# Lesson Plan Business Letters

**Instructor:** Nan Hammerschmidt, Jani DeVries, Eileen McGurn  
**Date:** June 25, 2013  
**Course Title:** BAMM 2 / Advanced Business Project  
**Specific Topic:** Business writing

## Reading Assignment:
Effective business letters: Cover Letter

## Performance Objectives:
- After completion of the lesson, students will be able to:
  1. Find models/examples/templates of professional business letters
  2. Use resources to support business writing
  3. Edit writing for content, format, grammar and spelling
  4. Produce professional quality business letters

## Standards: CTE & CCSS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>W.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Use words, phrases, and clauses as well as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.</td>
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<tr>
<th>W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.</th>
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<tr>
<td>b. Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic.</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.</td>
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<tr>
<th>W.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and over-reliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.</td>
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## Assessment:
Letters evaluated using Business Letter Rubric

## Materials:
- Article: “How to Write a Great Cover Letter”
- Models and templates of different types of letters
- Business Letter Rubric

## Procedure:
**Literacy Strategy used:**
- Inquiry Chart (I-Chart)
- Jigsaw Activity
Entire Class:
Introduction and Method of activating prior knowledge –
Reflective journal question:
“Thinking about a manager you have had either in the student store or in an outside job, what did they do well? What would you have liked them to do differently?
- Have students share their answers and then ask them to think about how they might use what they know to apply for a position in management.

Method of setting purpose –
Students will apply for management positions using a complete application packet which will include a cover letter.

Individual:
Read article regarding effective cover letters and use internet to find two more articles using “I-Chart” strategy.

Group:
Small groups use jigsaw strategy to go over “Here are 12 of the worst cover letters we’ve ever received.”

Entire Class:
Small groups present and review examples of bad cover letters with class
Review business letter rubric

Application of Material:
Students will complete an application packet including cover letter, application and resume to apply for a management position in the store

Extension Questions:
- When would you use a formal business letter format in your management job?
- How can you find models of different types of business letters?

Accommodations needed:
Models of professional business letters provided
Students shown how to access sample business letter writing through MS Word
How to Write a Great Cover Letter

Skip the “Dear Sir or Madam” and zero in on exactly how you’re going to solve whatever problems the hiring company has.

By Lisa Vaas

Do hiring professionals even read cover letters for senior candidates anymore? Some say yes; some say no, they don’t bother unless the resume in question has grabbed their attention.

The simple answer is that you should assume your resume will merit a look at your cover letter; always include one (either as a separate document or an e-mail that acts as one); and make it exceptional, so you stand out from the crowd. TheLadders talked to hiring and career management professionals to find out exactly how a good cover letter is laid out and what it contains.

Dear who?

The salutation is your first chance to make contact with a hiring professional, but it’s one spot where laziness often wins out over due diligence. We’re talking about the “Dear Sir or Madam” approach. What this generic salutation says isn’t positive: Namely, that the author couldn’t be bothered to find out the hiring manager’s name.

Abby Kohut, president and staffing consultant at Staffing Symphony, suggests job seekers can easily locate the right person online: “To find the name of the hiring manager, try searching on Google or LinkedIn,” she said. “Even a good guess scores you points because it indicates that you tried harder than everyone else.”

Why do you want to work here?

Kohut recommends that job applicants make sure to mention the name of the company in the letter, followed by an explanation of why they’re interested in working there. “Make sure that you really mean what you say,” she said. “Recruiters have a way of sensing when you are being less than truthful. Our goal is to hire people who sincerely want to work at our company — it’s the job of your cover letter to convince us.”

Bombastic claims are just as bad as insincerity. Brooke Allen, a hiring manager at Maple Securities, said he hates it when job seekers claim in their cover letters that they’re his “best candidate.” “How can they know without evaluating all my candidates?” he asked.
You also need to make a sales pitch as to why the employer should want to work with you, Kohut said.

“Your letter should explain what you can do for your ‘customer,’ not what you are selling,” she said. “The key is to give the reader a small glimpse into your background, which encourages them to want to learn more by reading your resume.”

Length and format

Job coach and author Susan Kennedy, of Career Treking, provided this outline for a good, succinct cover letter:

- **First paragraph**

  Introduce yourself and state why you're writing; you are enthusiastically presenting yourself for a job, and your background makes you the best candidate. List a referral source if possible.

- **Second paragraph**

  List your value to the company. Describe how you will contribute to the company from Day One. This should be based on research of the company and job. Share knowledge of the company’s goals, accomplishments and opportunities.

- **Third paragraph**

  Call to action. Ask for the interview and state when (exactly) you will follow up.

If you are responding a job posting, Kennedy recommends a column approach. Below is a sample of how that might look, with bulleted lists of requirements and descriptions of how your background matches them:

Job Requirements: 1-2 years of general accounting experience. Your experience: Tracked expenses and all financial reporting for a government subcommittee.


Kennedy notes that cover letters “can also be used to bridge your background and the job.” She offered up an excerpt from the cover letter of a client with a degree in political science who wants to get a job in the video-gaming business:

“As you can see, my resume is attached. But what you won’t see on my resume
is my passion for video gaming: it is how I see the world. My analytical skills and attention to detail will enable me to help solve the caller’s problems and ensure a high-quality product.”

Perfect spelling and grammar are mandatory

A cover letter is “a writing-skills evaluation in disguise,” Kohut said. “When recruiters are faced with large stacks of resumes for new positions, you'll never make the first cut if they notice even one spelling or grammar mistake on your resume or cover letter.” Make sure that even an e-mail is scrupulously proofread.

Tactics hiring professionals love

Sometimes a gesture can impress a hiring professional. Kohut was once beguiled by a candidate who read her LinkedIn profile and saw that she had won a ping-pong tournament. “He sent me a ping-pong paddle in the mail and wrote a cover letter with ping pong-themed language in it,” she said, including sentences like these:

"I'd like to get in the game."
"I bring energy, intelligence and motivation to the table."
"I now feel compelled to drive home positive business results."

For Allen, the most effective cover letters are those that do one of the following two things in one sentence or two: They make a compelling statement that begs a response, or they ask a question that must be answered.

“A good approach is to ask for clarification of a point that makes it clear they have done their homework, as in: ‘Your ad said X while your Web site said Y … Could you help me understand Z?’ ” he said. “I believe the goal of the job seeker is to start a conversation rather than just throw a resume into a pile.”

Career Advice from TheLadders

Writing Cover Letters That Sizzle
Cover Letters that Command Attention
Composing a Persuasive Cover Letter
Help, The Internet Ate My Resume!

Tactics that hiring professionals hate

Allen said that cover letters or cover e-mails should not only be “well written with proper spelling, grammar, punctuation and capitalization,” but they should also leave out abbreviations or emoticons. Phrases like “i dunno,” lolh,” “i dnt cf,” “!!!,” “dgms,” “WTF” and using all capital letters have no place in professional correspondence, he said.
“I am not against people who are into texting, if they use it when they text,” he said. “But I like the full expressiveness of our language and the keyboard.”

Abbreviations are also inappropriate. They’re not expressive, Allen said, and using them risks confusing your reader, who might not know what their spelled-out versions are.

*Lisa Vaas covers resume writing techniques and the technology behind the job search for TheLadders.*

Let’s Go Shopping for a New Job Hunt

http://www.theladders.com/career-advice/how-to-write-cover-letter
That's me with other Business Insider folks ringing the opening bell!

As the Managing Editor at Business Insider, I receive lots of cover letters every day. Some of them are really great, and tell me instantly that the applicant gets what we're trying to do here and why they are someone we might want to hire.

Others are awful. Bad enough that I've started collecting them in a Gmail folder called "Worst Cover Letters."

The offenses vary. Some people are way too long-winded and never get to the point. Others don't realize their emails are riddled with spelling errors. Some people call attention to their weaknesses in a letter that's supposed to summarize their strengths. Others can't (or at least don't) write in the language we would be hiring them to write in.
I don't mean to emphasize the negative. The next post will feature some of the best cover letters I've ever received. (Not surprisingly, most of those people now work at BI.) But still, in the name of demonstrating what NOT to do...

This one's too short. It's also rude ("Hello"? How about a name?). You should always assume we're still offering the position, write a quick note, and attach your resume.
incapable of. (For example, why point out that you're "average" at Excel?)

This cover letter has a lot of issues. For one, it's way too long. For another, it's filled with bloated self-importance. ("Burgeon"? Are you kidding
me?)
QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.
Here's the second half of this guy's rant. It never ends!

This one's too negative: "The only reason I'm applying"; "I
don't read much of the magazine"; "I know I am not tailor made for the job."

This person wants a job where she can only work "non-working" hours? What?
This is a second email in a correspondence. The applicant tells us he is "just looking for a paid job in journalism" when he should be telling us why he's the one for THIS job.
Spelling errors are an immediate red flag. Especially in a sentence like, "I don't have any experience related to Journalism background."
A position is never a good fit BECAUSE you are 24 years old.
Why would we care that your friend's grandfather loves your writing? And don't get us started on the lowercase "i"s.
Here's one where the candidate complains about the lack of response from other jobs she's applied for. Yikes!
This one doesn't even mention a position, or Business Insider at all, for that matter!
QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.

Is this English?
QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.

Read more: http://www.businessinsider.com/worst-cover-letters-2011-10?op=1#ixzz2XGhgSdnv
## Rubric for Business Letter Writing

**Task Description:** (Teacher may explain specific assignment in this space.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>weight</th>
<th>4 – Exemplary</th>
<th>3 – Accomplished</th>
<th>2 – Developing</th>
<th>1 – Beginning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>□ Accurately uses correct business letter format (heading, greeting, introduction, body, closure, signature, enclosure, and copy)</td>
<td>□ Mostly uses correct business letter format (heading, greeting, introduction, body, closure, signature, enclosure, and copy)</td>
<td>□ Some noticeable errors in use of correct business letter format (heading, greeting, introduction, body, closure, signature, enclosure, and copy)</td>
<td>□ Several noticeable errors in use of correct business letter format (heading, greeting, introduction, body, closure, signature, enclosure, and copy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>□ Letter clearly states the purpose</td>
<td>□ Letter clearly states the purpose</td>
<td>□ Purpose of letter is unclear</td>
<td>□ Purpose of letter is unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>□ Appropriate explanations or facts used to support the main idea</td>
<td>□ Some explanations or facts need to be used to support the main idea</td>
<td>□ Main idea is not supported by explanations or facts</td>
<td>□ Main idea is not supported by explanations or facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>□ Easy to follow</td>
<td>□ Somewhat hard to follow</td>
<td>□ Hard to follow</td>
<td>□ Letter rambles; hard to follow or understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>□ Tone is appropriate for intended audience</td>
<td>□ Tone is generally appropriate for intended audience</td>
<td>□ Tone is too formal or too informal for intended audience</td>
<td>□ Tone is inappropriate for intended audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appearance</strong></td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>□ Typed, using correct spacing, font, and format</td>
<td>□ Letter typed with few problems in spacing, font, or format</td>
<td>□ Letter typed with frequent problems in spacing, font, or format</td>
<td>□ Letter not typed; wrong format used and hard to read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Usage</strong></td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>□ Accurate use of punctuation and grammar</td>
<td>□ One or two mistakes with punctuation or grammar</td>
<td>□ More than two mistakes in punctuation or grammar</td>
<td>□ Incorrect use throughout the letter of punctuation or grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>□ No spelling errors</td>
<td>□ One or two spelling errors</td>
<td>□ More than two spelling errors</td>
<td>□ Frequent spelling errors distract from letter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assignment Score ____________ + Beyonder/Bonus ____________ = Final Score ____________

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## Effective Cover Letters I-Chart

| Question #1: What should every good cover letter look like (format, etc)? |
| Question #2: What should a list of “DOs” include? |
| Question #3: What should a list of “DON'Ts” include? |

### What I think I know

### Source #1

### Source #2

### Source #3

### Summary of Information


## Business Writing Evaluation Rubric

### Evaluation Criteria for the Business Writing Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The writing sample demonstrates a particularly effective ability to generate detailed content appropriate to the purpose as well as the ability to organize and support it in an effective manner. It uses clear and coherent language and formatting that conform to the expectations of professional and academic communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The writing sample demonstrates a solid ability to generate detailed content appropriate to the purpose as well as the ability to organize and support it. It uses language and formatting that conform to the expectations of professional and academic communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The writing sample is uneven or undeveloped in its attempts to generate and organize appropriate content. The use of language does not consistently conform to the conventions of professional and academic communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The writing sample fails to demonstrate competency in basic writing. The writing sample evidences recurring problems with respect to the generation or organization of content and/or conformity to professional and academic conventions for language usage.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>