Cover Letters 101

The cover letter can be a challenge, because while you might be trained well in the practice of medicine, but nobody has trained you how to sell yourself. Well, now is your chance!

- **Your cover letter should not be longer than three paragraphs.** It should be in basic business letter format, with the only exception being your name and address. If you have your name and address set up as a header on your resume, make the one on your cover letter match it exactly.

- **The date should be flush left with a space below it.** Then you should have the address to which you’re writing, with the name of the person, their title, the organization or group name, their address, and then their city, state and zip, all on respective lines, followed by the salutation.

**Paragraph 1:**

Your first paragraph is an intro paragraph. You should only write two or three sentences. The fewer words you can use to get your point across, the better. Here’s an example:

*I am a third-year Family Medicine student graduating this May from Oklahoma State University College of Medicine. I plan on moving in July and am currently looking for an opportunity to practice in a hospitalist environment. As a result, I have enclosed my curriculum vitae for your consideration.*

See? This is just a simple paragraph saying who you are, what you’re looking for, and why the recipient should care.

**Paragraph 2:**

The second paragraph is the trickier part. This is where you have to sell yourself. There are thousands of students graduating in every year, so what makes you special? Have you been involved in any unusual procedures? Did you get awarded anything for your efforts during residency? Is your hospital known for any certain type of technology or other aspect that might give you a benefit? Do you have an interesting background? Any of these things can help to make this second paragraph something that interests the employer enough to keep reading. For our hypothetical resident, here’s an example of what s/he might say:

*I have consistently been a top performer throughout my medical training—I graduated at the top of my class from medical school. I was named DO Student of the Year and have held leadership positions in professional***
organizations such as the American Association of Awesome Doctors and the Academy of American Cool Colleges. My current preceptors have told me I am conscientious, knowledgeable, and a team player.

This paragraph brings out a few points that may interest an employer just enough to continue to your CV, which is where the real magic happens anyway. This is not the place to list all of your accomplishments – just give a summary of a couple of them that might set you apart from the other candidates.

Paragraph 3:

The third paragraph is a quick conclusion. Just try to reiterate who are you and what you want. Don’t get bogged down in details:

If you are interested in an intelligent, well-trained Family Medicine resident who will work hard and maintain the high level of quality that your hospital is known for, please contact me at your earliest convenience to schedule an interview. I look forward to hearing from you.

Very simple, but it gets to the point. And the best part is that the whole letter only takes about 30 seconds to read. If it takes longer, there is a smaller chance of it being read at all.

The Closing

Close it off with “Sincerely”, “Best regards”, or “Yours truly”, then leave a few spaces, and type your name. Underneath your name towards the bottom of the page, type “Enclosure”. This means that the CV is enclosed:

   Best regards,
   
   John Smith, DO

Enclosure

And you’re done! Just sign your name, put it with your resume (which you’ve already edited after reading our past articles, right?) and send it off.

- The following page is a copy of the letter in its entirety so you can see just how it all looks put together…
October 22, 2010

John Smith, DO
Director of Medical Education
1234 any street
Any town USA 90210

   RE: Family Medicine Residency

Dear Dr. Smith:

   I am a third-year Family Medicine student graduating this May from Oklahoma State University College of Medicine. I plan on moving in July and am currently looking for an opportunity to practice in a hospitalist environment. As a result, I have enclosed my curriculum vitae for your consideration.

   I have consistently been a top performer throughout my medical training—I graduated at the top of my class from medical school. I was named DO Student of the Year and have held leadership positions in professional organizations such as the American Association of Awesome Doctors and the Academy of American Cool Colleges. My current preceptors have told me I am conscientious, knowledgeable, and a team player.

   If you are interested in an intelligent, well-trained Family Medicine resident who will work hard and maintain the high level of quality that your hospital is known for, please contact me at your earliest convenience to schedule an interview. I look forward to hearing from you.

   Best regards,

John Smith, DO

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Enclosures