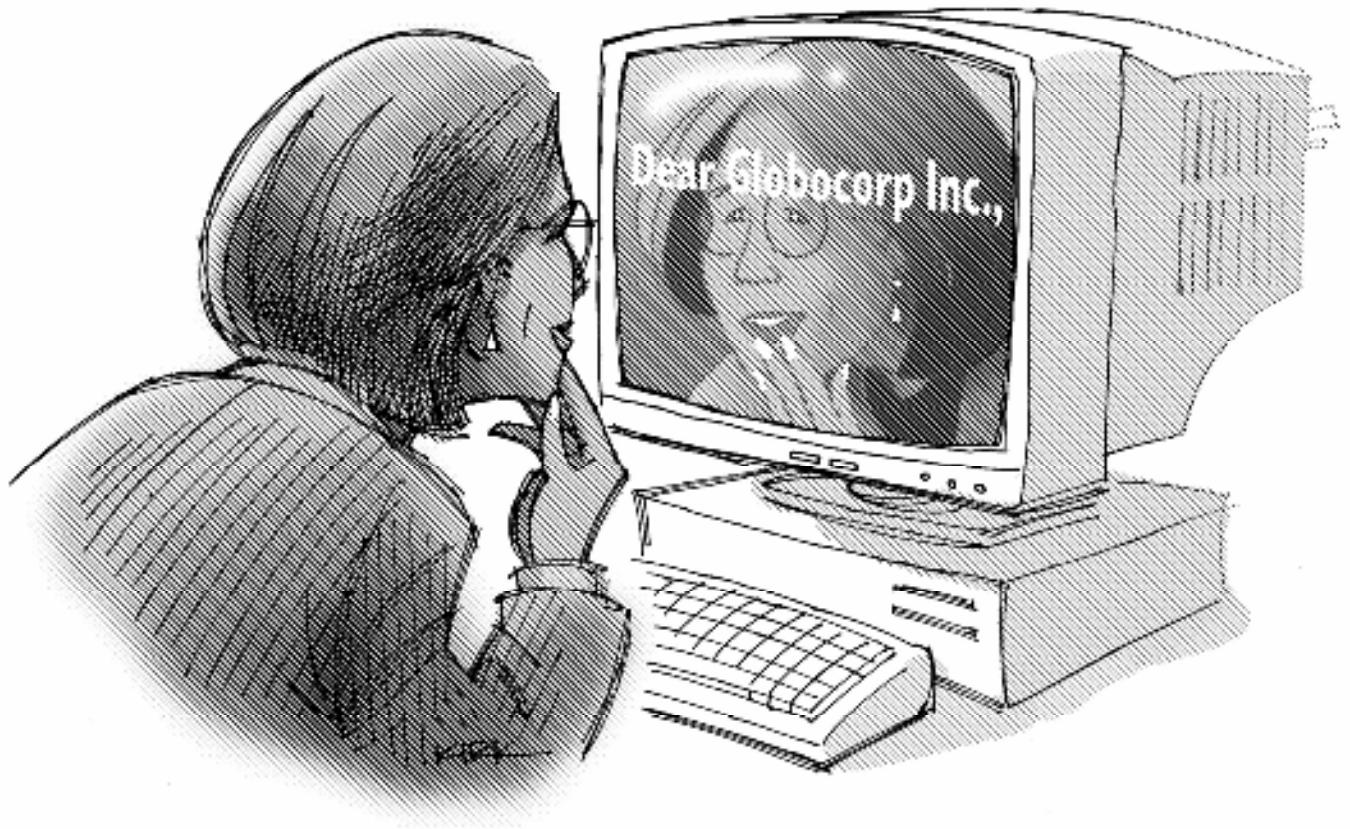


How to Write a COVER LETTER

By Eric R. Anderson



HOW TO WRITE A COVER LETTER

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Always write a *personalized* cover letter for *each* job.

A COVER LETTER HAS THREE MAIN PURPOSES

- It formally introduces you.
- It highlights specific information from your resume and from your background that applies to a specific field or position. It also has the capability to give the reader insight to items not addressed in a resume.
- It helps you to get the interview!

USE TWO BASIC TYPES OF LETTERS

- **Letter of Application:** A cover letter that accompanies your mailed or emailed resume when applying for an *advertised* job opening (details start on page 3).
- **Letter of Inquiry:** A cover letter that accompanies your mailed or emailed resume when applying for jobs which are *not* advertised (details start on page 8).

OTHER TYPES OF COVER LETTERS:

- **Listed skills** - In this style, list your skills either as they directly relate to the requirements in an advertised position, or as they relate in general to the field or position that you are pursuing (page 14).
- **Conversational** - In this style, personalize your cover letter even more. This format tends to be less structured (page 15).

*ADDITIONAL HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS START ON **PAGE 17***
(Including how to send resumes through e-mail.)

THE LETTER OF APPLICATION

Remember that you are *responding to an advertisement* in this letter. That will guide some of your text. Make sure that you comment on specific qualifications that are listed in the advertisement.

THE EMPLOYER'S NAME

With advertised openings, you will sometimes be instructed to mail your information to an office, or a title, such as the Director of Human Resources. In this case, you need not find the name of the individual to whom you are writing. You can address the letter to "Dear Director", or "Dear Sir/Madam", *or you can simply omit both the salutation (Dear _____,) and the closing (Sincerely,) from the letter.* Still, if you can get the name of the appropriate person, it will be to your benefit, differentiating you from the other candidates. If the gender of the person is unclear (e.g., Kim, Pat) your salutation can omit their Mr. or Ms. title (i.e., "Dear Kim Anderson,").

THE FIRST PARAGRAPH

Two or three sentences in length. Start with an interest-creating sentence in which you appeal to the employer's needs. Be as specific as you can about the position desired.

1. I am applying for your Sales Trainee position which was posted on UALR's job website. You indicate a need for a recent graduate with a background in business and sales. I will graduate in May with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, and I have held part-time sales positions throughout college.
2. During the last two years, my editing position with our school newspaper has provided me with experience related to the Proofreader position which was advertised in The Democrat Gazette on March 5. I will graduate from UALR in May with a Bachelor's degree in English, and I plan to enter the field of publishing.
3. I am very interested in the position of Customer Service Representative with Orgo-gro. Mark Muggli, a systems analyst with your company, recently informed me of two openings in this division.

If you are a student with related employment experience, you may want to mention your experience instead of your degree in the first paragraph:

4. I am especially interested in the Loan Officer position which was advertised in the Democrat Gazette on November 8. I have several years of experience in banking, including significant exposure to loans and mortgages.

THE SECOND PARAGRAPH

Three to five sentences in length.

In this paragraph, you will emphasize a match between the skills which you possess and those which are required by the employer. Use the advertisement to guide your writing. For example, if an advertisement mentions specific courses in your major, then point out in the letter that you have had those courses. If an advertisement indicates that the successful candidate will possess excellent speaking skills, then make sure you mention previous or current employment, class projects, presentations, or any other examples of your experience. If you are underqualified for the advertised position, you can include a statement about related experience, or an example of your proven ability to learn new information quickly. Remember that the advertisement is often a "wish list" and that you might not need *all* of the qualifications that are listed.

At the end of this paragraph make a reference to your resume. Some options are:

1. Please see my enclosed resume for a more complete view of my background and qualifications.
2. My enclosed resume will give you a better view of my skills and abilities.
3. Please see my enclosed resume for more information.

If you have both *academic qualifications* and *career-related work experience*, you may want to separate this middle paragraph into two paragraphs. By doing this, you can focus on each of these subjects individually.

THE THIRD PARAGRAPH

Two to three sentences in length.

This is the paragraph in which you tell the employer how to get in touch with you, and thank the person for taking time to give you consideration. Some examples are:

1. Should you need additional information, you can reach me at (501) 555-1212 during the evening, or leave a message at (501) 555-4141 during the day. I can also be reached by e-mail at jcollege@yahoo.com. I am available for an interview at your convenience. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.
2. I am available for an interview during...(list dates or months or whenever you are available). You can reach me at (501) 555-1212 from 3:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. I look forward to hearing from you.
3. I am excited about the possibility of working for Orgo-gro. Should you need more information, you can reach me by phone at (501) 555-8989 or by e-mail at ssstudent@ualr.edu. I am available for an interview at your convenience.
4. I believe that my student teaching experience and academic background will be a benefit to the Wellington School. Should you need additional information, you can reach me at (501) 555-1234. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

MODEL: LETTER OF APPLICATION

Your Address
City, State Zip Code
Today's Date

Person to whom you are writing (if possible)
Title
Company or Organization name
Address
City, State Zip

Dear Mr./Ms. _____,

Identify the position for which you are applying, tell how you heard about the opening (newspaper, contact person, etc.), and explain why you are writing (would you like to be considered for the position? Has your academic and/or employment background prepared you for this position?)

Present your qualifications for the job. These qualifications will probably be a combination of your education and your work experience. Show how each of these has prepared you for the field that you want to enter. You might want to mention current or previous employment, specific courses that you took, aspects of jobs or internships that you had, and so on. Finally, make some reference to your enclosed resume.

You may wish to reiterate your interest in the position. Indicate your willingness to come in for an interview. Include your phone number with the best times to call you and an e-mail address. Finally, close with a positive statement.

Sincerely,

(Sign your name)

Your Typed Name

enclosure

EXAMPLE: LETTER OF APPLICATION

Box 999, UALR
Little Rock, AR 72204
January 14, 2008

Mr. Peter Kirkpatrick
Director of Personnel
Ernst & Young
Huntington Center, Suite 2000
41 South High Street
Little Rock, AR 72205

Dear Mr. Kirkpatrick,

I am writing to express my interest in the Auditor position advertised in the January 13th edition of The Democrat Gazette. I will graduate from UALR in May with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Accounting.

You indicated a need for someone with both accounting experience and leadership skills. During my junior and senior years at UALR, I have worked as a student accountant in the University Bookstore. In addition, I have held leadership positions in Student Government and within the residence halls as a Resident Assistant. Please see my enclosed resume for a more complete view of my background.

I am eager to learn more about this opportunity with Ernst & Young, and look forward to interviewing with you. I can be reached by phone at 236-0000 or by e-mail at ccollege@yahoo.com. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Chris M. College

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FOLLOW-UP TO A LETTER OF APPLICATION

If you respond to an advertised opening, you can expect to wait anywhere from a week to more than a month for a response. Why? Human Resource departments are very busy, and sometimes things get put on the back burner.

By the second week, you're feeling as if no one likes you and you're wondering if you should call to inquire about the status of your file. In general, resist the temptation to call. There are hundreds of resumes along with yours, and if each of those people called, it would begin to get annoying. An exception might be the fields of sales and journalism, in which you are expected to be more aggressive in your approach. Some sales recruiters say that they *only* consider those who persistently call!

Instead, you might want to send a follow-up letter. These letters are appropriate in two circumstances: If something new came up (like you'll be gone for a while and won't be able to interview during that time), or if you simply want to remind them that you are still interested, without being pushy. It's a nice way of ensuring that they received your resume and cover letter while giving them a positive impression of you.

Write a letter something like this:

| | |
|---|---|
| | Your Address city, state zip date |
| Lars Holte Director of College Recruitment Midwest Lefse Commission 235 Krumkake Avenue Little Rock, AR 72205 | |
| Dear Mr. Holte, | |
| I mailed a resume and cover letter to you on July 20. I am still very interested in the Marketing Assistant position. | |
| If you would like any additional information, or if you have any questions, please call me at 555-7896. I look forward to meeting with you. | |
| | Sincerely, (Sign your name) Your Name |

THE LETTER OF INQUIRY

In this type of letter, you inquire about the *possibility* of available positions. Since you are not responding to an advertisement, the first paragraph will not make reference to one, as it did in the letter of application. Instead you will want to refer to what has prompted you to write the letter - an article you have read in the paper, someone you have talked to in the field, personal knowledge that the company hires people with your qualifications, etc... The second paragraph will probably take on a slightly more general tone, since you will not be responding to specific listed qualifications. Finally, you will need to be more assertive in your approach. This is most obvious in the last paragraph.

NOTE: This type of letter should only be written when someone has referred you or if you know there is a job available through your networking or research. This is not to be used for a mass mailing of letters and resumes.

THE EMPLOYER'S NAME

In a letter of inquiry, you should ALWAYS use a specific person's name. You'll call that person at a later date, and you have to ask for him or her. It is easy to get the name and title of the person to whom you should send your resume and cover letter, if you don't already have their name. Simply call the main number for the company or organization and ask the person who answers the phone if he or she can give you the name (gender, if necessary,) and title of the person to whom you would direct a letter regarding possible employment. Then ask for the spelling of the person's name.

THE FIRST PARAGRAPH

Instead of mentioning an advertisement, you will explain briefly why you are interested in working for this company and what has prompted your letter. These statements are important, as they provide the best opportunity for you to personalize the letter.

As mentioned earlier, your letter may have been prompted by an article you have read in the paper, someone you have talked to in the field, or personal knowledge that the company hires people with your qualifications.

Examples:

1. I am writing to inquire about social work positions with the Franklin County Mental Health Board. I recently read an article in the Democrat Gazette which indicated that you are seeking to establish a number of treatment teams to assist the mentally ill in managing their lives. I am excited about the possibility of securing one of these positions, because I am extremely interested in working with this population.
2. During a recent conversation with Professor Joe Fasby, my faculty advisor in the Accounting department at UALR, we discussed the possibility of several upcoming openings for auditors at Ernst & Young. Professor Fasby has worked for Ernst & Young in the past and feels that my education and experience would make me a good match for this type of position. I will graduate from UALR in May with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Accounting.

THE SECOND PARAGRAPH

This can be the same as the second paragraph in the letter of application. The difference is that you are not responding to the qualifications of a specific position opening. Rather, you are giving the reader a general overview of your background. You are telling the reader what you think she or he wants to hear about you, based on the nature of the positions for which you are expressing an interest.

THE THIRD PARAGRAPH

This paragraph becomes more assertive than the same paragraph in the letter of application. You *must* contact the person to whom you are addressing the letter, since there is a very small chance that this person will rush to call you immediately after receiving your letter and resume.

Examples:

1. I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss these positions with you. I will call during the week of April 10 to inquire further. If this is inconvenient, you can reach me by calling 555-2324 after 6:00 p.m. or by e-mail at college@yahoo.com. Thank you for your consideration.
2. I look forward to discussing summer internship opportunities with you. I can be reached at 555-2324. If I do not hear from you by February 8, I will call you to follow up on my interest.

These examples might seem pushy or forward to you. They might have been considered pushy if you indicated the date and time that you expected the person to be available for your phone call, but you're not doing that. Instead, you're giving them a time frame and allowing them an alternative if they don't want to talk with you. That's being polite, not pushy.

MODEL: LETTER OF INQUIRY

Your Address
City, State Zip Code
Today's Date

Person to whom you are writing
Title
Company or Organization name
Address
City, State Zip

Dear Mr./Ms. _____,

Tell the employer what position(s) you are applying for, why they should consider you, what has prompted you to write the letter, and why you are interested in working for them. You may want to mention your current educational status, and month/year of graduation. If you already have experience in the field, you may want to emphasize that here instead.

Present your qualifications for the position(s) for which you are applying. These qualifications will probably be a combination of your education and your work experience. Show how each of these has prepared you for the field that you want to enter. You might want to mention employment, specific courses that you took, aspects of jobs or internships that you had, and so on. Finally, make some reference to your enclosed resume.

Suggest a time period (during the week of...) when you will call for more information. Include your phone number, e-mail address, and the best times to reach you if your suggested week is inconvenient. Finally, close with a positive statement.

Sincerely,

(Sign your name)

Your Typed Name

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EXAMPLE: LETTER OF INQUIRY (Part One)

(Written as a response to the newspaper article below:)

GRANTS WILL HELP COUNTY'S MENTALLY ILL

Grants totaling about \$1.2 million will help expand a program for county residents with severe and long-term mental illness, the Saline County Mental Health Board said yesterday.

The board received \$825,472 from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation of Princeton, N.J., and \$383,786 from the Arkansas Department of Health.

An estimated 6,000 people in Saline County suffer severe and long-term mental illness.

The Mental Health Board serves 525 through a program in which treatment teams help people manage their lives. The board has eight teams. It wants 32 teams of 3,000 more patients, spokesman Pat Groseck said.

Teams are composed of nurses, social workers and experts in medical benefits and housing.

LETTER OF INQUIRY: EXAMPLE (Part Two)

2346 Education Drive
Benton, AR 72018
February 15, 2008

Mary Sidewinder
Office of Community Treatment
Franklin County Mental Health Board
447 East Broad Street
Little Rock, AR 72204

Dear Ms. Sidewinder,

I am writing to inquire about social work positions with the Saline County Mental Health Board. I recently read an article in The Democrat Gazette which indicated that you are seeking to establish a number of treatment teams to assist the mentally ill in managing their lives. I am excited about the possibility of securing one of these positions, because I am extremely interested in working with this population.

My combination of formal education (a Bachelor of Social Work degree) and extensive practical experience will enable me to be a productive member of your treatment team. My studies at UALR provided me with a strong working knowledge of the social work field. My experience at Volunteer's Express has given me the opportunity to teach life management skills to clients. Please see my resume for further details concerning my additional social work experience.

Again, I am very interested in working for the Saline County Mental Health Board, and I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss these positions with you. I will call you next week to inquire further. If this is inconvenient, you can reach me by calling 555-4836 after 6:00 p.m. or by e-mail at jformica@capital.edu. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Julie Formica

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ANOTHER EXAMPLE: LETTER OF INQUIRY

(Written as a response to a conversation with a faculty member.)

Box 999, UALR
Little Rock, AR 72204
February 15, 2008

Mr. Peter Kirkpatrick
Director of Personnel
Ernst & Young
Huntington Center, Suite 2000
41 South High Street
Little Rock, AR 72205

Dear Mr. Kirkpatrick,

During a recent conversation with Professor Joe Fasby, my faculty advisor in the Accounting department at UALR, we discussed the possibility of several upcoming openings for auditors at Ernst & Young. Professor Fasby has worked for Ernst & Young in the past and feels that my education and experience would make me a good match for this type of position. I will graduate from UALR in May with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Accounting.

Professor Fasby has told me that your organization values both practical experience and leadership skills. During my junior and senior years at UALR, I have worked as a student accountant in the University bookstore. In addition, I have held leadership positions in the Student Government and within the residence halls as a resident assistant. Please see my enclosed resume for a more complete view of my background.

I am very interested to learn more about these positions at Ernst & Young and look forward to the possibility of interviewing with you. I will contact you next week to inquire further. If this is inconvenient for you, you can reach me by phone at 236-0000 or by e-mail at ccollege@ualr.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Chris M. College

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ANOTHER WAY OF PERSONALIZING THE LETTER (The Conversational Style)

I have tried to emphasize through the examples in this booklet that personalizing is an important aspect of the cover letter. The point deserves repetition and explanation. When you personalize a letter, you let the employer know that you truly have a desire to specifically work *there*. You have taken the time to respond to their needs, and you may have taken the time to research companies and industries in which you have an interest. You are a good risk. Conversely, when you do not personalize, you blend in with everyone else.

Employers indicate that they like a conversational tone in a cover letter. To do this with business correspondence you must maintain the professional nature of the letter while helping it to flow more easily. You can achieve this type of writing typically after you've had practice with cover letters, and/or when you feel very comfortable applying for a position for which you are truly well-suited.

The following page presents an example of a conversational cover letter. To be sure that your writing is at its best, make sure that you schedule a time for someone in Career Services to review your cover letter!

CONVERSATIONAL COVER LETTER

1234 Capital Way
Cabot, AR 72023
January 14, 2008

Ms. Gail Giga
Recruiting Coordinator
Information Technology Department
100 Hard Drive
Conway, AR 72032

Dear Ms. Giga,

I am a Senior at University of Arkansas, Little Rock majoring in Computer Science with a minor in Accounting. I am interested in interviewing for an Information Technology (IT) Analyst position at Goldman, Sachs. Having spoken with a former Goldman Analyst, read your brochures and visited your web site, I believe that Goldman, Sachs is the right global investment bank for me.

I am interested in an IT Analyst position because I have really enjoyed my internship at the Arkansas Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC), where, for the last year, I have been the only intern at the 17-person IT department that provides computer support to over 2000 in-house customers. My additional course work in accounting and finance has exposed me to concepts of financial services, an area to which I now want to apply my computer-related skills.

With an analytical, yet service-oriented, background that includes working 40 hours every week while carrying a full course-load, I want to be an IT Analyst at Goldman, Sachs for two reasons. First, your 'technology is the business' idea appeals to me since I too value IT work not as a backstage operation but as a very important team-based part of Goldman's business. Second, in my spare time, along with colleagues and friends, I want to pursue community service in the New York area.

Ms. Giga, having seriously thought about being an IT Analyst in general and at Goldman, Sachs in particular, I would very much enjoy speaking with you further about the possibility of my being considered for an interview.

I have enclosed a copy of my resume and my transcript. I will call you soon to follow-up on this letter. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chip Cobol

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ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

EMAILING and MAILING your LETTERS and RESUMES

E-mail

When sending your resume and cover letter by e-mail, attach BOTH in Word, RTF, or PDF.

Or you can send them as one document:

Create one document that contains both your resume and cover letter. After you create your cover letter, go to Insert→Break, and select a Page Break. Then go to Insert→File, browse for your resume, select it, and save the new document as something like [YourName] resume-cover.doc. When the employer prints your materials they will only need to open one document and will receive your cover letter and your resume.

In either case, in the **body** of the e-mail write a brief note indicating that you have attached your application materials for the _____ position.

*NOTE: You've probably saved your resume as "resume.doc", since you don't have heaps of resumes on your hard drive. Remember that employers DO have heaps of resumes on their hard drives, so you should use **your name** in the document name (e.g., EricAnderson coverletter-resume.doc)*

E-mail Subject Line

Make sure that your subject line will make the employer want to read your email (and not delete it!). This is especially true for the letter of inquiry; in this case, you might want to use the name of the person who referred you (e.g., "Steve Mellum referred me"). Otherwise, you might include the name of the position (e.g., "Public Relations Intern application").

Signing the Letter

This may seem obvious, but many people forget to sign the cover letter (they remember after dropping it in the mailbox). When you write and send a great number of letters, it is easy to forget the little things, like signing your name. Remember.

Envelope Size

As I mention in "How To Write A Resume", when you mail a cover letter and a resume, consider using 9 x 12 inch envelopes instead of business size envelopes. If you do this, then the employer gets your resume and letter without any creases. He or she will not have to bend your credentials flat before reading them. They look better. I think it's worth the extra expense.

The exception to this rule is sending a letter to a box number listed in the paper. The mail slot for these is business envelope size. If you send your information in a large envelope, it will be bent and crushed to fit into that slot.

Overnight Mail and Fax

Some people send their resumes and cover letters by overnight mail or registered mail. Faxing is an option, too. The lower quality of the copy can be a disadvantage, though. Check with the employer *before* you fax.

STYLE CONSIDERATIONS

Active/Passive Voice

The way you arrange your wording in writing and speaking is important. As an example, active voice is more powerful than passive voice.

Active: During my senior year, I presented a case analysis of Borden.

This sounds better than:

Passive: During my senior year, a case analysis of Borden was presented by me.

Verbs and Examples

Use verbs, not adjectives. It will help you to focus on showing what you can do for them. Use examples to bring life to your letter!

Focus on the Employer!

Change the focus of letters from "I" to "you" whenever possible. Concentrate on the employer's needs, since that's what *they'll* concentrate on. Tell them specifically how you meet their needs!

Don't begin *all* of your paragraphs with the word "I". Even if you can't focus on the employer, you can restructure one or more of the paragraphs in order to avoid the "I" overkill.

Example:

Before: I am currently working at Spineless Periodicals as Assistant Editor.

After: My current position is Assistant Editor at Spineless Periodicals.

SALARY HISTORY AND SALARY REQUIREMENTS

You don't have to include this information if you don't want to. You can indicate that your salary is "negotiable", (unless you will not be considered if you fail to include the specific information). You don't want to be removed from the list of possible candidates just because you list an income slightly above or below the range that they have set. For information on typical salaries for entry-level positions, and more hints on how to handle this issue, see us in Career Services.