



## HANDOUT SERIES

CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

→ Life after Rensselaer Starts Here

# WRITING A WINNING COVER LETTER

Studies have shown that most cover letters are read in 8 seconds or less. That's not much time in which to introduce and sell yourself to a prospective employer. Thinking of leaving out the cover letter since it seems to command so little attention? Think again. Most employers say they won't even give a resume a second look if it is not accompanied by a cover letter. Always remember, whatever the reason for sending a cover letter, it should help to stimulate interest in you.

**The main goal of the cover letter is to help you obtain an interview.**

A cover letter is written as an introduction for your resume. There are two different types of cover letters you may need to write: solicited and exploratory. The solicited letter is written to apply for a specific opening and might begin like this, "I would like to be considered for the position of mechanical engineer as seen posted in the Career Development Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. I am a self starter, a quality that I know would be valued by XYZ Co." The exploratory letter is written to explore potential employment opportunities. You might start this letter by saying, "Recently, I read an interesting article about your corporation in the June 18 edition of the Wall Street Journal. Given your need for experienced software designers, I would like to share my extensive background with you and discuss your current hiring needs."

### Creating Your Cover Letter

#### Content

- Create an individualized cover letter for every resume you send
- Be honest and professional
- Make sure the letter contains no errors in spelling, grammar or punctuation
- Know your audience: research the company before writing
- Address your cover letter to a specific person, not "To Whom it May Concern" (Please note: This may require you to call the company and ask whom this should be. Verify the spelling of their name or to find out the gender of the person to whom you are sending the letter.)
- Site specific examples to market yourself
- Do not restate details from your resume; refer the reader to your enclosures (resume, portfolio, writing samples, etc.)

#### Format

- Keep the cover letter to one page; be brief yet informative
- Use a business letter format
- Stick to the three paragraph rule: Introduction, Body (may be split in two if needed) and Closing
- Be sure top and bottom margins are equal and side margins even
- Include your contact information (address, phone number, e-mail)

#### Presentation

- Print your cover letter on the same paper as your resume
- Select matching envelopes

#### Resources

Many books on writing cover letters can be found in the CDC Cafe. Additional resources can be found in the Job Search section of the CDC Website.