
From Extra-Ordinary to Extraordinary

The Secrets of Brilliant Cover Letters

What do you know about cover letters?

- Structure?
 - Content?
 - Purpose?
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Classic Advice

- Tell them why you're writing.
 - Show them you know about their organization.
 - Talk about your qualifications.
 - Indicate follow-up plans.
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Dear Mr. Kline,

- I am writing to you concerning the position of the Director of Communications of Accuracy in Academia.
 - Please consider this letter to be my application for the position of Communications Director at Accuracy in Academia.
 - I am contacting you in regards to the director of communications position you are seeking for Accuracy in Academia.
 - I am contacting you in regards to the PR/marketing professional that you are seeking for Billionaires for Bush.
 - I would like to be considered for the Director of Communications at Accuracy in Academia.
 - I would like to throw my hat in the ring to be considered for a public relations, marketing and communications position with Billionaires for Bush.
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Classic Advice as typically executed

- Tell them why you're writing.
 - A sentence flatly stating interest
 - Show them you know about their organization.
 - Reference to a tidbit pulled from the website
 - Talk about your qualifications.
 - A rehash of the resume
 - Indicate follow-up plans.
 - Thanks for your time, and I'll follow up in X days.
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Dear Mr. Kline,

As a seasoned strategic communications professional, I am writing to express my interest in working for your dynamic organization as Director of Communications. I am a strong believer in the power of education and look forward to working for an organization in pursuit of bringing truth to the classroom.

With over 9 years of experience in handling strategic communications among the investor and stakeholder community, I believe my experience will prove to be invaluable to your organization. As detailed in my attached resume, my prior work experience entails extensive report writing, drafting press releases, drafting copy for the company's annual report and a myriad of other writing assignments.

Most recently, the completion of my Master's degree in Strategic Communications at Columbia has provided me with the foundation to develop and implement a range of strategic communications plans along with strategies to promote product branding.

Along with my strengths as a proven communications professional, I am a high energy individual who thrives in a team environment. I believe that my proven communication skills and passion for seeking truth in education will make me an asset to your organization.

I welcome the opportunity to meet with you in the near future to discuss the role and how I can assist Accuracy in Academia in achieving its mission. I will contact you next week to set up an appointment. In the interim, please feel free to contact me at 212.555.1001.

Thank you for your consideration.

Dear HR Recruiter:

The only place where bad communication is funny is on television. In the real world, at an institution as important as the Federal Reserve, a mistaken message can be disastrous. I have made a career out of ensuring those disasters never happen.

As a writer/producer for Nickelodeon's in-house advertising agency, I run complicated campaigns for the world's biggest brands. In the last year, I brought our VP of advertising and the CMO of Target together under an idea that led to the first-ever full integration of the two iconic brands. I created a campaign for Kmart that resulted in a seven-fold increase in product sales. These successes depended upon my ability to bring teams of people with varying goals and personalities together. That ability makes me an excellent fit for your Communication Specialist position.

The driving force behind all my achievements is my passion for sharing ideas. I love what I do, and that love has led to multiple screenwriting awards, a Promax Gold award and a Master's Degree at one of the most prestigious media strategy schools in the country.

A strong internal communications plan at the Federal Reserve is vital to our country's financial health. With my ability to effectively distribute messaging across a variety of groups and mediums, I would be a valuable member of this important institution.

I look forward to speaking to you directly about this opportunity.

Classic Advice...revised

- Make sure it's clear why you're writing.
 - Show that you understand their needs and desires.
 - Show them your personality.
 - *MAKE THEM WANT TO MEET YOU.*
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A successful application in
three parts

Dear MaryAnn

PART I

You are looking for a team player and someone who can handle the workload of 25 sales people and 1700+ ad pages. Look no further, I am that person.

I am the best candidate for the Advertising Director spot at **REDACTED** and I want the job.

I have managed sales teams over the last several years and I understand how important being a team player is to both management and to the sales force. More importantly, I lead by example. I work hard and motivate sales people to do the same. I think strategically and make myself available to pitch in when and where I am needed.

REDACTED' s success did not just happen. You all made it happen and I would like to be there with you and take your magazine to new heights. I have strong client relationships and I know how to look at business through a brand "lens." This ability has made me a successful advertising professional and my numbers prove it. I have consistently hit my quota over the years at REDACTED and I have made a lot of money for this organization. I would like to do the same for **REDACTED**.

You should know that clients and salespeople tell me regularly that they enjoy working with me. I am professional, smart and driven and I have a style all my own. I think that I epitomize the **REDACTED** reader and I can project that to the world. In a nutshell, I understand your brand.

Best,

Dear MaryAnn,

PART II

Thank you so much for a fabulous breakfast this morning. I feel that it provided us with a great opportunity to get to know each other. I am glad that we discussed a wide range of topics and had many laughs along the way.

And speaking of things that are funny, I felt a bit self-conscious that I have never stayed at a Four Seasons hotel on business (as budgets at XYZ never really allowed it). As we were talking about it I was wondering if you were imagining me showing up “Beverly Hillbillies” style to such a prestigious hotel.

So I immediately sprang into action and performed an analysis of the ties in my closet to demonstrate that I indeed have REDACTED style!! Here is the breakdown (for real!):

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Brand	#	Comments			
Gucci	12	Of course!	Versa	1	Grazie!
Armani	11	A must-have	Burberry	1	Mad about that pattern still
Boss	8	They really resonate with me	Givenchy	1	Oui
Versace	7	Sometimes, you have to make a statement	Biella	1	Roma
Zegna	6	Elegance	City London	1	Oh, behave, baby!
Calv. Klein	6	Sometimes, I am a minimalist	D&G	1	I wish I looked like those models!
Barney's	3	Great patterns	Faconable	1	Bon jour!
Fendi	2	Sometimes, I like to dream I live in Milan	Vineyard	1	I've met Chuck and Shep
Polo	2	Proud to be an American	J Crew	1	For the outdoor summer wedding (with flip flops)
Pink	2	Color!			
Brooks Bros	1	Classic style			
			Tie stats:		
			Total		75
			Average price (est)		\$95

Proof that I am a REDACTED guy: They hang in my closet coordinated by colors

Proof that I can be a regular guy: I' ll admit which ones weren' t the most practical purchases

Proof that I am a gentleman: I plan on donating some of my ties to Housing Works this afternoon so that a man who is less fortunate than I can wear them and realize his dreams.

Probability that I will be wearing one of the above ties (or even better, a new one) on my first day at REDACTED: a hopeful 100%!!!!

I will call you at 2pm as discussed. And thank you for everything.

Best,

Michael

I would like nothing more than to be a part of your team and will follow-up with you to see how we can move the process to the next step.

So... can I have the job?

The final piece

PART III

- A 30-page national sales analysis with recommendations.

Fancy dancing is no substitute for serious chops.

Some ways to get started ...

Dear Ms. Boule,

Long ago, Cicero noted that “If you wish to persuade me, you must think my thoughts, feel my feelings, and speak my words.”

As a veteran journalist with experience at some of the nation’s top newspapers and magazines, I know a lot of editors—and how they think, feel and speak. My time in a public relations agency may have been limited, but I can get stories published. I am familiar with the mainstream business press, corporate newsletters and consumer-oriented publications. ...

Dear Mr Lemcke,

My career, like yours, has spanned the globe, with a substantial portion spent in Japan. As a Tokyo-based correspondent for Business Week in the mid-1990s, I covered Japan's consumer auto market and its internationally renowned automakers, as well as the trade issues that arose between the U.S. and its number one partner in Asia. These are subjects you know well.

If that were all that I had to offer, applying to join the consulting team at CNC might be like bringing coals to Newcastle. ...

Dear Mr. Platt,

A great editorial manager commands a variety of talents, among them the organization of a field marshal, the delicacy of a diplomat, the inspiration of a madman.

In more than a decade of editorial leadership on two continents I have cultivated these talents and more. ...

To the recruiters for the Knight Case Studies Initiative Director:

Earlier this summer, after sessions on how to think like an editor and pitch like a freelancer, I gave my students a new exercise: Foursomes each represented a hypothetical magazine, with an editor, deputy editor and two writers. The editors were given a page count, a budget and a deadline. The writers started pitching.

The room sprang to life as students tested their story ideas on their peers and put into practice theories we had discussed about newsworthiness. Later, students raved—not just about how much fun it was, but about how much they learned.

In some 20 years of teaching and mentoring, I have noticed that nothing inspires learning more than a sense of real-world experience and decision-making.
