

MAKING CONTACTS



AGENDA

- SESSION 1
 - Starter
 - Who Can Talk about You?
 - Preparing Your References
- SESSION 2
 - Cover Letters
 - Writing a Cover Letter
 - Conclusion
- Student Assessment

Objectives

Students will recognize the importance of good references and identify potential references.

Students will learn how to determine what employers might want to learn from references.

Students will learn to prepare references for phone calls or other inquiries from employers.

Students will recognize why cover letters are important and identify the parts of letter.

Students will write a cover letter for a job of their choice.

Materials Needed

- Session 2: One copy of the “Sample Cover Letter” activity sheet for each student (Part I)

- Session 2: One copy of the “Your Cover Letter” activity sheet for each student (Part II)

SESSION 1

Starter (3 minutes)

Tell students to imagine that they have to choose to work on a project with one of two classmates whom they don't know. Both of these students claim to know a lot about the subject, to be hard workers, and to have great grades. Ask, "How are you going to decide which student to work with?"

Lead students to the understanding that the best way would be to get the opinions of other students or teachers who have worked with them before.

Explain to students that employers try to find out more about applicants in the same way. References are the people who will speak to potential employers about an applicant's ability to do a job. The first session will help students identify and contact references. The second session will help students write appropriate cover letters to potential employers.

Part I Who Can Talk about You? (25 minutes)

Purpose: Students recognize the importance of securing good references and identify potential references.

1. Students consider what employers want to know about them.

Place students in small groups. Ask groups to brainstorm information that an employer might want to know about them. Have them develop a list of questions that employers might have.

Have groups share their questions with the class. Write the questions on the board. As they offer their questions, ask students to explain why an employer would want to know such information. Help students discover the qualities that employers are looking for in a new employee.

2. Students identify the characteristics they should look for when choosing references.

Ask students, "If the personnel manager at the company where you applied wanted to find out information about you, what kinds of people would you suggest the manager talk to?"

Students should share that people for whom they have worked (as volunteers or for pay) are good choices. Also, teachers, counselors, and coaches are valuable references.

Ask students why they chose these people. List the reasons on the board. Have them organize this list by order of importance. Help students reach a consensus about the top four qualities a reference should have.

Lead students to the understanding that they should choose references who know them well, respect them, and like them.

3. Students recognize potentially inappropriate references.

Ask students if any of them have listed family members as references. Ask the class to consider some of the pros and cons of listing family members. (Pros include that family members know them very well. Also, some students may only have family references. Cons include that employers may feel that a family member is not an objective source or that a student is trying to hide something by having only a family member as a reference.)

Ask students if they can think of other people who might not make appropriate references. (Students might respond: close friends and social peers.) Have them explain their thinking.

Have students review their lists. Ask if they would like to change, add, or delete categories of people from their lists of possible references. If so, have them explain why before making the appropriate changes.

4. Students choose people to use as references.

Have students take a minute to write down the names of two or three people to use as references when applying for a part-time job. Have students find their references' telephone numbers and addresses as part of their homework.

Part II Preparing Your References (20 minutes)

Purpose: Students will learn to prepare references for telephone calls or other inquiries from potential employers.

1. Students recognize that communication with references is important.

Ask students to consider what they would do if they received a phone call from someone they don't know asking their opinion of a friend.

Have volunteers share their answers with the class. (Students should mention that they might not answer the questions or that they might give a poor responses, as they wouldn't be prepared for the conversation.)

Point out that if references don't know that they are references, they might not give the best recommendations.

2. Students learn to prepare references for calls from potential employers.

Explain that students need to prepare their references to talk about their strengths to a potential employer. Students should be sure to ask the person if it's okay to use them as a reference.

Explain that if a person agrees to be a reference, students should call and tell them the name of the employer and the job sought. Point out that if students haven't spoken to a reference in a while, they may need to update the reference on their job goals and their other recent activities. That way, references will be prepared and can give strong, effective information.

Have several pairs of volunteers take turns role-playing a conversation in which a student asks an individual to be a reference. Have other students critique the performances.

SESSION 2

Part I Cover Letters (20 minutes)

Purpose: Students recognize why cover letters are important and learn how to write a cover letter.

1. Students recognize the importance of cover letters.

Tell students that once they have identified the job they want to apply to, written their resumes, and prepared their references, the next step is to write a cover letter.

Ask students to explain what a cover letter is. Lead students to the understanding that a cover letter introduces them to the employer and identifies the position in which they are interested.

Explain to students that a cover letter also allows them to explain things about themselves that aren't immediately visible in their resumes. Provide students with the following example:

You're applying for a job at a local ice cream store. Mr. Steven Chip, the manager, is interviewing 50 young people for summer jobs. You know your resume is strong, but your resume can't show how good you are with people, that you love ice cream, and that you've been a customer at Mr. Chip's store for years. Your cover letter can!

2. Students discover how cover letters can expand and complement a resume.

Tell students that a cover letter is the place to specify to an employer the job in which they are interested. A cover letter allows applicants to show that they know something about the company and have initiative. Cover letters can also bring up or expand upon special skills or talents that might not be highlighted in a resume.

Ask students to identify other things that they might include in their cover letters. (Students might respond: special experiences that could prove useful on a job, willingness to take on all tasks.)

3. Students analyze the parts of a cover letter.

Have students form small groups. Distribute copies of the "Sample Cover Letter" activity sheet. Give groups four or five minutes to identify the elements of a good cover letter. Call on each group to identify one important element that the members found in the sample. (Students might respond: the heading; an inside address; a salutation; the body, which includes who the writer is, how they found out about the job, and why the writer is qualified for the job; a closing; and a signature.)

4. Students learn the dos and don'ts of writing good cover letters.

Give students the following pointers. You may wish to have them take notes.

- Address the letter to a specific person. Don't use "To Whom It May Concern." Call the company to find out how to spell the person's name. Be sure to include their title. If there is no way to find out the individual's name, use "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Personnel Manager."
- Make your letter short and to the point. The first paragraph should say that you are applying for a job and provide a description of the job.
- Use the letter to describe the skills you have that make you a good candidate for the job.
- Don't begin every sentence with "I." Vary your sentences.
- At the end of the letter, explain that you will contact the employer to follow up. Also, thank the employer for their time.
- Close the letter with "Sincerely."
- Check your letter for mistakes and then print the letter and the envelope. Don't forget to put your return address on the envelope.
- Be sure to sign your name.
- Ask someone to proofread your letter before you mail it.

5. Students identify key points about cover letters.

Point out that a cover letter must be specific. Students will need to write a new cover letter for each job they apply to. Remind them that cover letters and the interview process can turn a no into a yes.

Part II Writing a Cover Letter (25 minutes)

Purpose: Students will write their own cover letters.

1. Students develop ideas that they might include in their personal cover letters.

Have students take a few seconds to think about a job that they would like to have. Ask them to think about some of the things that they might include in a cover letter to give more information about themselves and to show interest.

2. Students draft their cover letters.

Pass out the "Your Cover Letter" activity sheet. Have students write a first draft of their cover letters. They can make up addresses for the companies and names for the heads of personnel if they do not have that information.

3. Students use peer evaluation to offer constructive criticism.

After students have completed their drafts, have them meet in small groups to exchange cover letters and offer constructive criticism. Remind students of what constructive criticism is. You may want to establish rules for peer evaluation by requiring each group member to make a positive comment before criticizing or correcting.

4. Students revise their cover letters.

Direct students to reexamine their first drafts. Suggest that they look for places where they can improve their letters by shortening sentences, being more to the point, or substituting words that are more precise. Ask them to think about the changes that were suggested by their peer evaluation group. Have students make changes that improve their letters.

5. Students check for errors in spelling, grammar, mechanics, and form.

Provide time for students to exchange and proofread the revised letters. Remind students that they should always proofread their cover letters and not rely on their word processor's spelling and grammar check features.

Conclusion (2 minutes)

Ask students to identify how references and cover letters can help strengthen their resumes for a potential employer. Suggest that students keep a copy of their list of references and cover letters so they can use them as models in the future. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- References are a way for a potential employer to find out more about an applicant.
- People who know you and respect your abilities are good choices for references.
- References are important and could be the factor that helps get you the job.
- A cover letter gives you a chance to give a potential employer more information and to make your resume stand out.
- An effective cover letter is brief, precise, and error-free and follows proper business-letter format.

Student Assessment

SESSION 1

1. List your references. Explain your relationship with them and why you think they would be good references.
2. Who might make an inappropriate reference?
3. How should you prepare your references for being contacted by potential employers?

SESSION 2

1. What is a cover letter, and why is it important?
2. What is in a good cover letter?
3. What might employers think when they receive cover letters with spelling and grammar errors?

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Using Quotations

“A wise man knows everything. A smart man knows everyone. A successful man knows both.” –Chinese proverb

Have students explain why it takes both knowledge and contacts to be successful. Encourage them to give examples.

Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

Print sample cover letters on heavy paper and cut them into parts. Distribute three or four letters (in pieces) to each group of students for assembly. Students should note qualifications in the body of the letter that match the needs of the target company.

Review the standard parts of a business letter. Have students explain how they assembled the pieces (e.g., the writer used the company name in the body of the letter).

Writing in Your Journal

Have students write about the reasons they chose the references they selected and the activities they have shared with those people that shed light on their character or skills.

Have students share their work with a classmate.

Using Technology

See *What Color Is Your Parachute? Guide to Job-Hunting Online* by Richard N. Bolles and Mark Emery Bolles for a list of job-related websites.

Have students visit and write reviews of these sites. Have them share their work with the class.

Homework

Have students research a company they'd like to work for. Have them visit the company's website and research information about the company at the library.

Explain to students that a cover letter should describe ways in which their skills could benefit the employer. Have them make notes about how their skills might be useful to the company. They should include a sentence or two about this in the final drafts of their cover letters.

Additional Resources

Assign topics from *Winning Cover Letters* by Robin Ryan, which addresses 42 cover letter mistakes, to groups of students. Have them report their findings to the class.

Have students decide which mistakes might apply to beginning job hunters. Make a class list of dos and don'ts.

SAMPLE COVER LETTER

1347 Regata Drive
Georgetown, RI 02931

May 15, 20XX

Ms. Beverly Johnson
Supervisor
Cortland Pharmacy
233 Jones Street
Georgetown, RI 02931

Dear Ms. Johnson:

In response to your recent advertisement in the *Ledger*, I am applying for the position of weekend clerk. I have included my resume to provide you with information about my skills in working with people.

Experiences that have prepared me for this position include my present job at Flagman's Sporting Goods, where I have worked as a cashier for one year providing customer assistance and pleasant service. I also volunteer at the community hospital, so I am familiar with pharmaceutical names.

I am interested in a future career in medicine. Working at Cortland Pharmacy would offer me the chance to build knowledge in the field. My strong interest in medicine would also benefit your store.

I will contact you early next week to discuss a good time for us to meet. If you have any questions, I can be reached at (401) 555-5656. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Jason Washington

Jason Washington

YOUR COVER LETTER

Your address

Your city, state, ZIP

Date

Name

Title

Address

City, state, ZIP code

Dear _____,

I am applying for _____

Experiences that have prepared me for this job include _____

I will contact you _____

Sincerely,

Signature

Your name