

Work Search Activity 4: Cover Letter Basics

FOR THE TEACHER

Introduction

The purpose of this activity is to help students understand the basic form and function of cover letters, and to prepare them to write their own cover letters. Students will be able to:

- Explain the purpose of a cover letter
- Identify appropriate and effective cover letter form and techniques
- Reflect on content for their own cover letters

Setting the Stage

Ask students to recall a time when they've made a particularly good or bad first impression. What were the consequences of the impression they made? A cover letter is an applicant's introduction to a potential employer—and first impressions count! **(Have students reflect on the importance of first impressions when searching for work in the My Journal section of their Plans.)**

Review what students already know about cover letters. In this activity, students will build on that knowledge with tips and advice from Career Cruising's **Employment Guide**. If access to computer resources is limited, you can print out the **Cover & Broadcast Letters** section of the guide for students to use in class.

Have students work in groups, acting as hiring panels, to discuss and evaluate the two sample cover letters. Encourage students to mark up the cover letters by circling or underlining the strengths, weaknesses, mistakes, and other points of interest in the letters. When students have finished with the worksheets, you can go over the cover letters as a class, highlighting examples of effective—and ineffective—cover letter writing.

Finally, students will have the opportunity to express which accomplishments they would include in their own cover letters. This initial inventory will help them think objectively about their own skills and abilities, and how they'd like to present themselves to potential employers.

Starting the Program

Go to www.careercruising.com. Enter your personal My Plan username and password in the spaces provided, and click on **Log In**.

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PART A: TRUE OR FALSE?

Read the **Cover & Broadcast Letters** section of the **Employment Guide** and answer the following true-or-false questions about cover letters:

	True or False?	
1. The purpose of a cover letter is to highlight your qualifications for a specific job and secure an interview.	T	F
2. All of the really important information is in the resume, so a cover letter doesn't need to be perfect.	T	F
3. You don't need to send a resume if you send a cover letter.	T	F
4. A cover letter highlights the most important information about your qualifications, while a resume is a more comprehensive summary of your qualifications.	T	F
5. It's a little pushy to address the hiring manager by name; it's better to always address your cover letter to "Whom It May Concern."	T	F
6. You should write your cover letter in point form because hiring managers may be too busy to read all of it.	T	F
7. Ideally, cover letters should be one page long and contain three to five paragraphs.	T	F
8. You should tailor your cover letter to describe how your skills, abilities, and achievements are transferrable to the job you're applying for.	T	F
9. You should include examples in your cover letter to prove that you possess the skills and characteristics the employer is looking for.	T	F
10. Your confidence and enthusiasm about the position should come across in your cover letter.	T	F
11. Sending a form letter is fine—it's not like your skills or experiences are going to change.	T	F
12. If you don't have much experience, don't draw attention to it; emphasize the relevant skills you've acquired in other ways.	T	F
13. If your contact information is on your resume, you don't need to put it in your cover letter as well.	T	F
14. Ending your cover letter with an invitation for the employer to contact you for an interview is a little desperate.	T	F

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PART B: EVALUATING SAMPLE COVER LETTERS

Read the job posting and cover letters found at **the end of this activity**. Evaluate how well the cover letters present each applicant. Feel free to circle, highlight, or underline points of interest in each letter for discussion.

Once you've considered each letter, answer the following questions:

1. What are some of the strengths and/or weaknesses of Taylor's cover letter (Cover Letter A)?

2. What are some of the strengths and/or weaknesses of Jamie's cover letter (Cover Letter B)?

3. How different are Taylor (Cover Letter A) and Jamie's (Cover Letter B) actual qualifications?

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4. What impression did you get of the applicant from Cover Letter A?

5. What impression did you get of the applicant from Cover Letter B?

6. If you were the hiring manager, which applicant would you interview? Why?

SUMMARY – YOUR VIEWS

Now that you know a little more about writing cover letters, answer the following questions:

7. Why are cover letters important when submitting a resume for a job opening?

8. What are some of the challenges of composing a strong cover letter?

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9. Cover letters are tailored to specific job postings, but, in general, what would you like potential employers to know about you? What do you have to offer? (e.g. a specific skill, characteristic, or accomplishment)

Dining Out Magazine

August 2013 Issue

We're Hiring at LE WOK INDONÉSIEN!**Position:** Sous Chef**Job Ref.:** SC-5309**Location:** Le Wok Indonésien, 789 Main Street, Northwest City, CA 59800**Industry:** Food Services**Job Type:** Full-time, 40-50 hours/week**Deadline:** August 31, 2013**Job Summary**

Do you live for great food? Are you a motivated and creative culinary professional who strives to take casual fine dining to a new level? **Le Wok Indonésien** is a Southeast Asian restaurant committed to providing its guests with an unparalleled dining experience. We are looking for an enthusiastic and dedicated sous chef to join our team and make those mouths water in anticipation.

Key Skills & Abilities

- An organized team player with excellent communication skills
- Consistently punctual and reliable, with a professional appearance
- Take pride in your work (and your wok!) and actively learn new cooking techniques
- Demonstrate superior customer service skills and courtesy when interacting with guests
- Innovative and creative

Key Duties

- Supervise kitchen staff to ensure efficient meal preparation and production
- Help create new menu items and present dishes according to chef's specifications
- Manage food and supply budget; keep track of stock and order new ingredients as needed
- Clean and sanitize all kitchen equipment
- Promote a positive atmosphere in both the kitchen and dining room
- Fulfill any other duties assigned by the chef or restaurant manager

Recommended Qualifications

- Associate degree in culinary arts or related program
- Minimum 1-2 years of experience working in a fast-paced restaurant
- Training in safe food handling and/or workplace safety
- Demonstrated excellence in cooking and food presentation
- Strong work ethic

Work Conditions & Physical Requirements

- Comfortable working under pressure in a hot, hectic environment
- Able to stand on feet for long periods and lift heavy objects
- Willing to work irregular hours, including some evening, holiday, and weekend shifts
- Appreciate our diverse, multicultural work environment

We offer a competitive salary and benefits, as well as opportunities for career advancement. Please send your cover letter and resume to Geraldine Greene, Restaurant Manager, and indicate the Job Reference Number in your application.

COVER LETTER A

RE: Job CS-5390

To Whom it May Concern,

I recently saw that you are hiring a sous chef. Since the beginning of time, I have wanted to work in your restaurant. Working at Le Wok Indonésien would be an amazing opportunity for me to learn new cooking techniques and improve my knife skills, which are not the best. I just know U R the kind of man/woman who likes to make people's dreams come true! :)

As you can see in my resume, I apprenticed as a cook at a very prestigious restaurant that once won an award as best new French bistro in the city. Then I took a year and a half off to travel for personal reasons before getting a job as a concierge at a luxury downtown hotel. Although dealing with annoying guests and staff is a real pain, it's worth it to be able to visit the kitchen during my breaks and watch the hotel chefs at work. I have learned a lot about cooking in a hectic environment that way. Once, I even saw them prepare an elaborate meal for a celebrity wedding at the hotel. I have to respect client "confidentiality," but it was a big feast with expensive and exotic ingredients! I'm sure everything I learned here would help me rise above the other cooks at your restaurant. It goes without saying that I am a very hard worker who never overlooks even the tiniest detail. Everyone also says that I am very proactive and have endless synergy, which I'm sure you will agree are important qualities that a person of my young age rarely possesses. I learned during my culinary arts program that I actually prefer doing pastries, so I would like to stick with this as much as possible. I'm looking for a job that pays me at least \$35,000 a year.

I am confident that my enthusiasm makes up for any shortcomings I may have. In my free time, I volunteer with Big Siblings as a big sibling to an underprivileged child. I am also an avid runner. Just this last year, I completed a 10 k marathon, which is the highlight of my life. Since I have intensive training on most weekends and some evenings, I would have to schedule my shifts last-minute around this priority.

I hope you'll call me if you feel that I am a suitable candidate. If not, all the best to you and your staff, and I'll still recommend your restaurant to all of my friends.

TKL.

Taylor Kelly

partyanimal_1991@email.com

COVER LETTER B

Jamie Morgan
681 Lakeview Street
Northwest City, CA 59800
555-555-5259
jmorgan@email.com

August 12, 2013

RE: Sous Chef, Job Ref. SC-5309

Ms. Geraldine Greene, Restaurant Manager
Le Wok Indonésien
789 Main Street
Northwest City, CA 59800

Dear Ms. Greene,

Please consider my application for the position of sous-chef at Le Wok Indonésien, as advertised in the August 2013 issue of *Dining Out Magazine*. The restaurant's reputation for outstanding service and culinary innovation is widely known, and it would be a privilege to work under Chef Giselle Petit. I can offer my flawless record of being reliable and punctual, strong communication and leadership skills, and a willingness to learn and be creative in the kitchen. Above all else, my goal is to give customers an unforgettable meal.

I graduated from the Culinary Arts program at Northwest City College in May 2011. The program teaches the essentials of food preparation, presentation, and service in the restaurant industry, and includes courses in garnishes, nutrition, baking, and stocks, soups, and sauces. During the hands-on training, I became comfortable working in a fast-paced environment with a diverse variety of co-workers.

I apprenticed under renowned Chef Max Gupta. During my training period, we won the 2011 "Delicious Dish of the Year" Food Fusion Award for inventing our popular dish called Spicy Melon Curry. Inspired by Mr. Gupta's experiences, I spent a year travelling in Southeast Asia to sample the cuisine of Thailand, India, and Vietnam. This experience has deepened my understanding of food preparation and appreciation, and I am keen to apply this knowledge in a practical setting.

In my current position as a concierge, I am challenged to be resourceful when resolving issues. For example, guests often approach me with special food restrictions that must be accommodated by the hotel restaurant. By discussing options with the chefs and relying on my culinary training, I suggest an appetizing alternative menu. My goal is to take these skills to the next level, and working creatively with food as Le Wok Indonésien's sous chef would be an exciting step forward in my career.

Please see my resume for more information about my relevant skills, work experience, and education. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the details of this position in person at your earliest convenience. I can be contacted by phone after 4:00 pm on weekdays and by email any time.

Sincerely,

Jamie Morgan

Jamie Morgan