

COVER LETTER HANDBOOK



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Mount St. Mary's Career Center
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 Second Edition Revised by Maureen Pham '24

Introduction

According to Harry Dahlstrom, acclaimed author of *The Job Hunting Handbook*, cover letters are, "Your hello, your smile, your chance to create a rapport, your reason for writing." As such, we at the Career Center believe that an excellent application is not complete without a strong cover letter showcasing the skills, experience, and character that Mount students and graduates bring to the table. This guide offers helpful recommendations for when you are composing and submitting cover letters during your internship or job hunt. It also provides samples of strong cover letters that align with actual job postings found previously on MountHired, the Mount's former career management system. We hope that this guide will assist you as you endeavor on your career journey.

General Recommendations

1.) Brainstorm

- Read and re-read the job description and highlight keywords
- Research the company and their mission
- Map your qualities and experiences to the job description
- Consider your audience

3.) Edit

- Proofread, proofread, proofread
- Break long sentences
- Read it aloud to yourself or another person
- Have another individual or Career Center staff read your document

Do...

- Tell a story in each paragraph
- Keep paragraphs around six lines or less
- Use some of the same language found within the job description
- "Prove" your qualifications through brief, yet specific examples
- Be confident, genuine, and write with conviction
- Create a good flow for your message from beginning to end
- Tailor your cover letter for every position

2.) Draft

- Do not worry about editing yet
- Focus on documenting your thoughts
- Address what the employer specifically asks for in the job description
- Save your file often

4.) Submit

- Include your physical signature
- Export your document as a PDF
- Print multiple copies on professional/resume paper
- Use a professional file name when applying digitally (*Jones_Cover Letter*)

Don't...

- Exceed one page in length
- Start with: "My name is..."
- Use adverbs or weak phrases (*i.e.*, *tirelessly*; *really good*)
- Say "I feel...", "I believe...", or "I think..." since these are passive word choices
- Begin too many sentences with the word "I"
- Begin sentences with the word "As"

Sample Job Description #1: Humanities

Website Content Manager: B&O Railroad Museum
Taken from MountHired.com

Location: Baltimore, MD

Description:

General Purpose of Job: Provide oversight and management of the strategic editorial content of the B&O Railroad Museum's website including all social media channels, ensuring content is relevant to key audiences and effective in communicating and marketing the B&O Railroad Museum's exhibits, collections, programs, and events.

This position will generate and edit website content, email newsletters, social media posts/blogs and online marketing materials that advance the B&O brand and effectively market the museum and its programs. The web content manager is a core member of a small, energetic marketing and communications team that collaborates with development and curatorial staff. This position requires an enthusiastic self-starter with both creative and technical skills as well as a person who is excited by the opportunity to build an on-line presence, attract new audiences, and think outside-the-box.

Essential Functions:

- Create, write, edit and manage online content
- Maintain and manage the B&O's brand identity by serving as the primary contact who oversees consistency related to style, tone and quality online
- Build relationships with B&O staff to better understand and promote the collections, programs, and improve overall storytelling
- Conduct quantitative and qualitative assessment of the B&O's online efforts, including website analytics and consistently evaluate and report strategies based on user trends
- Develop and implement social media content to raise brand awareness, attract new audiences while maintaining current users
- Continually monitor trends, looking for ways to build and improve and enhance the B&O's emerging social media presence
- Co-manage website budget, vendor accounts and relationships, including IT consultants, web development support and freelancers

Qualifications/Basic Job Requirements:

- Bachelor's degree with major coursework in journalism, communications or related field
- Three to five years of experience writing and editing website content, digital communications and similar products
- A minimum of one year of experience with content management tools and systems, including e-newsletter platforms

- Experience using Photoshop for photo manipulation and basic HTML coding
- Experience evaluating web traffic via Google Analytics
- Working knowledge of social media management platforms
- This position requires leadership, innovation, creativity, organization and attention to detail, as well as an eye for design and technical acumen
- Ideal candidate will be a strong communicator with the ability to create and build an on-line presence, keeping abreast of best practices for web and social media communications as they evolve
- Ability to work collaboratively as a member of a professional team, fulfilling obligations to other members, being positive and supportive of others, and complying with policies, procedures and goals of organization
- Photography a plus
- Travel Requirements: Less than 25%

Phoenix Photo

p.t.photo@email.msmary.edu
798-364-6225

[DATE]

Dana Kirn,
Director of External Affairs
B&O Railroad Museum
901 W. Pratt St.
Baltimore, Maryland 21223

Dear Ms. Kirn:

When my family took a vacation to Baltimore, we made a point to visit the B&O Railroad Museum. Here, we learned the rich history of the B&O Railroad and relaxed by taking a ride on the One-Mile-Express. Now that I am older, it is clear to me that the B&O Railroad Museum is a staple in communicating the history of the Baltimore region. I aspire to continue to uphold the mission of the B&O Railroad Museum in the 21st century as its website content manager through expanding the B&O Railroad Museum's digital presence.

I recently graduated from Mount St. Mary's University with a Bachelor of Arts in Communication and a minor in art. My coursework has given me the technical and soft skills to reap the benefits of the ever-changing digital landscape. Through completing writing-intensive courses, I gained the skills to communicate across diverse audiences while maintaining a consistent tone, style, and professional quality. Additionally, I pursued my passion for photography by minoring in art. This minor pushed me to reflect on how art communicates meaning. Moreover, I learned how to translate those reflections into creating aesthetic, meaningful pieces through Photoshop and Canva.

During my undergraduate career, I enhanced my knowledge through two internships. I navigated multiple social media platforms to develop professional relationships with alumni during my Mount St. Mary's University Office of Alumni Engagement internship. I also collaborated with a team of professionals in assessing website traffic and engagement through Google Analytics. Additionally, I recently completed an internship with Orchard Graphic Design Services where I created informative and visually appealing e-newsletters, blogs, and other resources. I made sure to maintain a consistent brand identity across contexts.

I look forward to speaking with you further regarding my qualifications and experiences for the B&O Railroad Museum's website content manager position. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Phoenix Photo

Phoenix Photo

Sample Job Description #2: Education
Assistant Teacher: The Ivymount School
Taken from MountHired.com

Location: Rockville, MD

Description:

The Ivymount School serves over 200 students, ages 4 through 21, from throughout the Washington, DC area. For over 50 years, Ivymount has provided educational programs and therapeutic services for students with disabilities with the goal of enhancing the lives of our students through evidence-based instruction and interventions. Several programs are offered at Ivymount School to meet the wide range of needs throughout our student population. Within these programs, classroom models and instructional strategies are tailored to address the specific needs of our students. Assistant Teacher positions are available throughout the school.

1:1 ABA Assistants are responsible for implementation of Behavior Intervention Plans, direct supervision, and support for assigned students during educational activities across the day. This position is an excellent opportunity for those interested in professional growth in the fields of psychology or special education. Registered Behavior Technicians (RBT) are encouraged to apply.

Job Duties and Responsibilities:

- Participate in 1:1 student rotation per classroom model
- Implement Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) including recommended teaching accommodations
- Provide direct student supervision and support during educational activities throughout the school day including jobsites and community trips
- Implement the classroom management system when applicable
- Ensure needed materials are prepared in advance
- Prepare for changes in the student's daily schedule in advance
- Collect and graph data daily for target behaviors; submit related documents/reports to Behavior Analyst/Program Coordinator as required
- Collect data for fading plan goals and objectives

Eddie Cation

e.d.cation@email.msmary.edu
(634) 526-8890

[DATE]

Elizabeth O'Brien
The Ivymount School
11614 Seven Locks Rd.
Rockville, MD 20854

Dear Ms. O'Brien:

My younger sister, who is on the autism spectrum, has faced many difficulties in her schooling. Watching her undergo these hardships instilled within me a deep passion to properly cater to the needs of children with disabilities to enhance their lives through a better educational experience. I would be thrilled to continue the work of the Ivymount School as an assistant teacher.

I am a recent graduate from Mount St. Mary's University with a Bachelor of Science in Education with a dual certification in elementary and special education. In my coursework, I developed and implemented various educational resources such as classroom models and instructional strategies to enhance student learning. I applied this knowledge during my internship in a second-grade classroom at Emmitsburg Elementary School. Here, I assisted in classroom management and developed multiple lesson plans through assessing student needs and preparing appropriate materials. My second internship experience was at Catoclin Elementary School where I taught in a fifth-grade special needs classroom. There I participated in 1:1 student rotations and implemented Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP.)

The past two summers, I had the privilege of volunteering once a week at L'Arche: a Christian community for adults with disabilities. I was an "afternoon adventurer" who accompanied them on trips to their favorite places in the D.C. area. Through this experience, I built rapport with members of the L'Arche community and gained the organization and communication skills necessary to work well in a group and thrive on constructive criticism. Finally, I also volunteered for the past four years at the Special Olympics Maryland Fall Fest held at Mount St. Mary's University. There I assisted in managing fun and inclusive events for all participants.

My university's mission of instilling a deep respect for the dignity of the human person has further impressed upon me the importance of special education. If selected as an assistant teacher at the Ivymount School, my goal is for dignity to be the foundation of everything I do within the classroom. I look forward to discussing my experiences and qualifications for this assistant teaching opportunity further. I appreciate your time and thank you for your consideration.

Thank you,
Eddie Cation
Eddie Cation

Sample Job Description #3: Sciences

Technician 1 Molecular Biology: Charles River Laboratories

Location: Malvern, PA

For 70 years, Charles River employees have worked together to assist in the discovery, development and safe manufacture of new drug therapies. When you join our family, you will have a significant impact on the health and well-being of people across the globe. Whether your background is in life sciences, finance, IT, sales or another area, your skills will play an important role in the work we perform. In return, we'll help you build a career that you can feel passionate about.

Job Summary:

Serve as laboratory technician under direct supervision, responsible for performing daily laboratory tasks as they relate to Molecular Biology Testing Services.

We are seeking a Laboratory Technician 1 Molecular Biology for our Biologics Testing Solutions site located in Malvern, PA.

The following are responsibilities related to the Technician 1 Molecular Biology position.

Responsibilities:

- Prepare reagents including buffers, chemicals solutions, complex reaction mixtures and media preparation according to standard test methods (STM) and standard operating procedures (SOP).
- Perform tasks using aseptic techniques including working within a biological safety cabinet.
- Perform a variety of molecular biology laboratory experiments, tests, and procedures following well-defined techniques and guidelines, including isolation and analysis of DNA and RNA, PCR, RT-PCR, QF-PCR, restriction digests, agarose gel electrophoresis.
- Make detailed observations and accurately and precisely record data. Summarize data for reports. Document all activities performed in notebooks and test batch records in accordance with the current Good Manufacturing Practices (cGMP).
- Report results of experiments, tests and procedures, and analyze data.

The following are minimum requirements related to the Technician 1 Molecular Biology position:

- Education: Bachelor's degree (B.S.) or equivalent in biology or related discipline
- Experience: 0 to 1 year of related experience in a biological laboratory. Knowledge of basic molecular biology techniques required. An equivalent combination of education and experience may be accepted as a satisfactory substitute for specific education and experience listed above.
- Certification/Licensure: None

Samantha Solvent

s.f.solvent@email.msmary.edu

824-074-6356

[DATE]

Albert Smith
Charles River Laboratories
358 Technology Dr.
Malvern, PA 19355

Dear Mr. Smith:

It is our duty as scientists to improve the lives of the general public. By manufacturing safe drug therapies, Charles River Laboratories continues to perform that task through effective and ethical research and experimentation. I would be proud to contribute to this noble pursuit as a molecular biology technician within the Charles River Laboratories team.

I recently finished my Bachelor of Science in Biology and a minor in chemistry at Mount St. Mary's University. In addition to taking general biology and chemistry courses and labs, I completed courses such as microbiology, genetics, and biochemistry. Here, I gained various molecular biology knowledge and experimentation skills such as DNA and RNA isolation and analysis, performing PCRs, and agarose gel electrophoresis.

In addition to learning standard test methods and standard operating procedures in my coursework, I advanced this knowledge further through my senior honors research project. Under the direction of Dr. Michael Turner, I analyzed the specific activity of microRNA-124 and its impact on wound healing in *C. elegans*. Completing this research significantly developed me as a scientist as I was required to maintain good manufacturing practices in my notebook and data analysis. Finally, I had the rewarding experience of being selected as the head tutor for the School of Natural Science and Mathematics. In addition to assisting students succeed in their coursework and realize their academic potential, I oversaw over twenty science tutors and provided them with various supplementary opportunities to improve their tutoring and interpersonal abilities.

I welcome the opportunity to speak with you further about my experiences and qualifications for the Charles River Laboratories role. I would be thrilled to be a molecular biology technician in your laboratory to advance the lives of others. I appreciate your time and thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

Samantha Solvent

Samantha Solvent

Sample Job Description #4: Business

Junior Business Analyst: Development Infostructure

Taken from MountHired.com

Location: Arlington, VA

Description:

At Development InfoStructure Inc. (Devis) we are dedicated to providing exceptional IT consulting services and solutions to Federal, State and Local Governments as well as the international development community.

Our primary mission is to satisfy the goals and objectives of our customers, and we approach problems as opportunities to invest our time in developing long-term solutions and assets. We are passionate about our work and creating an environment within which everyone is supported to perform in it while maintaining a healthy work-life balance. We know that the best investment we can make is in our people!

Overview:

We are currently seeking a Business Analyst to join our Corporate HQ's team in Arlington, VA!

Business Analysts at Devis are expected to work across job functions and collaborate with team members and clients extensively. Your main tasks will include performing detailed requirements analysis, documenting processes and the results of your analysis, and performing some user acceptance testing. To succeed in this role you should have a natural analytical way of thinking and be able to bridge communication gaps between technical and non-technical stakeholders. You also will be expected to analyze internal processes, determine where they can be improved, and implement sustainable and scalable change.

Specific responsibilities include but not limited to:

- Evaluating business processes, anticipating requirements, uncovering areas for improvement, and developing, documenting and implementing solutions
- Leading ongoing reviews of business processes and developing optimization strategies
- Staying up-to-date on the latest process and IT advancements to automate and modernize systems
- Conducting meetings and presentations to share ideas and findings
- Analyzing business and system requirements
- Documenting and communicating the results of your efforts
- Benchmarking our approaches against the latest changes and standards in the field
- Shifting between projects and tasks with ease
- Focusing on solutions rather than the confines of a particular role

Preferred Skills and Qualifications

- 1+ year solid Agile business requirements experience
- 1-3 years of experience with Knowledge Management and Data Visualization tools, systems and processes
- Direct experience with Software Development Life Cycle and processes in a team environment including Scrum/Agile development preferred
- Ability to elicit requirements, develop analyses, determine specification, and verify outcomes in a scrum environment is a plus
- Demonstrated experience creating User stories and defining acceptance criteria. Scrum certification a plus
- Ability to support users by investigating and resolving their problems

Must have at least 2 of the above

Sample Cover Letter #4: Business**Michael Soft**

m.t.soft@email.msmary.edu

846-023-3270

[DATE]

Eliza McBride
Development InfoStructure Inc.
2101 Wilson Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Ms. McBride:

It is no secret that 21st century business is powered by digital technology. With technology advancing at such a fast rate, the need for Information Technology (IT) counseling by knowledgeable, efficient, and communicative individuals like those at Devis continually grows. I am interested in becoming an active part of Devis's corporate Human Resources team as a junior business analyst and applying my business and communication skills to continue providing exceptional IT services.

During my undergraduate career at Mount St. Mary's University, I earned a Bachelor of Science in Business with a concentration in business management. This coursework taught me to develop, evaluate, and improve business processes, and to properly document and communicate my findings. The most valuable aspect of my business education was learning to find and execute solutions rather than focus on the confines of a particular situation. I accomplished this through applying an analytical mindset to all projects.

Since I did not want to confine my learning simply to a classroom, I was fortunate enough to intern with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Here, I worked with a team of FBI members to conduct data analyses through Knowledge Management and Data Visualization tools. Additionally, I was entrusted with the responsibility of developing my own data analysis and presenting my findings to upper-level FBI administrators. This internship improved my professionalism, analytical thinking, and communication skills. I constantly interacted with highly talented and experienced individuals who expected only the highest quality work and pushed me to consistently strive for excellence in every task I completed.

In addition to my coursework and internship experience, I also held a work-study position for four years at Mount St. Mary's University's IT Support Center. Though I came in as a first-year student with little technological knowledge, I became well-versed in IT support upon the completion of my work-study position. I learned to effectively communicate technical information to assist students, faculty, and administrators in resolving their technological problems. I am positive my business, IT, and communication experiences can enhance Devis's already strong team of professionals. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Respectfully,

Michael Soft

Michael Soft