As difficult as you may think it is to develop a résumé, writing an excellent cover letter can be even more challenging. And, even more than a résumé, it may determine whether or not you get an interview. Why? Each cover letter is a creative endeavor customized to the particular potential employer. A good way to destroy your chances for an interview is with a mass production of a cover letter. The cover letter is usually read before a résumé and becomes the first impression.

Use your cover letter to target your skills and experiences to persuade an employer to interview you. An excellent cover letter conveys confidence and enthusiasm. A good way to start is to write a rough draft as if you were talking directly to a person. Once something is on paper, you can polish the contents. Employers usually do not like letters that are filled with well-worn phrases and sound like everyone else’s. Neither is it desirable to be overly clever or to overdo the cover letter by writing too much. Your letter will create a positive impression if it is brief, readable and error-free and if it sounds like you – the “best of you in writing.”

A formal cover letter is written in the conventional style of business letters and follows the traditional rules of form and content.

**Elements of a formal cover letter**

**Your contact information:** A professional touch can be achieved by having your name, address, and phone number printed in a personal letterhead at the top. You can create your own letterhead on a computer. Other possibilities are to type your address at the top, or to begin with only the current date and at the end type your address under your name.

**Date:** the current date

**Contact name and title, and company address:** After the date, there is a quadruple space then the inside address. The first line of this address will preferably be a person’s name followed by a title. The next three lines contain the name of the company, street address, and city, state and zip code.

**Salutation:** For the greeting you may use a title before the last name such as: Dear Director Carlson, or the customary Mr. Thomas. Use a colon (:) after the greeting. If you are responding to a blind ad or have been unsuccessful in getting a name then use either: Dear Hiring Authority or Dear Human Resources Director. Never use: To Whom It May Concern, Dear Sir or Dear Madam. In these instances, you may also send the letter open style, in other words skip the salutation.

**Introduction:** The opening paragraph should be designed to attract the reader’s interest and make clear why you are interested and why you would be an asset. It states the reason for the letter and the specific position or types of work for which you are applying; and if applicable, it indicates how you learned of the job opening (placement
center, newspaper advertisement, friend, or employment agency). Your research should be evident, expressing positive information about the business.

**Body of letter (one or two paragraphs):** This section is used to document your assets and make a strong connection between what you have to offer and what the business needs or what the position demands. Highlight your skills and qualifications that are relevant to this particular organization—*tell what you can do for the employer*—it should create desire. If you are a recent graduate, explain how your academic background qualifies you for the position. If you have some practical experience, point out the specific achievements or your unique qualifications. You can also mention specific traits you have, like the ability to work with others, interest in the company, or responsibilities on previous assignments. Choose your strongest traits, and expand on them. Try not to repeat the same information found in the resume. It is essential however, to direct the reader to the important parts in your resume.

**Conclusion:** The closing paragraph restates keen interest in and regard for the specific business, requests a meeting at the employer’s convenience and provides a way for the employer to contact you. Finally, close your letter with a statement or question that will encourage a response. For example, state that you will call on a certain date to set up an interview. Or ask if the company will be recruiting in your area, or if it desires additional information or references.

**Closing:** End with a professional closing phrase such as Sincerely or Respectfully and four spaces below that, your full name. Use a comma after the closing phrase.

**Signature**

**Enclosure or Attachment (be sure to enclose or attach résumé)**

Formal cover letters are no longer than one page in length. The cover letter and resume are always mailed together. Do not send a resume without a cover letter. To present a neater appearance, use a larger envelope and an unfolded cover letter and résumé. Use a printer to address the envelope and be sure to include a return address. The employer’s address will look exactly like the cover letter’s inside address, which usually requires four lines.

An e-mail cover letter is shorter and less formal than the traditional cover letter. State concisely your reason for writing and your qualifications. Before sending, review the e-mail for spelling and grammar. Remember to attach your résumé in a .doc or .pdf format.
January 8, 2011

Mr. Charles Bland  
Staffing Director, Human Resources  
Hope Medical Center  
23 Hancock Street  
New Bern, NC 28562  

Dear Mr. Bland:

As a recent graduate in the medical office administration program at Craven Community College, I have great interest in your opening for a Patient Registration Counselor. Because your hospital has a reputation for a commitment to quality healthcare and expected growth in the near future, I am excited about this opportunity with Hope Medical Center.

As you can see from my enclosed résumé, I have gained diverse experience working in a hospital setting and have completed my associate degree with outstanding grades. My medical records experience provides me with understanding of patient confidentiality and patient rights as well as the importance of accuracy in recording information. I am proficient in data entry and word processing, and am able to monitor my own work. I have a good track record for a positive attitude, initiative, organizational skills, and communicating with hospital staff.

I would be pleased to provide you with any additional information you may need in a personal interview. I will call to discuss setting up an interview. If you need to reach me, I can be contacted through email or by telephoning me at (252) 555-5555. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Adam M. Koury

Enclosure: Résumé