

# Writing Cover Letters, Part 1

**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 value of story telling as an introduction to the role that cover letters can play in their job application packet — i.e., cover letters provide an opportunity to share stories about particularly relevant qualifications and interests. Students will learn about the different sections of a cover letter and review samples of strong cover letters.

## ≡ NBEA STANDARD(S):

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

## ≡ RELATED ARTICLES:

- [“Storytelling Infuses Your Message with Meaning and Emotion”](#)
- [“Stories of High School Enterprise and Opportunity from Baseball’s World Series”](#)
- [“How to Network Online with Influential People”](#)
- [“Educator Toolkit: The Power of Storytelling”](#)
- [“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, applying its advice to their own lives.
- 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:**

- [“Hollywood’s Peter Guber: Spinning Memos into Tales”](#)

### **Other Resources/Materials:**

- “Hollywood’s Peter Guber...” Reading Guide ([Handout A](#))
- Cover Letter Tips ([Handout B](#))
- Sample Cover Letters ([Handouts C, D, and E](#))
- Cover Letter Checklist (optional) ([Handout F](#))

### **Activities:**

1. Hand out “Hollywood’s Peter Guber: Spinning Memos into Tales” and the reading guide. Tell students to focus on Guber’s “MAGIC” acronym as they read, and think about how storytelling can benefit job seekers as well as employers. Students should read the article to themselves and complete the chart on the handout. When students are done reading, discuss the article and the handout.

### **Key Points:**

Element	Employers should tell stories to....(In a cover letter, job seekers can tell stories to...)
<b>Motivating</b>	Show how committed they are to whatever projects they take on.
<b>Audience</b>	Make connections with their employees (future employers).
<b>Goal</b>	Be upfront about their goals.
<b>Interactively</b>	Make the listener/reader feel like part of the story.
<b>Content</b>	Utilize relevant experiences and observations as a way to share about themselves and their vision for the organization

(10 mins)

2. Explain that this lesson, along with the next two, focuses on writing cover letters. Cover letters are, in fact, a way to develop your qualifications that you list on your résumé, telling stories that illustrate your motivations and experiences. Like résumés, there is a particular format to follow when writing cover letters. Give students the Cover Letter handout and review the qualities and format of a good cover letter.

Be sure to remind students that good cover letters share:

- A personal approach
- A clear, concise presentation of interest, skills and intent
- A glimpse of the author
- Nice paper and readable fonts
- Intro, Middle and Concluding paragraphs that address the appropriate topics (discussed in detail on the handout)

(10 mins)

3. Break students into three groups. Give each group a sample cover letter (handouts C, D, and E). Ask students to go through each paragraph in their cover letter and consider whether it meets the criteria discussed in the “Cover Letter” handout. (The cover letters are all strong, so they should meet most of the guidelines.) Based on the Cover Letter handout and the sample cover letter, students should write a checklist for what should be included in their cover letters. Have students write their checklists on newsprint to post around the room.

(10 mins)

4. Have students share their checklists and note similarities and differences. You may either compile students' suggestions into one master checklist to hand out to students during the next lesson, or use the provided checklist (Handout F).

(5 mins)

5. Ask students to discuss the differences between résumés and cover letters (résumés should provide an overview of qualifications; cover letters are a chance to develop aspects of the résumé in more detail and tailor qualifications for a particular job). See if students have any questions about cover letters at this point.

(5 mins)

### **Tying It All Together:**

Have students create their own acronyms (such as Guber's "Magic") that will help them remember the key elements of a cover letter (in terms of both style and content). Have students write their acronyms on newsprint and hang around the room. Have students share with one another.

(5 mins)

### **Practice Outside of the Classroom:**

- Give students copies of the cover letters they did not evaluate in their groups to look at for additional ideas/guidance.

### **What Worked and What I Would Do Differently:**

I changed the reading guide after teaching the lesson the first time; basically, I simplified it (In an attempt to make the article extra relevant, I was having the students re-interpret the article as advice about cover-letter writing, which just made the whole experience confusing.) The second time I taught the lesson, I had students take more straightforward notes on the article, but then I connected the article to the day's activity by having students come up with their own cover letter acronyms.

Students found it useful to look at sample cover letters, and they wrote comprehensive “Cover Letter Checklists” as a result. I merged the groups’ lists after the class and then gave them copies the next day, so they could use their class-constructed checklist as they read more cover letters and started writing/revising their own.

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