ABSOLUTELY! The purpose of a COVER LETTER is to introduce yourself and any accompanying documents (such as a resume or writing sample) to the reader. This is your opportunity to demonstrate how you fill an organization’s need. Whether you are sending a letter of application (in response to an actual job listing or opening) or a letter of inquiry (sent to request information about the company and/or current openings), the cover letter must be brief, catchy, and well-written. It should not exceed one page in length and printed on quality bond paper matching your resume.

SECTION 1: The Opening - this section is typically one paragraph and should begin with a hard-hitting first line designed to get the reader's attention fast and to make you stand out. If you heard about the position from somebody, this is a good place to mention it. Tell the reader what position or type of work you are interested in, how you heard about the position, and why you are contacting them. Avoid starting with "I am a senior at Muhlenberg...". Since most people will begin a letter with that format, you will not captivate the reader.

SECTION 2: The Middle - writing this 1-3 paragraph section is similar to preparing for an interview; you should determine your most relevant skills with regard to the position for which you are applying and describe them here. State why you want to do this type of work (in terms of what you have to offer, not what you hope to gain) and why you want to work for this company (be specific). Incorporate your positive characteristics which would be valued by the employer and include experiences and skills that demonstrate your qualifications. You can refer to your resume, but do not rewrite the resume in the cover letter.

THE ROLE OF RESEARCH
It is impossible to write the Opening and Middle sections of a cover letter without first researching the position, organization and industry. Prior to writing the letter, you should ask yourself (and be able to give a compelling response) to the following:

• Why am I interested in this position (organization, industry)?
• What are my qualifications?
• How have I demonstrated the skills for which they are looking?

If you cannot answer the questions, more research is needed.

Organizational Research:
Whether it is in your cover letter or for your interview, being well-informed about the company to which you are applying is key. The most up-to-date information can be found on the Internet. Going directly to the website of the company can be best, although on websites like Vault.com or Wetfeet.com you may be able to find information that the company doesn’t publicize.

SECTION 3: The Closing – re-emphasize your career objective and your interest in this position in one brief paragraph. Indicate your desire for an interview, but, if possible, be flexible with the time and date. The tone (active or passive) can be determined by the sender’s preference, but you must follow up regardless.

WHAT WILL GIVE ME “THE EDGE”? To demonstrate your unique interest or qualifications, be able to respond to the following questions:
• What attracted me to this organization?
• What interests me in this industry?
• How did I select this type of work?
• When did I realize this work is for me?
• In past courses, internships or jobs, did I do something similar to what I will do in this position?

Can I just send the same cover letter with every resume?
No. Most generic cover letters and resumes will not even generate a response. Each cover letter should be carefully written to address the specific position and the unique qualifications that make you a strong candidate for that position. The time you spend researching will pay off when it helps you stand out!

The ad just said "send resume," so I don't really need a cover letter, right?
Wrong. A cover letter should always accompany your resume. Again, it is your chance to tell the employer what makes you a strong candidate for this job.

IMPORTANT NOTES

• Use the name of the person to whom you are writing as well as his/her title. If you do not know it, try to find out by calling the organization, looking in directories, or checking their website.

• Be gender conscious when addressing a cover letter. Never assume the gender of the recipient by his/her name or title. When in doubt, call the company and ask for the proper title, gender, and spelling of his/her name.

• Your cover letter demonstrates your writing skills to the employer. Be sure all grammar, punctuation, spelling, address and phone numbers are correct. Don’t just rely on spell check.

• Use the cover letter to convey enthusiasm and to introduce new information that is important, but not included on your resume.

• Follow-up your cover letter with a telephone call if you have not received a response after approximately one to two weeks. In this guide, there are follow-up ideas.
SAMPLE LETTER OF APPLICATION

(Many Muhlenberg students use this guide. Read the samples then write your own original letter - you don’t want to sound like everybody else.)

The letter that appears here might be sent in response to this ad:

**Mentor Coordinator:** This education outreach program provides high school scholarships and mentors to low-income students or at-risk youth. Coordinator will manage volunteer mentors and coordinate support services for students and will facilitate and monitor each mentor-student pair to ensure that the mentoring program is effectively meeting the program objectives of promoting student academic achievement and overall development.

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**Shawn P. Atkins**

atkins@att.net  
College: 2400 Chew Street, Box 1234, Allentown, PA 18104, 484-664-0000  
Home: 116 Winding Brook Lane, Plymouth, NJ 07876, 215-123-4567

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**EDUCATION**

Muhlenberg College, Allentown, PA  
Bachelor of Arts, Business Administration, Concentration in Marketing  
Cumulative GPA 3.3, Dean’s List, Omicron Delta Epsilon

**RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE**

Upward Bound Summer Residential Program – St. Francis University, Loretto, PA  
Tutor/Counselor Summer 2010

- Worked to improve the social and academic development of high school students
- Built and maintained a living environment conducive to teenage academic and social growth
- Administered study sessions in three academic disciplines: Economics, Chemistry, and Shakespeare
- Enforced program behavior policies
- Conducted personal performance and overall program evaluations
- Guided formal and informal counseling sessions

Muhlenberg College Office of Residential Services, Allentown, PA  
Head Resident Advisor Fall 2009 – Spring 2010

- Responsible for daily management of a coed first-year student residence hall of 300 students
- Supervised nine peer resident advisors, including scheduling and weekly staff meetings
- Controlled the budget allowance for the building’s programs and activities
- Assisted with central office procedures including staff selection, training and development
- Facilitated staff evaluation process with residents
- Organized Halloween Haunted Resident Hall Program for children of college employees
- Carried out Resident Advisor duties listed below

Office Clerk Summer 2009

- Assisted with office’s daily operations including summer mailing and key inventory

Resident Advisor Fall 2008 - Spring 2009

- Developed and maintained a living environment conducive to the personal growth of 31 first-year students
- Enforced College policies and upheld College traditions
- Conducted peer education and counseling
- Trained in mediation, conflict resolution, and diversity sensitivity

**LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES/POSITIONS**

Co-Committee Head of the Student Council Campus Community Affairs Committee, 2009-2010

- Organized community service projects and campus speak outs on political and social issues

Elected Executive Board Secretary for Muhlenberg College radio station, Fall 2008

Attended National Student Leadership Conference at American University, Summer 2007

**EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

Community Service * Ultimate Frisbee * Hiking * Radio DJ * Track and Field

**COMPUTER SKILLS**

Windows Operating Systems, Publisher, PowerPoint, Word, and Excel * HTML * Internet * E-mail

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Mr. James Williams  
Executive Director  
Partners for Education  
123 Main Street  
New York, NY 10028

Dear Mr. Williams:

For the past two years, I have planned and participated in many community service projects through my college’s Office of Community Service & Civic Engagement and Student Council. My years spent as a Resident Advisor and a Head Resident at Muhlenberg, as well as my summer job as a Tutor/Counselor with Upward Bound, have exposed me to some of the most pressing issues facing our youth today. I recently found the position description for the Mentor Coordinator position with Partners for Education on idealist.org and believe it is just the type of position I seek.

My community service experiences include the planning and coordinating of a neighborhood rake-a-thon in which I gathered members of the Student Council together to rake leaves for the neighbors of the college. I also organized the Council’s participation in the Muscular Dystrophy Association’s “Lock-Up” fundraiser. Both of these required me to reach out and contact people in need and coordinate the sign up process for volunteers. The most successful project that I organized was a clothing drive in which I filled my mini-van from floor to ceiling, three times, with clothes to be donated to the Good Shepherd Home.

I have had extensive experience in recruiting and training the staff members of the Residential Services Office at Muhlenberg. As a Head Resident, I was responsible for selecting and supervising my own nine person staff for my first-year residence hall. I have scheduled meetings, planned and operated many programs, and facilitated the staff evaluation process. These have taught me how to be very organized and stay on task even when there are a multitude of things that need to get done. These experiences align well with the mission of Partners for Education to “ensure all students leave school with the academic, technical and employability skills” to ensure his/her future success.

My degree in Business Administration, my dedication to the humanitarianism, and my ability to see projects through to the end would be true assets to Partners for Education. Enclosed you will find a copy of my resume highlighting my variety of work experiences. I look forward to speaking with you in further detail about my qualifications. Thank you for taking the time to review my information.

Sincerely,

Shawn P. Atkins

Shawn P. Atkins

Enclosure