

CREATING *a top-notch cover letter*

■ A resume is a summary of your qualifications, but the cover letter is your sales pitch to the employer. The cover letter gives you the opportunity to draw an employer's attention to the skills and experience outlined in your resume, expand upon information which particularly matches you to the position for which you wish to be considered and highlight special achievements that might otherwise be overlooked.

■ A well-written cover letter can make a significant difference in successfully arranging an interview or meeting with a potential employer. Approach the letter as though you were reading it as the employer. You want the reader to think "Gee—here's someone who's a notch or two above the rest." Try reading it out loud. Be sure the letter gets right to the point. Pick the items from your resume that differentiate you from other candidates. If you are not sure what distinguishes you from everyone else, you should research the career fields you are targeting and understand what skills they seek. Then, think about your past experiences and make note of relevant areas where you excelled. Your cover letter should speak of what you have done and what you can do for the company.

■ Standard business format is preferred for a cover letter. Avoid the generic "Dear Sir/Madam." Instead find the name of the person who manages the company/department to which you are applying. You can find a name on BlueDevilTRAK for employers recruiting on-campus, call the organization's main telephone number for information or check their website.

■ Generally, the structure of the cover letter consists of an introductory paragraph, a middle paragraph for reflecting your unique strengths and a concluding paragraph stating your planned course of action. Be sure the middle paragraph is more than a listing of the items on your resume; this is your chance to explain what you gained from your experiences and to brag! Use the last paragraph to be proactive and follow-up.

TAKE NOTE: A variety of sample cover letters and resumes are available on the Career Center website and in the Resource Room. Resume workshops are offered at the Career Center. CATs are available daily to assist you with starting or refining your cover letter and resume. Individual appointments may also be made with your career counselor.

how to...

>write a cover letter

▶▶ Use conventional business letter format on standard-size paper that matches your resume.

▶▶ Use business structure: heading, date line, inside address, salutation, body, closing and signature line.

▶▶ Keep your cover letter to one page with three or four paragraphs.

▶▶ Always direct your letter to a specific person, most preferably an individual with hiring authority. Be sure to spell his/her name correctly and use the proper title!

▶▶ Tailor your letter to the specific job and organization. Never use a non-personalized form letter.

▶▶ Provide specific examples to support and illustrate your qualifications.

▶▶ Do not exaggerate your accomplishments.

▶▶ Express appreciation to the employer for considering your application.

▶▶ Have several people, including the CATs (p. 6), proofread your letter for grammar, punctuation, spelling and typographical errors. The reader views the cover letter as an example of your written communication skills and judges you accordingly.

▶▶ Re-read the cover letter from the employer's perspective. Ask, "Why should I hire you?"

▶▶ Do not alter margins for your letter to fit one page. Make your letter more concise instead.

▶▶ Cover letters should be signed in blue or black ink. If sending electronically, your typed name will serve as your signature.

▶▶ If you state you will follow up -- make sure you do.

Straight from the **SOURCE**

An Employer's Advice on Cover Letters



Marc A. Bender, director of recruiting and training at First New York Securities, LLC, had this to say about a Duke student's cover letter:

"Paul's cover letter demonstrated his unique ability to separate himself from the pack and convey to First New York Securities that he thoroughly researched the company, position and fit for the job he was pursuing. Most cover letters come across as generic and uninspiring. To find one that is targeted and demonstrates a passion for FNYS and what we do makes me excited to meet the candidate."

Marc Bender, Director of Recruiting and Training
First New York Securities LLC
850 Third Avenue, 20th Floor
New York, NY 10022

October 5, 2003

Dear Mr. Bender,

I am writing to you in reference to the opening in the Assistant Trader position at your firm. Our **1** conversation at the Duke presentation on campus got me excited about the position's educational and market exposure opportunities. I am interested in joining the Trading team at First New York Securities, highly regarded as a rapidly growing leader in proprietary trading.

2 In addition to my educational preparation at Duke, where I am currently a candidate for a B.S. in Economics, I have held a variety of jobs during my undergraduate career. While my quantitatively-oriented studies in Economics, including my coursework in both Accounting and Financial Markets & Investments, have given me grounding in statistical, mathematical and analytical work, my jobs have enabled me to work simultaneously as a leader and a team player.

My employment at the Duke Undergraduate Development Annual Fund exemplifies my strengths in leadership and teamwork. After September 11th, 2001, in light of the need for assistance in New York City, many of those who gave yearly donations to the Duke Annual Fund were reluctant to continue their giving. **3**

However, I succeeded in retaining more than 90% of my clients as annual donors. Despite the fast-paced, hectic, multitasking work environment at the Fund, I earned bonus monies during more than 80% of the nightly work sessions for my ability to solicit large-scale pledges. In spite of the drop in donations due to **4** September 11th, my success in increasing financial donations from Duke parents and alumni helped the Fund to achieve record campaign contributions in fiscal year 2001-02.

I think First New York Securities would be a great fit for me because I understand the fast-paced, multi-tasking nature and challenge of trading. I excel at thinking on-the-fly, as well as sifting, sorting and digesting large quantities of information effectively in a short amount of time. For example, during my **5** internship at Barclays Bank, I had the responsibility of sifting through a variety of informational parameters on more than 100,000 transactions daily in order to identify potentially risky checking activity.

6 As for my extracurricular accomplishments, last year, through the Craven Quad Council, I established a large-scale affirmative action panel debate between students and professors, the first of its kind. Also, I single-handedly organized and ran a \$6,000 on-campus concert for the express benefit of the student body. The success of my programming helped Craven Quad Council to garner three prestigious awards—including Program of the Year, Quad of the Year and the coveted Dean Sue Wasiolek Commendation for Unparalleled Performance—at the annual Duke Student Leadership Retreat in April 2003. This year, I have been elected to serve on the Campus Council and its Executive Finance Committee, which entails the responsibility of utilizing and distributing more than \$45,000.

In light of First New York Securities' reputation for consistently exceeding industry performance standards, I believe that the First New York Securities trading team is the right match for me. I am confident that I can contribute significantly to, and benefit immensely from, the firm. My enclosed resume, including my financial markets coursework and fraud/risk experience, demonstrates that First New York Securities is a great fit for my personality, work ethic and skills. Thank you for your consideration and your **7** time.

Sincerely,

Paul Royer

Cover letter notes from Marc Bender...

1. Good time to draw in conversation with recruiter—anything that refreshes memory about who you are.
2. Good idea to mention major.
3. Good use of numbers to emphasize.
4. Use the middle paragraphs to BRAG! Adjectives that suggest the significance of your role or award are fine to use!
5. Good transition between education and occupation.
6. It is good to support your statements with examples.
7. You may consider including a plan of action, e.g., "I intend to follow-up with. . ."

Cover letter notes from The Career Center...

1. This section is unnecessary because it should be on your resume. Instead, the employer's name and title should be on the first line, with the address of the company below.
2. Try to locate the name of the company representative.
3. What's missing is a) how you learned about the position and b) why you are interested in Blue Flame.
4. Italicize.
5. It would be appropriate to include a specific project you worked on here.
6. Do you mean 2004? Make sure to check your letter for typos or have a friend look it over.
7. It may be helpful to list where and how the company can reach you. It is also typical to thank the recruiter for spending the time to read your letter.

Aileen A. Ringer
email@duke.edu

Current Address
Duke University
Box 12345
Durham, NC 27708
(919) 555-1234

1

Permanent Address
679 East 12nd Street
Brooklyn, NY 11234
(919) 555-4321

Dear Sir/Madam, 2

Blue Flame Marketing is a quickly emerging force in the ever-changing industry of marketing and advertising. With its studies and surveys about urban marketing, leading corporations are changing their strategies to accommodate the needs of the urban consumer. Blue Flame is clearly becoming a strong influence. It is this evolving influence that causes me to feel confident that with my leadership and work experience I can make an immediate contribution to your organization. 3

At Duke University I am a known leader and extremely active in both the college and surrounding communities. I am the president of the Black History Month Committee and a Senator for the Duke Student Government. I volunteer my time tutoring young boys at a local area school. I am also a columnist for the Black Student Alliance's Publication, *The Talking Drum*. I have strong leadership skills, but I also know how to successfully work with a team of people. My skill set extends from interpersonal and communicative skills to organizational skills; this is especially evident in my extensive work experience. 4

5 Last summer I interned at Saatchi & Saatchi as the winner of the CosmoGIRL! Project 2024 Internship Program. There I created an advertising campaign while I worked with the account management, strategic planning, creative and media planning departments. Specifically, in both strategic and media planning, I developed skills in research, planning and marketing. In addition, in the summer of 2002, I worked with an emerging independent record label, Seven Heads Entertainment, as an unpaid intern. There, I created publicity materials for several artists with the label in order to inform different media about their upcoming albums. I also helped organize tours and inventory tracking systems. Having interned with both an award-winning advertising agency and a small record label, I have learned to hone my skills in both effective communications and professionalism and understand that these skills are required for success in the field of marketing and public relations. 6

I will be in New York City during the upcoming winter break. I will call your offices next week to arrange a convenient time in mid-December for me to meet with you and discuss employment opportunities at Blue Flame Marketing. 7

Sincerely,

Aileen Ann Ringer

120 TOP VERBS
for cover letters & resumes

- | | | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| accumulated | established | planned |
| adapted | estimated | prepared |
| administered | evaluated | presented |
| advised | examined | prioritized |
| analyzed | facilitated | produced |
| appraised | financed | programmed |
| approved | founded | promoted |
| assembled | generated | proposed |
| audited | governed | proved |
| authored | guided | provided |
| broadcast | heightened | publicized |
| budgeted | identified | published |
| built | illustrated | purchased |
| calculated | implemented | questioned |
| catalogued | increased | recommended |
| clarified | inspected | reduced |
| communicated | installed | regulated |
| compared | integrated | reorganized |
| compiled | interpreted | researched |
| composed | interviewed | reviewed |
| computed | introduced | revised |
| conducted | invented | rewrote |
| constructed | investigated | scheduled |
| consulted | launched | screened |
| controlled | lectured | served |
| coordinated | maintained | simplified |
| correlated | managed | sold |
| corresponded | marketed | solved |
| created | mastered | strengthened |
| delegated | measured | succeeded |
| demonstrated | mediated | supervised |
| derived | modeled | systematized |
| designed | moderated | taught |
| developed | monitored | traded |
| devised | motivated | trained |
| directed | negotiated | translated |
| discovered | organized | updated |
| earned | originated | upgraded |
| eliminated | performed | verified |
| enhanced | persuaded | wrote |