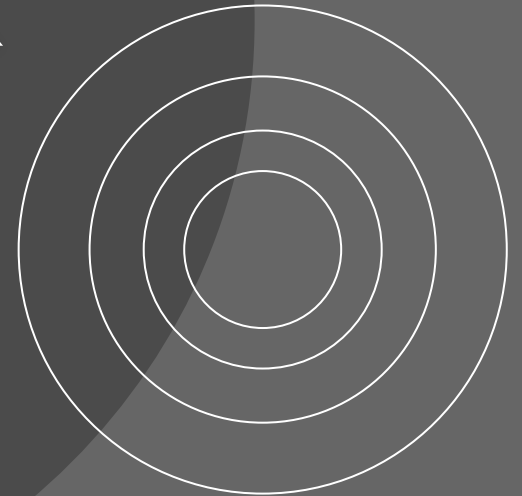




Career ToolKit: Cover Letter & Professional References





Hello!

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Agenda

- Cover Letters
- Professional References
- Q&A





Cover Letters

Purpose, Formatting, and Writing Tips

R.I.P
Cover Letter

Are cover letters necessary?



Stats

- Only 26% of recruiters said cover letters were important to their hiring decision (Jobvite 2017)
- 47% of job seekers didn't submit a cover letter for most recent application (Jobvite 2017)
- 53% of employers say a resume doesn't provide enough information. (Career Builder 2016)



**A good cover may not get read, but
a bad one is not worth reading.**

**No cover letter is better than a *bad*
cover letter.**

Make it count

- Distinguish yourself from other candidates
- Compliment the resume, don't repeat it
- Show how you are a good fit for the role
 - Especially industry/career changers
- Show off your writing and communication skills



Formatting tips

- 1 page
- Use same font/style as resume
- Align to left of page
- Date, address of organization, signature line
- Greet a specific person using the appropriate title or name
 - *“Dear Hiring Manager or “Dear Selection Committee”*



Introduction

- How you found the job
- A specific reason you are interested
- **Thesis statement:** “...because I have X, Y, Z skills I would be a good candidate...”

Body

- 2 or 3 BRIEF paragraphs
- For each skill (X, Y, Z) provide an example from your background
- Explain how you will apply that skill in the new job

Closing

- Restate your interest and fit for the job
- Include any other requested information (e.g. start date, salary range, availability, etc.)

January 17, 2018

John Graham
Revature LLC
11730 Plaza America Drive
Reston, VA

Dear Mr. Graham,

I am submitting my application for the Revature Software Engineer Manager position that I found on The George Washington University Handshake website. As an organization that strives to make an impact through well-trained IT professionals, I am attracted to the opportunity to continue my professional development while supporting the work of Fortune 500 companies. I believe that my technical knowledge, leadership ability, and collaborative nature make me a strong candidate for this role.

I am currently in my last semester at The George Washington University School of Engineering & Applied Science obtaining my Master's degree in Computer Science. I chose to return to school and focus my coursework on graphics and user interface because of the prevalence of smart technology and my desire to stay informed of emerging trends. My coursework has included design of interactive multimedia and design of human-computer interface, which has prepared me to immediately contribute to a variety of projects. I have three years experience with SQL, and advanced knowledge of Java and C++.

In my current role as a team leader at Cellular USA, Inc., I guide four other engineers as we develop products to fit the needs of a large federal client. Starting with the initial proposal, and at each stage of the project, I identify the key issues that need to be addressed and assign tasks accordingly. I schedule regular meetings with the project manager in order to incorporate feedback and ensure that our work is aligned to their goals. My ability to engage internal and external stakeholders will be a valuable quality when working for high profile clients at Revature.

For the next stage of my career I want to continue utilizing my skills while providing software solutions to improve business operations. I believe that my background and dedication make me a strong fit for the Software Engineer Manager job, and I look forward to discussing my qualifications in an interview. Please let me know if you have any questions and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Gene Gray

Specific interest in company

Thesis statement

Examples = Evidence

Apply skills to job

Customize the cover letter

Select skills
from the job
posting

Choose
relevant
examples
from your
resume

Connect
your
experience
to the new
job



References

Who to ask, how to ask, and what to ask for

Professional Reference

- Someone with knowledge of your professional skills (including education)
- Someone you worked with directly
- Someone you worked with recently
- Someone you worked with in a role similar to the role you are applying to now
- Someone who will provide a positive review

A vote of confidence

References can have a big impact on your job search success

- They can provide potential employers with first-hand, personal accounts of your abilities
- An honest, positive reference can back up what's on your resume
- References can help hiring managers when choosing between 2 candidates, or if they are on-the-fence about a candidate



Choose wisely

- Pick people who were close enough to you to genuinely know you and your work
- **Supervisors** and **coworkers** can attest to different aspects of your professional life, while **faculty** can speak to your academic skills and knowledge
- Avoid anyone who might come off simply as a friend
- Try to balance references from past and current jobs



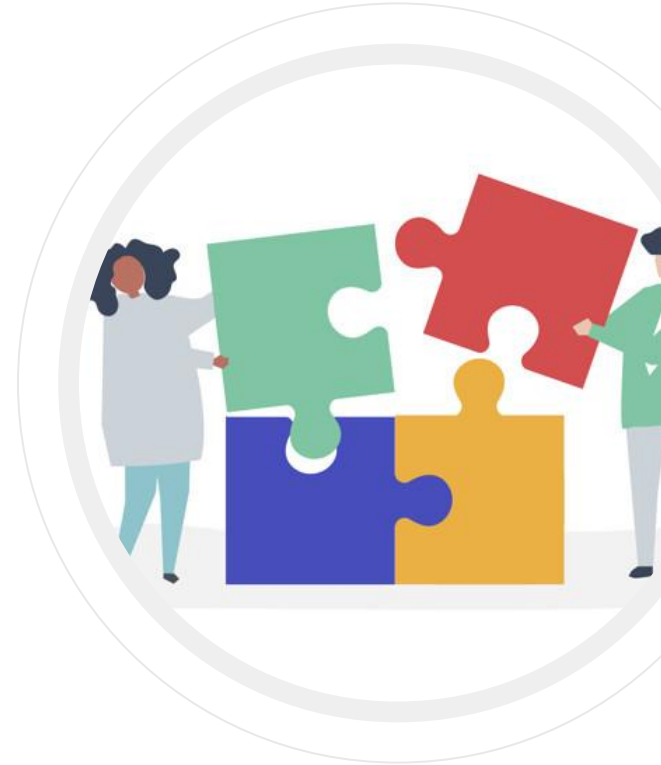
Ask nicely

- Ask early in your search process
- Meet face-to-face or schedule a call; email if you must
 - Remind them who you are and what you've been up to by providing your resume
- Give them a chance to gracefully decline:
 - *“Would you feel comfortable serving as a reference in my upcoming job search?”*
 - *“Do you have time in the next few weeks to serve as my reference for this fellowship?”*



Make it easy

- Explain why you chose them and what you think they could talk about
 - Share examples of your previous work
 - Highlight specific qualities or strengths from your time together
- If a letter or online form is required, provide all necessary links, instructions, etc.
- Confirm their preferred method of contact (email and/or phone number)



Hello [name],

I hope all is well! How have things been with you and **[the person's company, organization, or personal interest]**?

I'm reaching out because I'm beginning my job search process and I would like to list you as a reference, if you're willing. I thought of you because we've **[ways in which you've worked together]**, and you could speak to my **[key skills and abilities needed in the new position]**.

I've attached my current resume and the position description for your reference. I'm hoping you can talk about [choose 1 or 2 from list]:

- **[1-2 skill, abilities, or talents that are key to the position]**
- **[Specific project you worked on that's relevant to the role]**
- **[Key differentiator between you and other candidates]**

Please let me know if you'd be willing to serve as a reference and, if so, your preferred contact info and any other details you need from my end.

And, of course, if you're busy or not comfortable, I completely understand. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

All the best,

[Your name]

Gender bias in references

A study found that executives routinely used different words to describe men and women:

- “She cared for her clients and took very good care of their needs.”
- “He had strong relationships with his clients and was very reliable.”

A review of academic recommendation letters found that the letters praised women by using words such as “helpful,” “kind,” “sympathetic,” “nurturing” and “tactful,” along with behaviors such as helping others, taking direction well and maintaining relationships.

- “the more communal the characteristics mentioned, the lower the evaluation of the candidate.”



Avoiding gender bias in reference writing

Got a great student? Planning to write a super letter of reference?
Don't fall into these common traps based on unconscious gender bias.

Mention research & publications

Letters of reference for men are 4x more likely to mention publications and twice as likely to have multiple references to research. Make sure you put these critical accomplishments in every letter!

Don't stop now!

On average, letters for men are 16% longer than letters for women and letters for women are 2.5x as likely to make a minimal assurance ('she can do the job') rather than a ringing endorsement ('she is the best for the job').

Emphasize accomplishments, not effort

Letters for reference for men are more likely to emphasize accomplishments ('his research', 'his skills', or 'his career') while letters for women are 50% more likely to include 'grindstone' adjectives that describe effort. 'Hard-working' associates with effort, but not ability.

We all share bias

It is important to remember that unconscious gender bias isn't a male problem. Research shows that women are just as susceptible to these common pitfalls as men. This is a problem for all of us - let's solve it together!



brought to you by:

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
**Commission on the
Status of Women**

Research from Trix, F & Psenka, C. Exploring the color of glass: Letters of recommendation for female and male medical faculty. *Discourse & Society*, 2003; and Madera, JM, Hebl, MR, & Martin, RC. Gender and letters of Recommendation for Academia: Agentive and Communal Differences. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2009.



Keep it professional

Letters of reference for women are 7x more likely to mention personal life - something that is almost always irrelevant for the application. Also make sure you use formal titles and surnames for both men and women.

Stay away from stereotypes

Although they describe positive traits, adjectives like 'caring', 'compassionate', and 'helpful' are used more frequently in letters for women and can evoke gender stereotypes which can hurt a candidate. And be careful not to invoke these stereotypes directly ('she is not emotional').

Be careful raising doubt

We all want to write honest letters, but negative or irrelevant comments, such as 'challenging personality' or 'I have confidence that she will become better than average' are twice as common in letters for female applicants. Don't add doubt unless it is strictly necessary!

Adjectives to avoid: Adjectives to include:

caring	successful
compassionate	excellent
hard-working	accomplished
conscientious	outstanding
dependable	skilled
diligent	knowledgeable
dedicated	insightful
tactful	resourceful
interpersonal	confident
warm	ambitious
helpful	independent
	intellectual

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Keep it simple

- Create a document with your references
- Include a **name, title, organization, division or department, telephone number, and email address**, as well as a sentence briefly explaining the relationship
- ***Only provide references when requested***



Gene Gray

Washington, DC, genegray@gwu.edu, (555) 555-5555, graygenes.github.io

References

Dr. Martha Washington, Professor, Department of Electrical & Computer Engineering, The George Washington University, Washington, DC
marthaw@gwu.edu, 202-994-1111

I performed research in Dr. Washington's telecommunications lab for two semesters and presented a poster.

Liza Johnson, Assistant Director of Marketing, Big E-Company, Bethesda, MD
johnsonl@bigecompany.com, 240-555-5555

I reported to Ms. Johnson during my internship where I re-designed the company website on a new platform.

Follow up

- Send a (handwritten) thank you note to show your appreciation
- Let them know when sending out new applications
- Share the outcome, whether or not you got the offer
- Keep in touch periodically about your career progress



Next steps

- Draft a cover letter using a sample job or internship description
- Review the Cover Letter Guide (undergrads) or the SEAS Resume & Cover Letter Guide (graduate) for examples
- Start making a list of potential references including how you know them and what skills/experience they could share about you
- Begin reaching out to your references to schedule meetings to discuss your career interests and confirm their decision

A large, light grey circle is positioned on the right side of the slide. To its left, there are several concentric circles of varying diameters, centered on the same horizontal axis. The word "Questions?" is written in a large, bold, black sans-serif font, overlapping the right side of the concentric circles and the left side of the large grey circle.

Questions?