

## Purpose of a Cover Letter

- **Never send a resume without a cover letter!**
- Used when responding to specific, advertised openings or expressing interest in organization
- Explains **why** you are sending the resume, how you learned about company, position
- Convinces reader to look at your resume
- Calls attention to important attributes of your background
- Shows your personality, attitude, enthusiasm and communication skills

## Do's & Don'ts of Cover Letters

- Don't repeat information found in resume, instead...
- Do Sum-up important qualities, areas of expertise, and motivation about field or position of interest
- Do include information about availability
- Do explain shortcomings or gaps in work experience in history
- Do try to keep the cover letter to one page; however, two pages are acceptable, especially when reflective of extensive work experience

## General Structure of the Cover Letter

Generally accepted standard is a three-paragraph structure, though a cover letter should adapt to your needs.

1. **Opening paragraph:** State why you are writing, how you learned of the organization or position, and basic information about yourself
2. **Main Body paragraph:** Tell **why** you are interested in employer or type of work. Demonstrate that you know enough about the employer or position and relate your background to the employer or position. Mention specific qualifications that make you a good fit for the employer's needs. Explain in more detail relevant items on your resume. Refer to the fact that your resume is enclosed. Mention other enclosures when applicable.
3. **Closing paragraph:** Indicate you would like opportunity to interview for a position or to talk with employer to learn more about career opportunities. State how you will follow up on the letter, such as calling the company/employer. Offer to provide employer with additional information such as certificates, references, etc.
4. **Thank** the employer for his or her consideration of your letter/attached resume (could be a brief 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph).

## Formatting Concerns

- Be sure you use standard, acceptable margins for page layout (MS Word default)
- Use business letter style (first sentences are not indented)
- Block style is acceptable, with text flush with left margin
- Consult numerous sample cover letters in Virginia Tech's *Career Planning Guide*