

Writing Cover Letters, Part 2

SUBMITTED BY: Kathryn McGinn

SUBJECT(S): Career Development

GRADE LEVEL(S): 9, 10, 11, 12

≡ OVERVIEW:

Students will read and analyze a Knowledge@Wharton article about the importance of telling the truth on one's résumé/cover letter. Students will continue to read/evaluate sample cover letters and begin to consider how they will construct their own cover letters.

≡ NBEA STANDARD(S):

- Career Development, V. School-to-Career Transition

≡ RELATED ARTICLES:

- [“How to Network Online with Influential People”](#)
- [“Career Insight: Speechwriter Sarah Hurwitz on Becoming a Strong Storyteller”](#)

Common Core Standard(s):

- ELA CCR Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- ELA CCR Reading 5: Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text relate to each other and the whole.
- ELA CCR Reading 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

- ELA CCR Speaking and Listening 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Objectives/Purposes:

- Students will read and analyze an article for main ideas.
- Students will learn about the purpose, content and conventions of cover letters.
- Students will work constructively with peers to evaluate cover letters.

Knowledge@Wharton Article:

- [“When do Exaggerations and Misstatements Cross the Line?”](#)

Other Resources/Materials:

- Three sample cover letters ([Handout A](#))
- Cover Letter Checklist ([Handout B](#)) (alternatively, use checklist compiled from student suggestions in previous lesson)

Activities:

1. Hand out “When do Exaggerations and Misstatements Cross the Line?” Have students read the first two sections (up to “Pressure to Perform”). As students read, tell them to underline information that stands out to them as important. When they have finished reading the article, have them copy one of their underlined points onto a piece of paper. Students should write what the quote means in their own words and explain why the quote stood out to them. For example:

Quote: “Left unchecked, however, exaggerations that seemed innocuous at first could result in serious, potentially career-ending consequences.”

Note: This quote discusses how even harmless seeming exaggerations could get you into a lot of trouble if you're caught. This quote stood out to me because when you're looking for a job you want to make yourself look as good as possible, but you must be sure that emphasizing the

positives doesn't turn into making stuff up. This article shows that in today's world of social media, it's pretty easy for employers to catch you in a lie. It's just not worth it.

Have students pair/share, and then ask groups to share out with the class. Students answers will vary, but be sure to highlight some key points from the article:

- Exaggerating/lying in your résumé/cover letter can have serious consequences, including losing your job.
- There's an important difference between making yourself look good and making stuff up: accentuating the positive is okay, taking credit for work you didn't do is not okay.
- Especially in today's world, with google and twitter and facebook, a lie will probably catch up with you eventually.

(10 minutes)

2. Review key points from previous lesson:

- What is the purpose of a cover letter?
 - Serve as an introduction to employers
 - Highlight key information on résumé
 - What are qualities of a strong cover letter?
 - Personal approach
 - Concise description of interests and qualifications
 - Nice presentation
 - What goes into each section of a cover letter?
 - Intro: Why you are writing/why you are interested in the job
 - Middle: Highlight your qualifications that make you particularly well suited to the position for which you are applying
 - Closing: Plans for follow up and a thank you

(5 minutes)

3. Tell students that they are now members of a hiring committee, and they have to pick a new employee for a job based on three cover letters submitted (they should assume each candidate submitted a strong résumé and is qualified for the job). The hiring committee must go through each cover letter (see Handout A) with their checklist

(Handout B) and keep track of strengths and weaknesses of each letter. They must make a decision about who to hire and write a brief explanation for why they chose the candidate they did. Hiring committees should be prepared to share their selection with the class and defend their choice.

(15 mins)

4. Give each group an opportunity to discuss which candidate's cover letter they liked best and why. Both Goldilocks and Emma Fakestudent have fairly strong cover letters; students will likely choose to hire one of these two candidates. Hansel Notgretel's cover letter is weak, and students should discuss what changes they would make.

(10 mins)

Tying It All Together:

Ask students what they think are the most important qualities of a strong cover letter and why. Emphasize that cover letters provide an opportunity to personalize your job application and stand out about the crowd.

(5 mins)

Practice Outside of the Classroom:

- Visit the University of Pennsylvania Career Services website to look at even more examples of strong cover letters.
- Look through your local newspaper (or craigslist) to see what sort of jobs are available, and begin to think about how you would draft a cover letter as part of a job application.

What Worked and What I Would Do Differently:

Students found the Knowledge@Wharton article for this lesson particularly relevant, and we spent a fair amount of time discussing the difference between highlighting your accomplishments (good!) and embellishing your achievements (not good!).

Students enjoyed critiquing the cover letters, and they were even perhaps more critical of the letters than I would be. While it was useful for the students to identify the cover letter(s) they liked

the best, it was probably most helpful to go through Hansel Notgretel's cover letter and identify everything that he did wrong.

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