Cover Letters That Get Results

Introduction of workshop, time frame for workshop, introduction of participants (if small group)

By the end of this workshop you will learn:

Types of Cover Letters

Basics & Structure of a Cover Letter

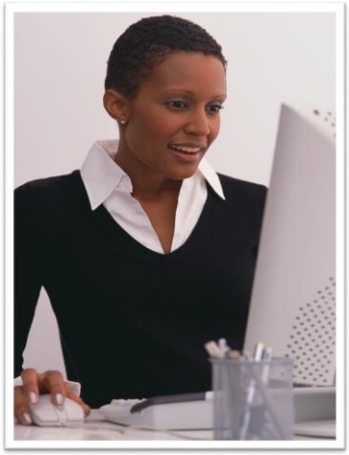
Facilitator can say: “During today’s workshop you will learn about different types of cover letters**,** the overall structure of a standard cover letter, and receive additional cover letter tips.”

What is a Cover Letter?

Facilitator can say: Your cover letter is a powerful tool. It is a letter of introduction and should work in combination with your resume. Your cover letter is the first point of interaction between you and the prospective employer.

Good Cover Letters

Engaging



Specific

Good (or well written) cover letters:

a. Engage the reader;
b. Are written for the specific position you are applying for;

A cover letter should:

c. Describe why you are interested in the position;

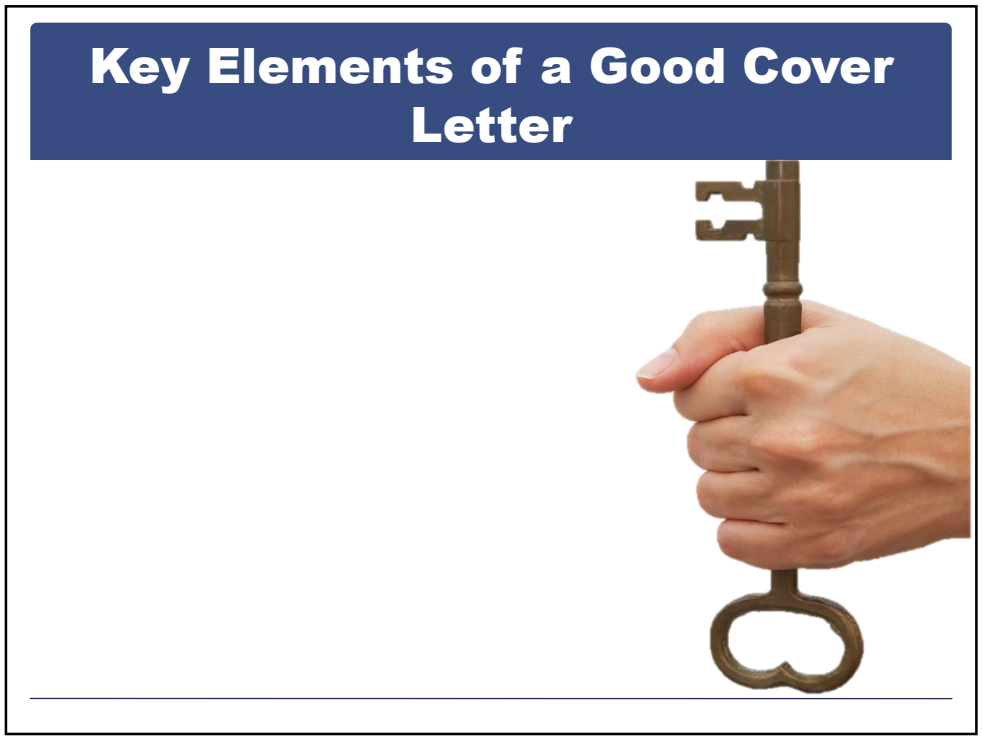
d. Include what qualifications or experience makes you an ideal candidate for the position; and

e. Outline your experience or education and reflect your enthusiasm and willingness to learn.

Facilitator can say: "A cover letter summarizes your experiences, qualifications, interests, and points out what specific skill(s) make you the right pick for the job. A good cover letter also helps the hiring manager answer the question: What value or benefit will this person bring to my organization?"

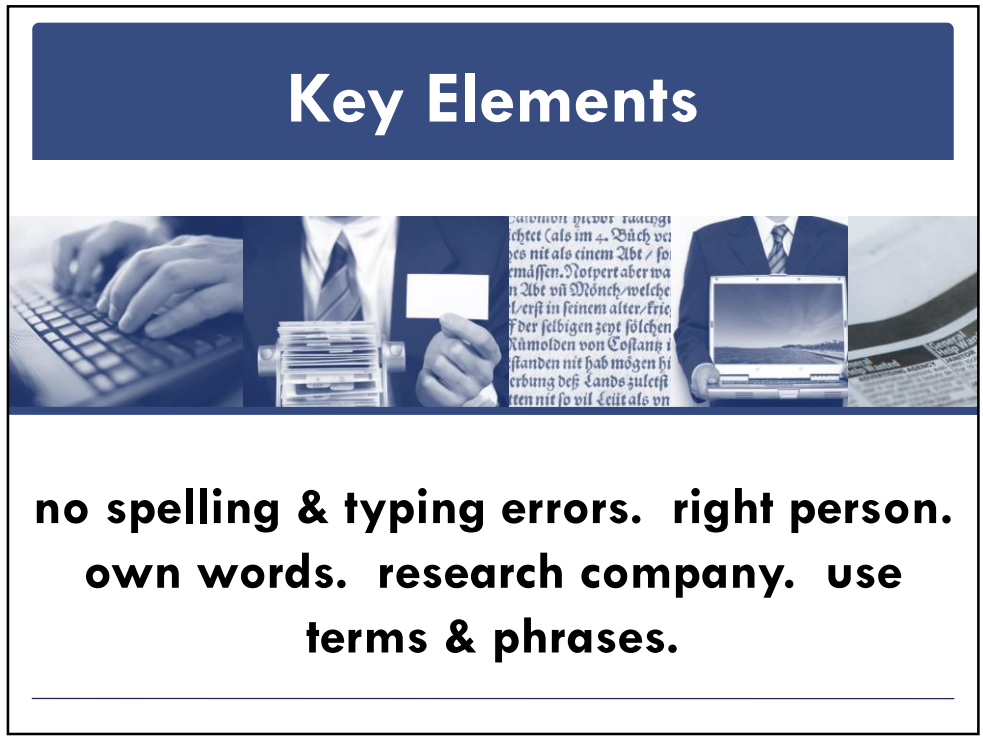
When applying for a job

Read the application instructions carefully before applying. The quickest way to land a cover letter in the waste basket is to ignore the application instructions. Do not make the cover letter too wordy or long. Your cover letter should be a brief summary of your experience and qualifications highlighting your key strengths or achievements that relate to the specific position you are applying for. Choose your language carefully and keep the cover letter professional.



WHAT MAKES A GOOD COVER LETTER?

There are some key elements to writing a good cover letter. (Review Handout #1- 5 Things That Make a Good Cover Letter)



Handout #1: 5 Things that make a Good Cover Letter

1. No spelling or typing errors. Not even one.

2. Address it to the person who can hire you. Resumes sent to the personnel department have a tougher time of it. If you can find out (through networking and researching) exactly who is making the hiring decision, address the letter to that person. Be sure the name is spelled correctly and the title is correct.

3. Write it in your own words so that it sounds like you.

4. Show that you know something about the company and the industry. This is where your research comes in. Don't go overboard-just make it clear that you didn't pick this company out of the phone book. You know who they are, what they do and *you* have chosen them!

5.Use terms and phrases that are requirements for the job from the job posting. You will have this information if you did research on the industry or networked with people in the industry. If you are
applying for an advertised position, use the requirements in the ad and put them in BOLD type in your letter.

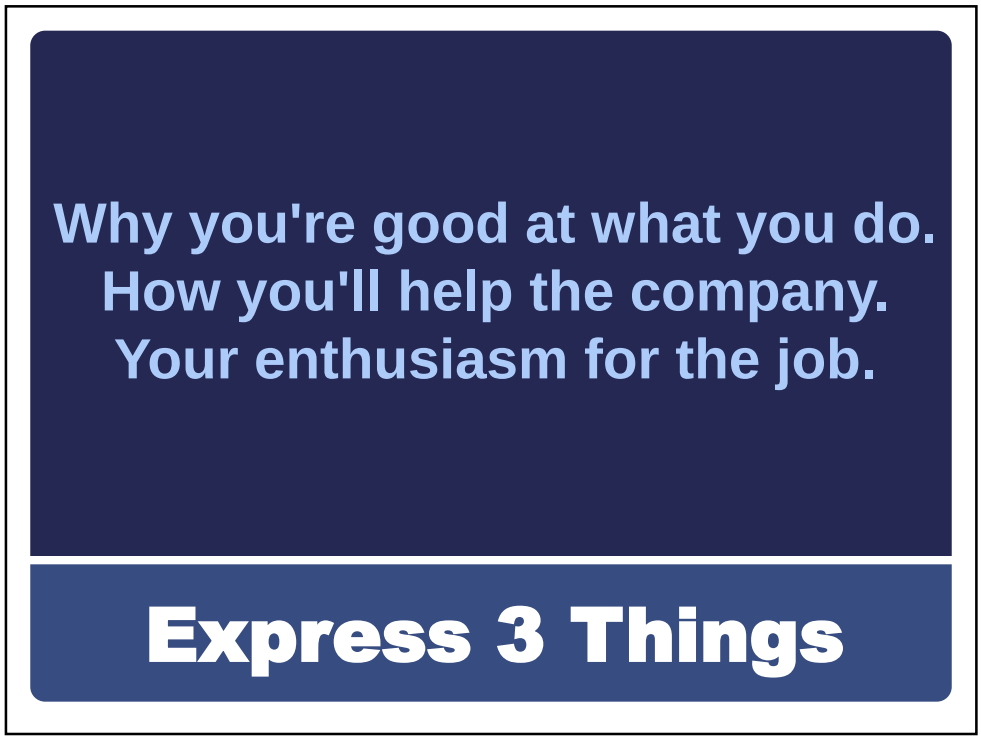
6. Make sure to find out if the contact person is a male or female if they have a name that could be for either gender, or if you're not familiar with the name and are not sure if it is a male or female.

Why should I hire you?

Facilitator can say: Your cover letter should answer the question:

Why should I hire you? It should grab the employer's attention and point out why you, above all other applicants should be contacted for an interview.

Facilitator can ask participants to take out **Handout #2: Tips to Make Your Cover Letter Professional** and review each bullet with participants.

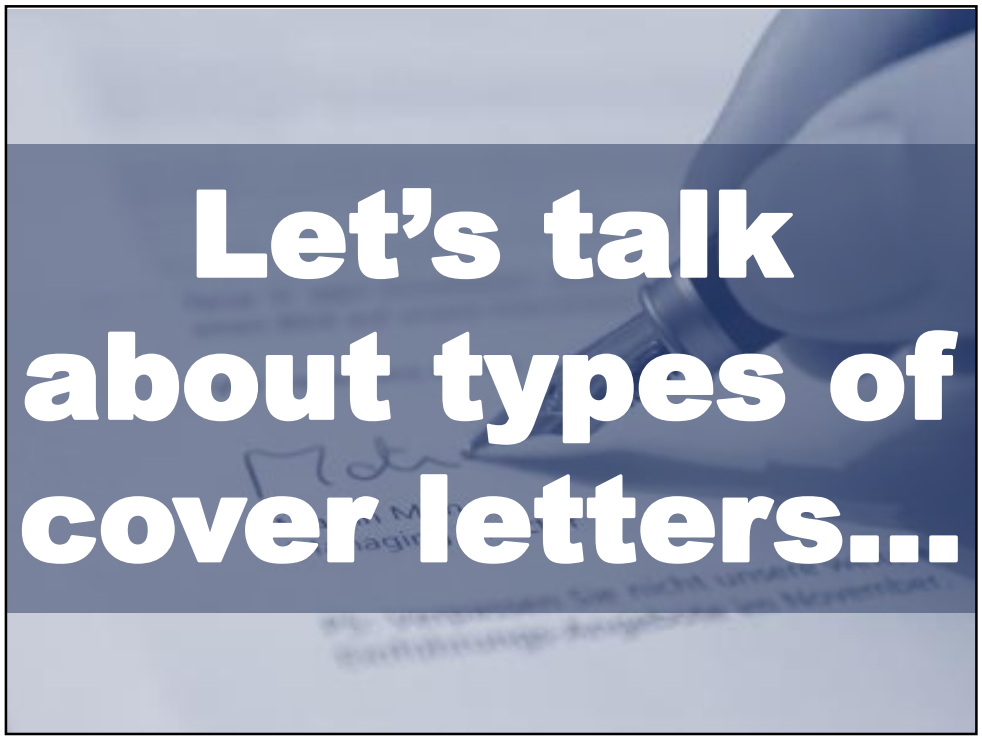


The best cover letters express three things:

Why you're good at what you do;
How you'll help the company; and
Your enthusiasm for the job.

Once this information has been written - stop. Do not continue writing about a specific project. Stop using words like "managed" and "team." The cover letter is about you and why you fit the job. It's about getting you to the top of the pile, not getting you the job.

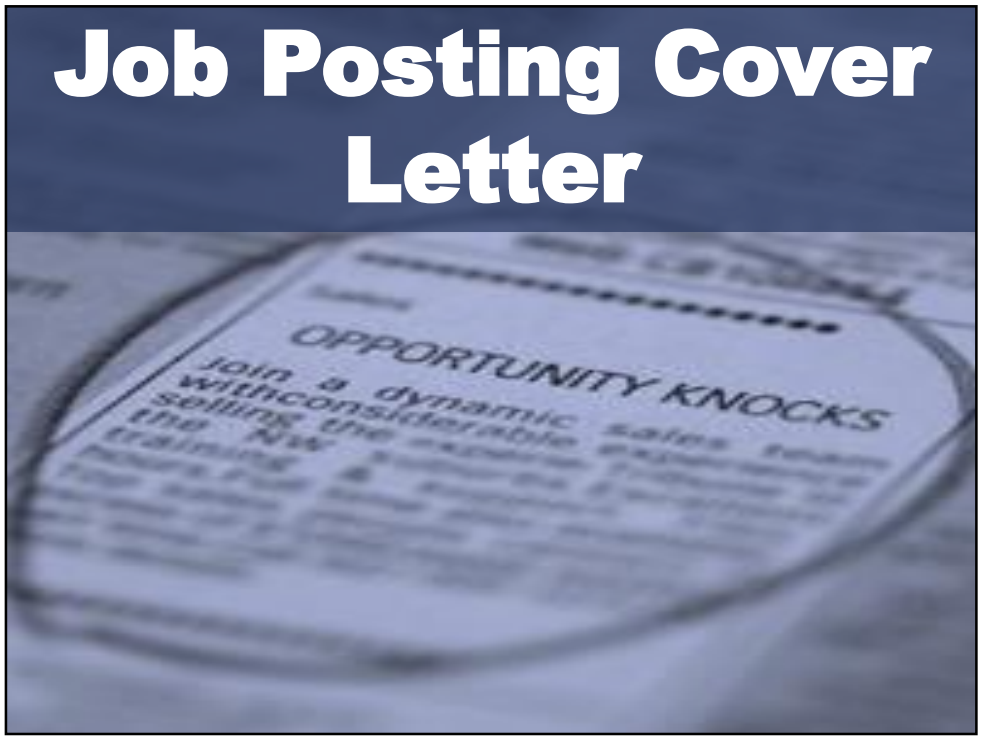
Your cover letter tells a story. It has a beginning, a middle, and an ending. If you tell your story right then you'll get your resume read.



Facilitator can say: There are different types of cover letters, depending on the situation – let's go over the three most common types of situations where you will write a cover letter:

Cover Letters for Job Postings

"Cold" Cover Letters



Cover Letter for a Response to a Job Posting

Facilitator can say: "When writing a cover letter for a job posting, keep the specifics of the job posting in mind (travel, relocation or salary). Target the cover letter to the specific requirements outlined in the job posting. If the job requires travel or relocation, make sure to specify your availability in your response. Only address salary preferences if requested, phrasing it in a range so you don't limit your opportunities."

Example: *"In regards to your request for salary requirements, I am seeking a position which pays from the high $30k's to low $40k's depending on the overall benefit package and responsibilities of the position."*

Be sure to tailor your letter to the specific requirements outlined in the posting.

Also, to respond to the posting quickly. The faster your inquiry reaches an employer's desk, the more individual attention it will receive.

Follow the application instructions closely. If you are going to apply for the position via email, paste your cover letter directly into the body of the email. Most hiring

managers and recruiters don’t want to spend the time opening multiple attachments and by placing your cover letter into the email you make the process more convenient for the employer. If you are going to attach your cover letter, attach it as a pdf file to make sure the hiring manager is able to open and read the file.

Facilitator explains that a “Cold” letter is a way of getting your “foot in the door”. With a "Cold" cover letter you can directly contact potential employers without a referral or previous correspondence. Most job-seekers use this type of letter.

Facilitator can say let’s go through the steps necessary to compile a well-written “Cold” cover letter (write on whiteboard/chalk board):

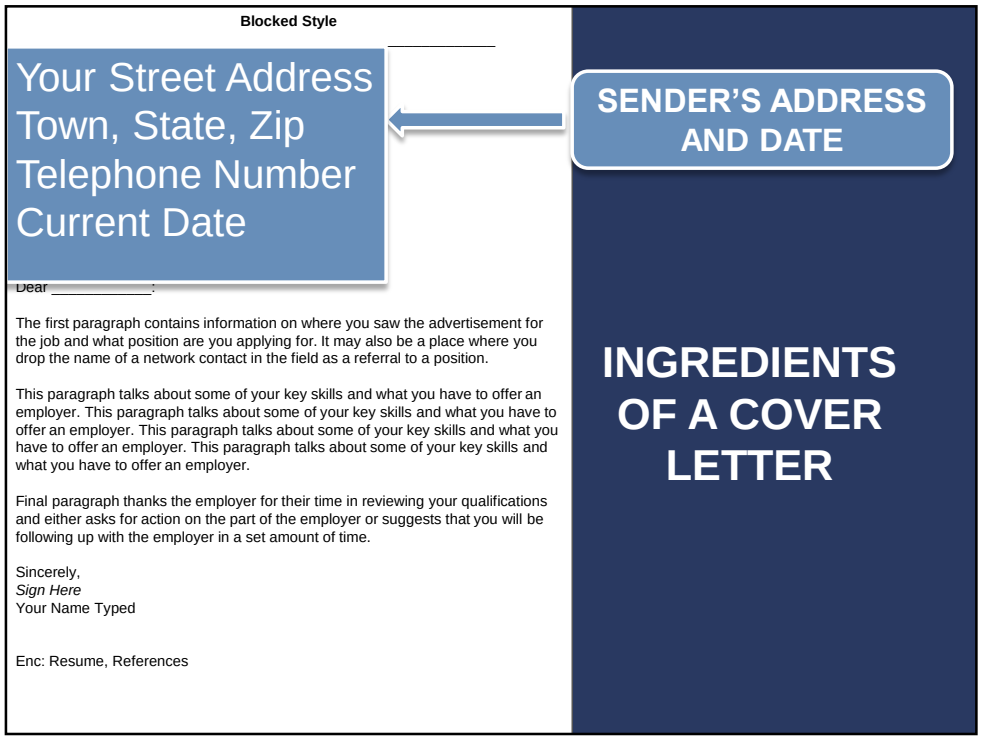
Step 1: Make a list of all companies that you might be interested in working for.

Step 2: List the names of the people who you believe can offer you a job by calling each company's main number and asking the receptionist for the name and title of the hiring manager in the field you are looking in to.

Step 3: Write a great cover letter. Make sure that each letter is individualized by addressing each to a named individual, and, if possible, saying something about the company to show that you've done some homework about the company.

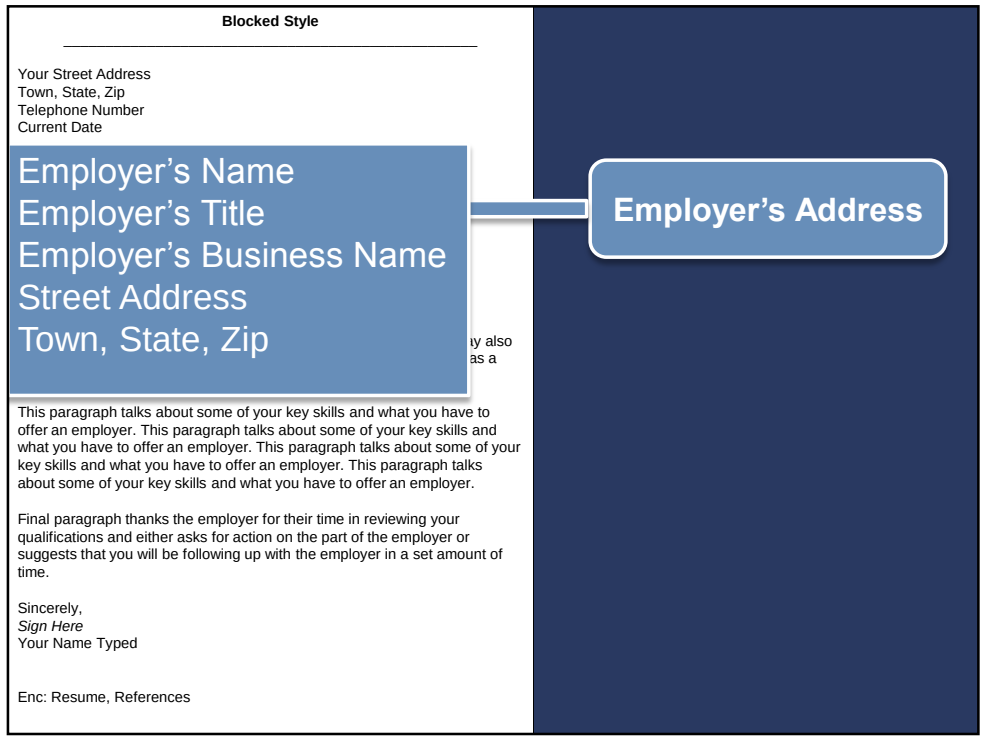
Step 4: Contact the people you wrote a cover letter to and ask for an interview. Be persistent, even if the potential employer says there are no current job openings (do not be rude or too pushy).

Step 5: If you cannot get a job interview, ask for an informational Interview where you can gain more knowledge of the field and perhaps get names of more people you can contact. Try to get as many informational interviews as possible. Informational interviewing with them gives you the opportunity to get noticed and offer you an opportunity to get referrals to other employers who might have job openings available.



Ingredients of a Cover Letter
Facilitator: Begin with slide 18, discuss the structure of a well-written cover letter.

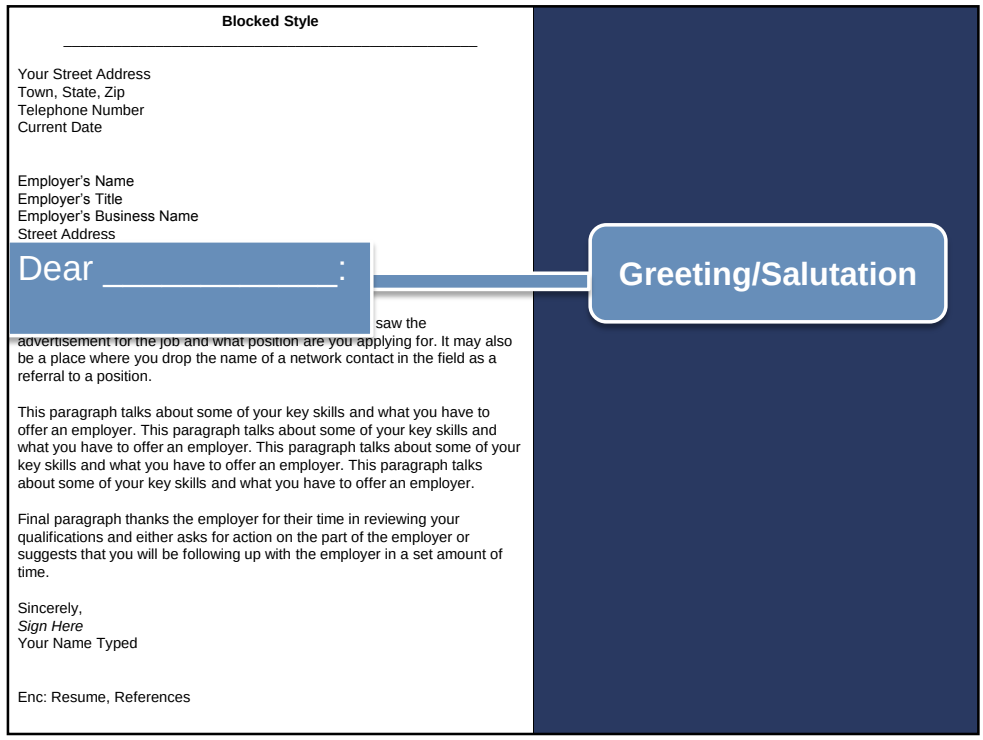
Sender's Address/Date: Begin with your current address. You do not need to include your name in this heading. Avoid abbreviations in the address, except for State (NY or PO Box). **Date:** Leave a blank line after your return address. This should be the date that you are writing the letter. Write out the date; do not abbreviate. Example: September 12, 2010



Employer's Address: Leave a blank line after the date.

Line 1: list the full name of the addressee
Line 2: Individual's formal business title
Line 3: Name of the company
Line 4: Address of the company

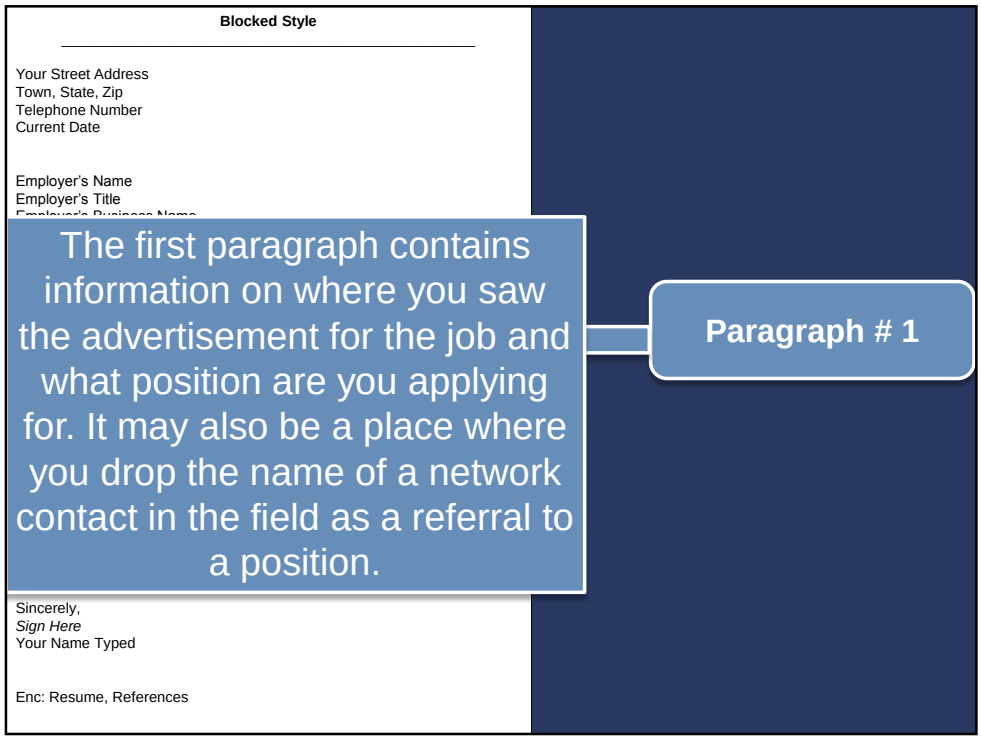
Do not assume that a person uses the title "Mrs." Always include the person's title. If you don't have the address, look it up on the company's website.



Greeting/Salutation: Leave two blank lines beneath the company's address. Begin with "Dear Mr." or "Dear Ms.," followed by the individual's last name and a colon. When responding to "blind" job postings, use a general salutation such as:

Dear Hiring Manager, I am responding to…
Dear Director of Human Resources, I am responding to…

AVOID: Dear Gentlemen or Dear Sirs…
Refer to the reader by his/her last name. Use a colon after the greeting, not a comma.



Your First Paragraph: *"Why I'm writing"*

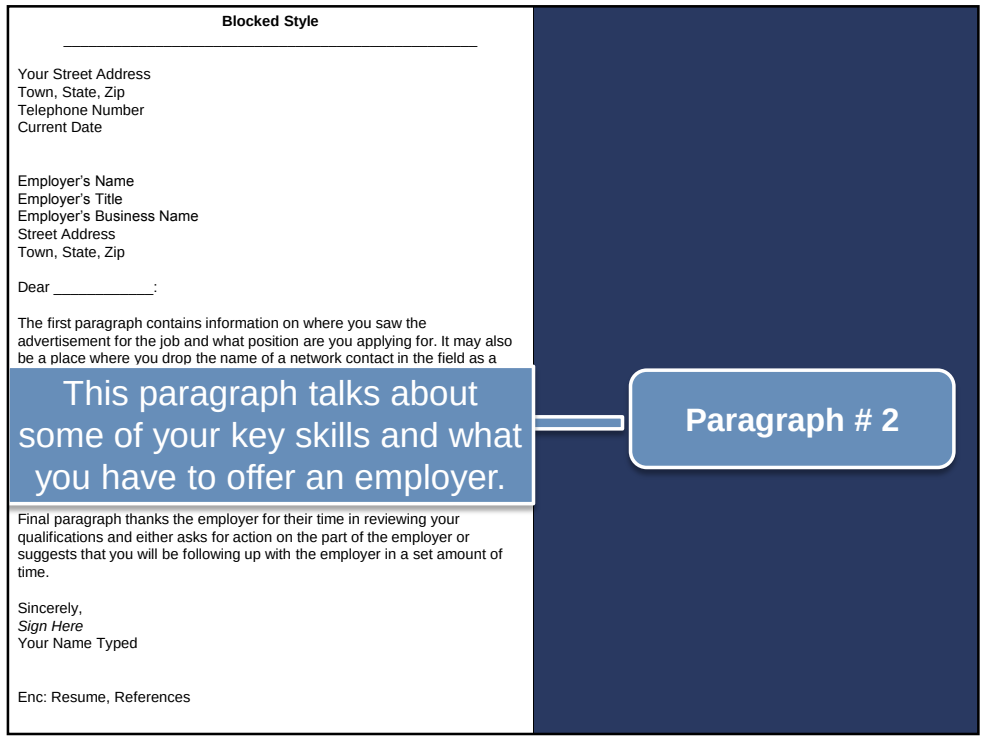
You've got to grab the hiring manager's attention to get them interested. Customize your letter to the job!!

Identify the position and the company.

Indicate specifically how you learned about the position.

Why are you interested in this job?

Be creative and enthusiastic



Your Second Paragraph: "Why do I fit"

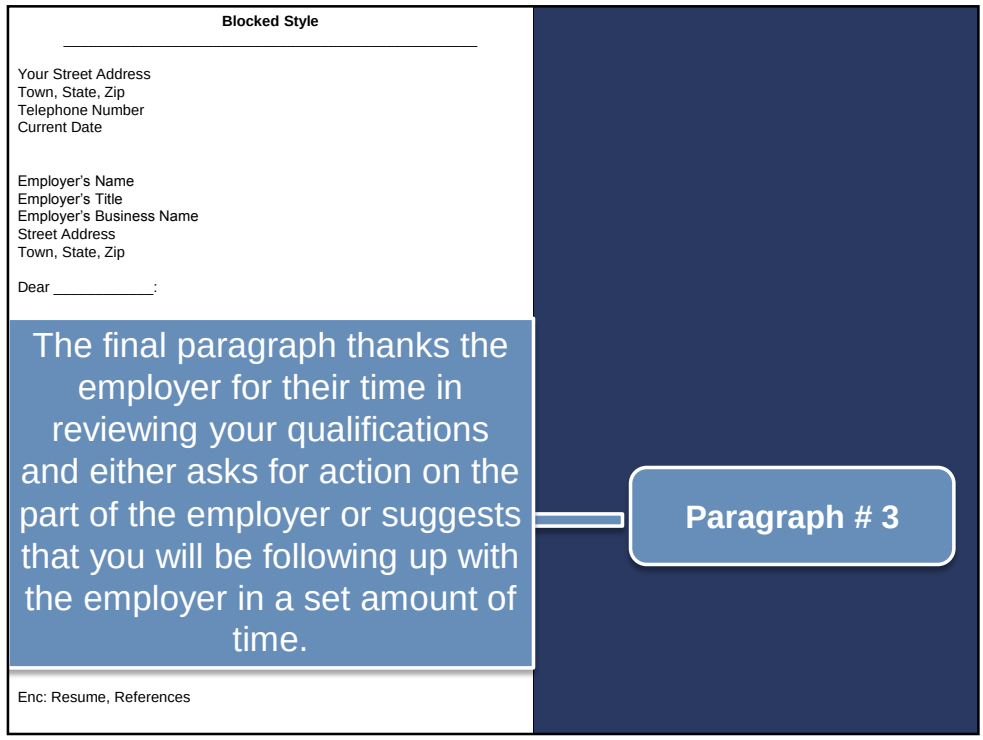
Now that you've grabbed the reader's attention, it's time to demonstrate why you're a good fit for the company. Match qualifications you have to the job.

Highlight skills and qualifications that are most relevant in the job opening.

Explain what you have to offer the employer

And show that you've spent some time researching the organization.

Showing you're a problem solver and can help with challenges that the company faces are qualities that many employers look for.

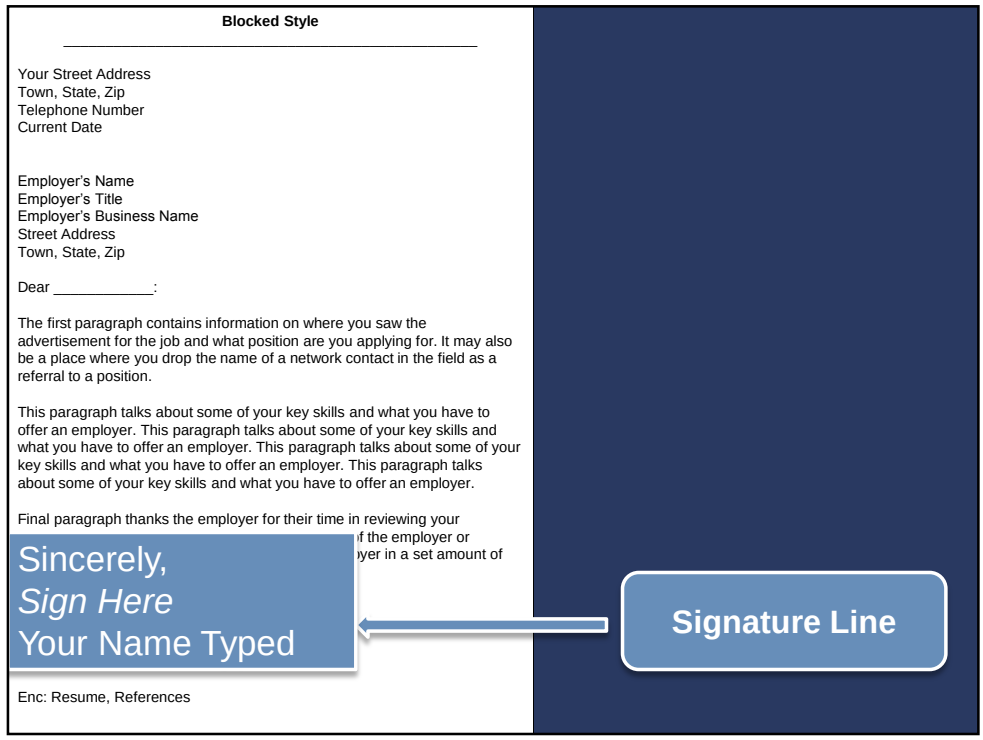


Your Third or Final Paragraph: "Seal the Deal"

Convince them you're a good fit. The last paragraph is where you seal the deal and ask for the interview. Be clear. Thank the employer for their time in reviewing your qualifications, restate your desire to work for the company.

If I don't hear from you in a week or two…

Keep your closing short and simple. Always keep your final words professional and to the point. Close with the word "Sincerely."

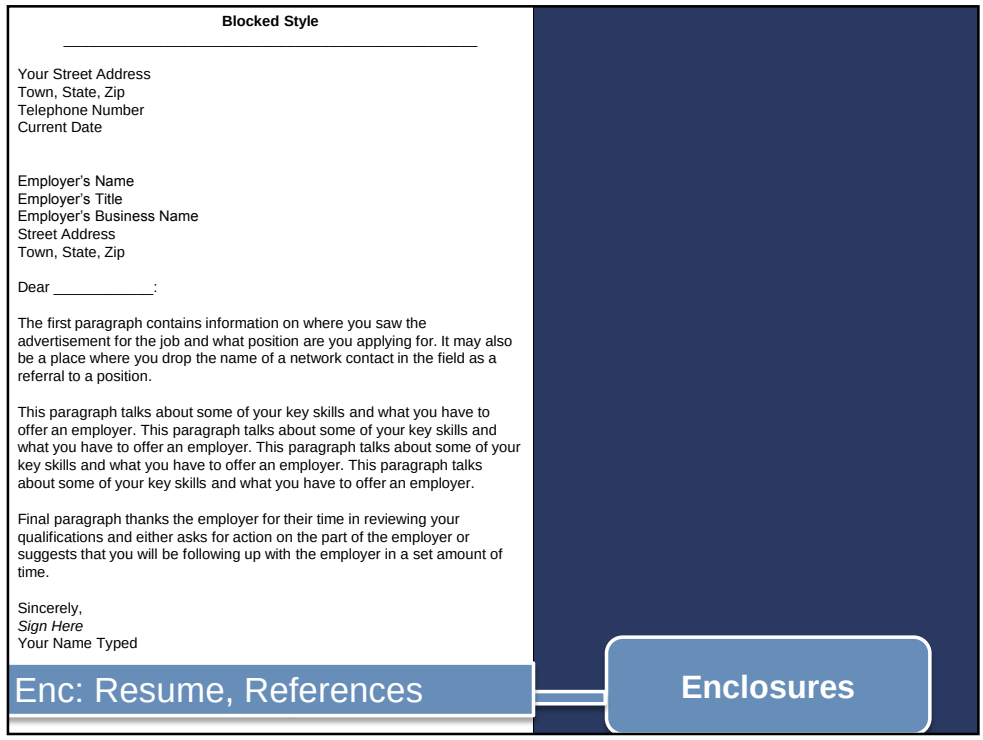


Handwritten & typed signatures: Handwrite your signature when you send a hard copy of a cover letter. Press enter twice, and type your name.

If sending via E-Mail, you can insert a jpeg of your signature AKA an electronic signature.

If you have a scanner in your One-Stop Center, you can scan your signature to make a jpeg. If this isn't possible, some people use a cursive font for your name

NOTE: If you have scanners in your One-Stop Center, offer assistance for signatures. If not, point out that these can be done at home.



Enclosures: Indicate what other documents may accompany the cover letter, such as the resume or an application.

Facilitator can ask participants to take out **Handout #4- T-Format Cover Letter Examples** to show different ways this format can be used when writing a cover letter. **Handout #5- T-Format Cover Letter Template** can be distributed to participants as an example of a complete cover letter done in this format.

Dear _____:

I am responding to your job entitled "_____" (Reference # _____) which I found in _____. I have extensive experience in _____ and have included a copy of my resume for your review.

Below is a comparison of your job requirements and my qualifications:

Your Job Requirements	My Qualifications
_____	•
_____	•
_____	•

Facilitator can say: Another way of crafting a cover letter is to use a "T-format" style cover letter. A T-format is designed to show a hiring manager how you stack up against the job requirements listed in a job announcement both quickly and clearly. To write a T-format cover letter, make 2 columns in the body of your cover letter. The left column will address the employers hiring needs and the right column highlights your specific qualifications that meet the listed hiring needs. You can select the hiring needs by reviewing the job description and selecting what you think are the must-haves for position.

Your Requirements	My Qualifications
Bachelor's in business or management	B.S. in Business Management
Human resources or training experience	Chosen to train all new employees in a fast-paced retail environment
Reliability and positive work	Promoted twice in three years with Blockbuster Video

Remember that a job description will have a long laundry list of ideal nice-to-have skills. Your job is to choose the top 3 requirements that match your experience. If you're trying to make a career transition and have to get a little creative by choosing a requirement that doesn't seem as high-priority, so be it. These requirements will become the mini sections under the "Your Requirements" column. Now write a little blurb for each of the requirements in the "My Qualifications" column. Try to reference examples of your work that demonstrate how you meet each of the hiring manager's primary needs

TOP 10 COVER LETTER TIPS: Take out **Handout #6: Top 10 Cover Letter Tips** – discuss the importance of each point with participants.

1. Make yourself stand out. Gain the competitive edge by writing a cover letter that focuses on your unique and exceptional qualities and matches the job description. What makes you an ideal candidate? Be strategic, persuasive, and concise.

2. Target the right person. Sending your letter to the proper person can make all the difference. Avoid generic addresses such as "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Sir or Madam." Instead, find out the name and title of the person who does the hiring for the job that you're interested. Remember to get and use the correct spelling of his or her name.

3. Stay simple. Keep your cover letter brief. Never send a letter that is more than a page in length. Be sure to use clear, professional language while avoiding acronyms, jargon, or anything overly personal.

4. Make it shine. The overall visual impression of your cover letter can be just as important as what's written in it. The overall look is as important as it's content. Match the style on your cover letter with the style of your résumé. Stick with one font. You are creating a first impression.

5. Be an attention getter. Don't waste your first paragraph by writing a dull introduction. Grab the employer's attention from the start by pointing out how you can make a difference in a way no other candidate can. Keep in mind that you have only about one to two seconds to get your initial point across before the reader moves on to the next letter.

6. Sell yourself. Don't expect to wow a prospective employer with a lengthy checklist of past accomplishments and titles. Instead, position your accomplishments in terms of how you could bring the same benefits to their company. Your cover letter needs to answer the question "What's in it for my company?" Clarify how your expertise will benefit them directly.

7. Second set of eyes. Never underestimate the negative effect of bad writing, which can greatly hurt your chances of landing a new position. Have someone else check your cover letter for spelling, grammar, and overall readability. Another set of eyes never hurts.

8. Avoid exaggeration. There's nowhere to hide when you finally land an interview and the prospective employer wants to know what you meant by "best in the world." Avoid saying anything that sounds too over the top which can project the wrong image and damage your credibility. And remember never to speak poorly of former employers or coworkers.

9. Close encounters. Don't depend on the employer to make the first move. Request an interview and tell the employer when you will follow up to arrange it.

10. Don't forget the follow-up. After sending in your cover letter and résumé, it's imperative that you follow up. You'll greatly increase your chances of getting an interview if you call the employer directly after writing, rather than just sitting back and waiting for a call.

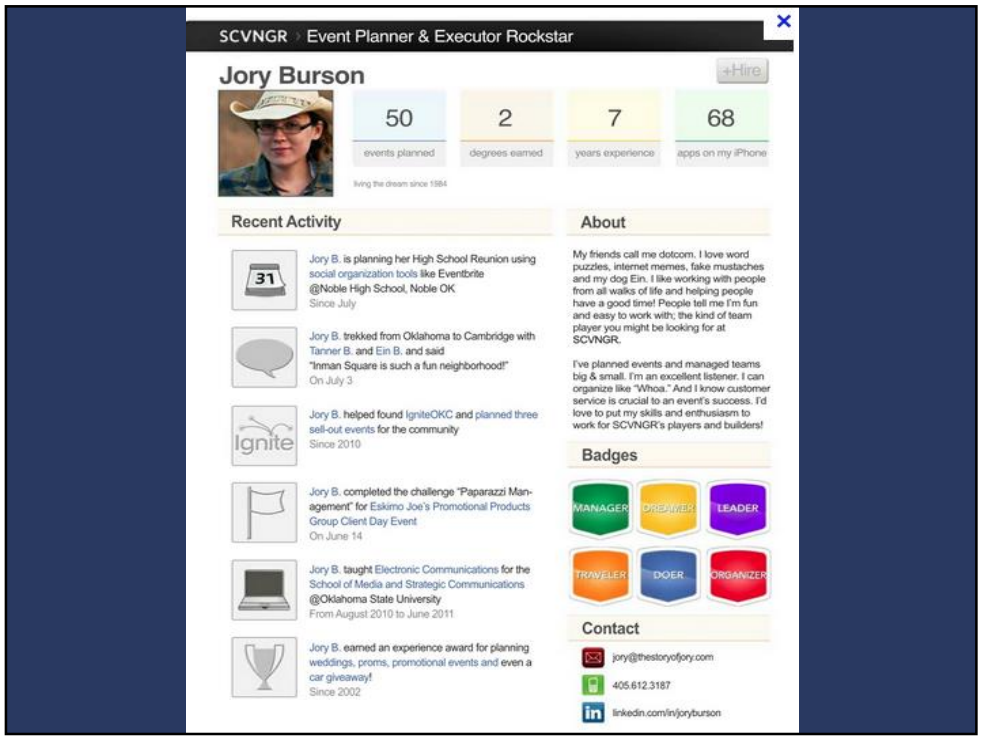
Letter Do's & Don'ts If time permits, facilitator can go over what you should and shouldn't do when writing a cover letter. Facilitator ask participant's to take out **Handout #7: Cover Letter Do's and Don'ts**

OPTIONAL EXERCISE:

60 Second Commercial:

Facilitator can explain how having a 60 second commercial can help them to summarize their experiences and strengths when creating a cover letter. Facilitator can have participants take 7 minutes to write their own 60 second commercial using the information below. Facilitator can ask for volunteers to read their 60 second commercial to the group.

For example:
I work as (or I work in)… (profession/job title)
With expertise in (area of expertise)
My strengths include (what you are best at)



ADVANCED OPTIONAL ACTIVITY – Brief Overview

Modern Cover Letters

The status of the cover letter is changing in the Web industry. While a well-formed cover letter still has a place, some companies believe that folks who rely on the old cover letter method for web jobs never make it to the next round.

You've Got 20 Seconds… MAKE IT SHORT AND SWEET!
Any Web design agency that is thriving is too busy to read. Talented people are busy people, and most Web people have a short attention span. The Web is all about scanning, so make your cover letter adhere to the standards you apply to Web writing. Every word counts!

Give examples of your work, but only the best. There's no need to show 20 samples when 5 are good. Remember you have just 20 seconds to impress them. Give them your best, and if they want more, back it up with a portfolio. And don't forget how much you hate receiving 10 MB attachments.

Showing personality, showing that you haven't just copied the cover letter of your "Web designer" template. Demonstrate personality with real examples.

EXAMPLE OF COVER LETTER SHOWN ON SCREEN:

www.thestoryofjory.com

Story behind the cover letter shown on screen:
From Jory, "You know what that means – time for Jory to get on this job search thing! I found a cool position open at SCNVGR, and as per their request I made a unique cover letter. I decided to spoof a SCVNGR profile page to illustrate my personality and a few bits of relevant experience. I used photoshop to create my own SCVNGR badges and Chrome's web inspector to match the colors off the site. It was a fun project and a welcome distraction from the job boards; maybe I'll photoshop all my job applications!"

Closure/Conclusion:

▪**Wrap Up**: Encourage workshop attendees to practice writing cover letters for positions they found in the classified ads. Encourage them to try writing "Cold" cover letters, and networking letters.

▪Encourage participants to e-mail their letters for critique.

▪Encourage participants to attend other workshops available at the One Stop.

▪Ask participants to circulate workshop evaluation and collect responses.

Congratulations, you have created a successful cover letter!