the class.]

II. Model Cover Letter (10 Minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Open to **Student Handbook page 64, Cover Letter Format.** [Display the page on the overhead projector.] As you can see, a cover letter consists of different parts.
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Notice that a cover letter for a job is the same as a business letter. It begins with your address, followed by the date, and then the company's address. Next, the greeting is directed to a specific person, such as Ms. Johnson or Dr.

Parker. It is best to use the specific name of the employer. Sometimes job ads will not list the name, but you should take the time to find out to whom you should direct the letter. This may require calling the company and asking. Doing so reveals to the employer that you are someone who is willing to make an extra effort. How is a cover letter different from a friendly letter? [Students respond.]

3. [Have a volunteer read the information about the first paragraph.]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: To land an interview, you'll want to hook your reader from the first sentence. Remember, employers have limited time to give to each candidate's letter and resume – some say 10 seconds per resume. If you can grab their attention immediately, they are more likely to read the rest of the letter, and consider you for the job.

4. [Invite another volunteer to read about the middle paragraphs.]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: In the middle paragraphs, you describe what you have to offer the employer by providing details about your skills or accomplishments – either in or out of school – as they relate to the position. Make connections between your skills and their needs – these may be academic accomplishments or skills used in an extra-curricular activity or job. For example, if the job requires good public speaking skills, you might talk about your role on the debate team. Do not repeat exactly what is in your resume; rather, provide more detail about the most relevant facts. Be sure to support each statement with evidence, and don't forget to use action words.

Break up the text into two paragraphs for easier reading. One big block of text is hard to read.

5. [Have another volunteer read the final paragraph and salutation.]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Be confident and straightforward. Thank the employer for his or her consideration. Then, be specific about how you will follow up and when.

III. Assist Anthony (20 minutes)

1. [Display **Student Handbook page 65, Model Resume: Anthony Martino** on the overhead projector.]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: We're going to try a practice cover letter together. Next

week, you'll write your own. Please turn to **Student Handbook page 65, Model Resume: Anthony Martino**, where you'll find the resume of Anthony Martino.

Anthony is about to graduate from high school, and hopes to find part-time work as a security guard to help pay his way through college. Let's look through his resume for evidence that he might be well-suited for this work.

2. [Have students highlight or underline items that would be of interest to his future employer, and list their suggestions on the board or chart paper. The list might include:
 - interested in a career as a police officer
 - worked in his uncle's security company
 - Police Scouts?
 - Law Enforcement Cadets?]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: I'm not sure what a Police Scout or Law Enforcement Cadet does, so it's possible Anthony's future employer won't either. His future boss may decide to call him in for an interview to find out more. Or she may put his resume into the "reject" pile and look for someone with more experience. A good cover letter can give her the information she needs to decide in his favor.

3. Please turn to the next page, **Student Handbook page 66, Anthony's Experience**, to see a more detailed explanation of these activities.

[Have students read these paragraphs to themselves, or choose a student to read each one aloud.]

4. Let's assume Anthony finds an advertisement for a security guard position near the college he'll be attending. (Of course, he'll research to find out more about the campus and the students who go there.) This ad gives him a lot to work with, because his potential employer describes the job in great detail. Now all Anthony has to do is convince her he can do the job, and that's where his cover letter comes in.
5. [Place a transparency of **Student Handbook page 67, Campus Security Job Ad** on the overhead projector, and refer to the questions previously written on the board or chart paper. Have students answer the questions aloud, and write their answers on the board or chart paper to assist them in writing Anthony's cover letter.
 - Background: What does a campus security guard do?
(*Patrols the campus looking for possible threats to safety or security*)

- Profile: What's Anthony's best pitch for getting this job? What should he include in his very first paragraph?
(Answers will vary, but could include his interest in studying criminology, his family history in law enforcement, or his extracurricular activities involving police work.)
 - Details: Even though Anthony has no previous experience as a security guard, what activities might lead an employer to believe he's the right guy for the job? (He should include his exposure to security work through his uncle's company, or through Police Scouts or Law Enforcement Cadets.)
 - Conclusion: What should Anthony say in his concluding paragraph? (He'll want to restate his interest in the job, and set up a time when he'll follow up.)
6. [Have students work in pairs to write a cover letter for Anthony. (Use **Student Handbook page 64, Cover Letter Format**, for guidance.) Circulate to provide help as needed. Give a 10-minute and 5-minute warning to alert students to the time remaining, allowing time to review their work before the end of class.]

IV. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Since employers have so little time to review cover letters and resumes, you'll want to write cover letters that grab the reader's attention right away. Let's see how you decided to highlight Anthony's accomplishments.
2. [Have students volunteers read sample opening paragraphs aloud. Then move on to examples of middle paragraphs, followed by closing paragraphs. Discuss the merits of sample paragraphs as needed.]
3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Great job, everyone! Next week, you'll have a chance to work on your own cover letter for a job you're seeking.

DO NOW You Decide!

Directions: Below are two cover letters for the same job, split into sections so you can compare them easily. In each row, circle the stronger choice. In the space below, explain why the one you circled is stronger.

Dear Ms. Garcia	Dear Ma'am
Explain your choice here:	
I'm looking for a summer job before I head off to college, and Camp Madison seems like an exciting place to work. Your science programs seem especially interesting.	I'm a senior at Truman High School with a huge interest in kids and outdoor activities. I'd like to put these interests to work this summer as a counselor at Camp Madison.
Explain your choice here:	
I was born and raised in the Bronx, and had my first up-close-and-personal look at nature in the sixth grade, when I attended an outdoor leadership camp as part of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program. Hiking, exploring, even cooking and cleaning up – I loved it all, and returned year after year. I would like to give other city kids a similar opportunity.	As you'll see in my resume, I'm a good student. My previous experience includes working as a cashier at Food Town.
Explain your choice here:	
I've coached middle-school students in an after-school basketball program and enjoy the challenges of working with this age group. I'm also certified in First Aid.	I like sports, and volunteered in an after-school basketball program.
Explain your choice here:	
I hope you feel I am qualified for this position. I look forward to hearing from you soon.	I'd like very much to talk to you about working as a counselor at Camp Madison. I will call next week to arrange a time to meet with you.
Explain your choice here:	
Sincerely, Chris Jones	Sincerely, Chris Jones

Cover Letter Format

Your Street Address
City, State Zip Code
Telephone Number
Email Address

Month, Day, Year

Mr./Ms./Dr. First Name Last Name
Title or Position
Name of Organization
Street or P. O. Box Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Last Name:

Opening paragraph: Grab the employer's attention with a strong opening sentence that makes him/her want to keep reading. Show the employer what you can offer by providing one solid example of a skill or achievement that connects with a main job responsibility. State the position to which you are applying.

Middle Paragraphs: This section is your opportunity to convince the employer that he or she should grant you an interview for the position. Make specific connections between your abilities and the job requirements by emphasizing relevant accomplishments and achievements using lots of action verbs and details. Support each statement you make about yourself with examples, or evidence. Expand, rather than repeat, specific items from your resume that are relevant to the job you are seeking.

Final paragraph: Be proactive by requesting action. Ask for the interview in this paragraph. Reiterate your confidence that you are a good fit for the job. Alert the employer that you plan to follow up, being specific about when.

Sincerely,

(Your handwritten signature)

Your name typed

Anthony Martino, Jr.

661 Idaho Avenue
Chicago, IL 60681
312-555-1212
tony_martino@net.com

Profile

Physically fit and morally strong High School Senior seeks part-time job while enrolled in the Portland State University Criminology program.

Maintained a solid “B” average in high school courses with honors in Math

Comes from three generations of law enforcement officers

Education

Chicago High School, Chicago, IL
2006-2010

Expected graduation date: June 2010

- GPA: 3.4
- Member, Varsity Football Team, 2008 - 2010
- Member, Varsity Wrestling Team, 2008 - 2010

Experience

Martino Security Firm, Chicago, IL

General Worker, summers and weekends, 2008 - present

- Answer telephones, fill out customer requests, and schedule appointments for my uncle’s security company
- Run errands and pick up equipment, as needed
- Train new summer workers on company policies
- Supervise one assistant

Interests & Honors

- Member, Police Scouts, 2006 – 2008
- Member, Law Enforcement Cadets, 2008 – Present
- Enjoys hiking, swimming, fishing, and hunting with dad and uncles

ADAPTED FROM: www.resumeedge.com

Anthony's Experience

If Anthony Martino gets invited to an interview, here's what he might say about his volunteer experience in law enforcement.

Q: What are the Police Scouts?

A: Police Scouts is a program for kids 14 and up. We usually work with the police department on community efforts like neighborhood watches or anti-gang programs. Most of the work involves youth and prevention. No guns, violence, or chasing robbers – NONE of the stuff you see on TV.

Q: What are the Law Enforcement Cadets?

A: This is a program for students sixteen to twenty, who are too young to join the police force. It's selective – you have to complete an application to get in. Cadets participate in activities that will help you consider a career in law enforcement – like classroom exercises and ride-alongs (accompany a police officer on his/her rounds).

Campus Security Job Ad

Job Title: Campus Security Guard

Department: Facilities

Hours PT/FT: 10 hours per week

**Must be able to work Saturdays and some Sundays and special events as needed.

Salary Range: \$10.22-\$12.01, depending on experience

Position Description: Follow and enforce the college's security protocols, using security policies and procedures to protect the college's operations.

Essential Duties & Responsibilities

1. Oversee campus security and act as a visible and available presence to assist students, employees, volunteers, and visitors.
2. Patrol the main campus during hours of campus operation on foot or in a vehicle and report irregularities such as unwelcome guests, fire hazards, leaking water pipes, unlocked doors, etc.
3. Follow the college's emergency procedures to assist students, employees, and guests during emergencies.
4. Provide security coverage on the weekends and/or special events, and public assistance that includes lockout services and information.
5. Maintain and process accurate, detailed, and professional paperwork and reports as needed and required.

Send or fax resume by 6/15/10

Reply To:

Tabitha Smith
Human Resources/Campus Security Guard
National College of Natural Medicine
049 SW Porter Street
Portland, OR 97201
Fax: (503)-555-1212

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