

# Resumes and Cover Letters for Recent College Graduates

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Mihyun Hong and Jenepher Schulte

## INTRODUCTION

A well made cover letter and resume is the difference between landing an interview and not. The conventions of resume and cover letter writing for those seeking entry into the workforce with their newly received diplomas are highly defined as a result of many people working in the same environment and having the same purpose. This is a highly strategic genre, with explicit purpose and strong dynamics of power and competition shaping the text. Having a sound understanding of how the genre works is key to using your cover letter and resume to its maximum potential.

Read our guide and write that winning resume you need to land your dream job. By first exploring the social context and purpose of the genre, then how that translates into the features of the genre, and finally expanding that basis of understanding to alternate modes and functions of resumes and cover letters, you will gain a comprehensive grasp of the genre, and in turn a better resume and cover letter of your own. When it is your first line tool for starting your future, every difference matters.

## SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE GENRE

An understanding of the forces shaping the standards of resumes and cover letters allows you to use them most effectively. Cover letters and resumes have a very specific sociorhetorical environment and vary little in convention. When written by a recent recipient of an undergraduate degree, the extent of variation is minimal. The level of conformity is dictated by the social situation in which the text is employed, and in the case of this genre, these factors cause conformity in format, content, structure, and writing style.

By identifying the writer, reader, purpose, and mode of use, the social situation is described. The social situation of resumes and cover letters shapes the text because there are strong dynamics of power and competition. Hirers are looking to choose the most qualified applicant out of the pool of resumes. Applicants know that hirers, who can consist of one reader up to any series of HR screeners, committees, and bosses, will be first scanning the gathered resumes for minimal requirements. The resume must stand through the 20-second scan; otherwise it lands in the recycle bin and immediately fails the purpose of the writer. Once past the initial screening, the resume must stand out against the backdrop of many other resumes. Ultimately it is the content of the resume, the qualifications of education and experience, which decides whether an interview is granted. But formatting and content strategies can highlight the important qualifications that the writer wants to stress, possibly influencing the

impressions of the readers. Because writers are so sensitive to the competitive nature of their situation, every possible strategic move is made to obtain the upper hand.

An applicant to a company looking for a person to fill a position submits a cover letter and resume together as a package. Through writing and submitting the package, the applicant is trying to be awarded the job by getting the hirer's attention, their strategy being to persuade by showing their qualifications and skills in the most effective manner. Knowing it will be only scanned at first, every writer chooses outline format with bulleted phrases. The phrases start with the verbs best describing the ability of the writer because a reader might not even read to the end of the phrase. Likewise, the most impressive section of content goes first, so that if the reader does not read to the end of the page at least the most persuasive content has been communicated. This manner is highly sensitive to the anticipated desires, expectations and reading style of the reader, and thus both the environments of the reader and the writer affect what the writer produces.

In a more abstract sense, the reader and writer are in two different environments; the reader is in a professional, formal work environment and the writer is in any possible environment yet is trying to be granted access to the reader's and thus incorporates the formal tone of the reader's environment to help the reader identify with it. Because the situation where cover letters and genres are employed is so specified, with the reader's formal environment and intention of choice, the writer's competitive environment and intention to be awarded the job, the resulting texts are very similar.

Important. Think of yourself as your own advertising agent. Identify your strongest selling points and your target audience. This is an advertisement of you, so know what the employer is looking for and tailor your resume and cover letter to their needs.

## THE CONVENTIONS

Adherence to the conventions of cover letters and resumes is important. The conventions are a result of writers identifying the expectations of the readers and making strategic decisions to best meet these expectations, in order best appeal to the reader.

Even though the resume and cover letter compliment each other, the format, structure, content, sentence structure and diction are different for each as a result of having different, yet coordinating strategies of argument. The conventions of resumes are discussed first because, although the cover letter serves as an introduction to the resume, no cover letter will ever be looked at if the qualifications given in the correlating resume are not first approved. The samples referred to can be found in full text in the appendix.

## THE CONVENTIONS OF RESUMES

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### Format

The most notable convention of the resume is the style of format. Resumes are written as an outline and divided into sections labeled by bold headings. Each starts with a centered heading

that bears prominently the full name and contact information of the applicant. The name is the largest, most bold font of the page, because the content is of no value without the name. The name of the applicant is the most stressed. As demonstrated in the samples, the resume is always in portrait layout and kept to one page.

### **Content and Structure**

Your qualifications are the only content of the resume. An appeal to logic, only the facts are given. Any discussion of your qualifications is saved for the cover letter. Included are the accomplishments and experiences that you argue qualify you for the desired position. This information is structured into category sections, and then lists each criteria chronologically. The sections tend to be objective, education, experience, and leadership. Logical organization of the content allows the reader to navigate through the content easily and expediently find the information they want. To insure that the most important content is read, the sections are in order of significance. The objective section is first. Second is either experience or education, whichever gives the most compelling argument for the reader to consider you as a candidate.

#### *Objective*

Here you explicitly define your purpose in applying. Not all college majors or patterns of employment point in a clear career path, and so an objective clarifies for the reader the direction that you have in mind. This section plays a crucial role in the resume and thus is placed just beneath the heading. Placed first, this will be what the reader relates the following content back to. The qualifications that follow prove why you ought to be granted whatever your stated intention is. Unlike the other sections, the objective is written in a short phrase.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

To obtain a position in the business field where I can apply and further develop my skills in international strategic marketing, leadership, and management, while helping the company to reach its profit goals.

#### *Education*

Resumes of recent college graduates tend to have the Education section as the first section of qualifications, as it is most often their largest accomplishment. Always first is the name of the school, name of the major, and the month and year of graduation. The cumulative GPA, departmental GPA, and a list of classes related to the position that were completed can be included in this section if noteworthy. If the GPA would not impress the reader, it is not included.

#### **EDUCATION**

*University of Washington, Seattle, WA*

- Bachelor of Art in Chemistry, June 2006
- Cumulative GPA: 3.78
- Departmental GPA: 3.89

- (Courses taken: Organic, Inorganic lab, Biochemistry lab, Microbiology lab, Physical Chemistry, Quantitative analysis lab)

### *Work Experience*

Here your experience in the work force is outlined. Every job or internship is given an individual entry, which is titled by the company name, job title, and duration of employment given in month and year form. Then, in bulleted phrases are described the notable responsibilities you carried at each position. This is where you are able to brag about how capable you are. What you have done before tells the reader what skills you already have.

***Nordstrom, Int'l Sales Department, Seattle WA                      June – September 2008***  
***Intern***

- Helped plan meetings and presentations, general office support.
- Built relationships in the Seattle and international business communities.

**Important.** Always remember that you are convincing them of your potential value to them. Think critically about what skills each experience gave you, then pick the ones that relate most to the job your applying for. Focus on those that show your skills et to be a perfect match to their needs.

### *Sentence Structure and Diction*

There are no complete sentences in resumes for the simple reason that they communicate less effectively than phrases when scanned. Every point must be summed up in one phrase because the reader does not spend enough attention on it to remember more than a phrase worth. Much attention is spent on the word choice in every phrase. Conventionally, every bulleted phrase of the Work Experience section starts with a verb, because your capabilities are the most important part of the phrase.

**Important.** Take time to find the most effective words. Because you only have so much of the reader's attention, start your bulleted phrases with strong verbs. These are they ideas of your capabilities that will stick with the reader, if you choose the right word. Would you rather be remembered for having already "Directed student discussions towards understanding of class concepts " in your TA experience, or forgotten because you only "Gave lessons to students"?

## THE CONVENTIONS OF COVER LETTERS

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### **Format**

Cover letters are written in formal business letter format. First is the heading that began the resume. Then, aligned to the left comes the date, address of employer, and opening salutation. This follows the convention of business letter, with a colon at the end like so.

Dear Mr. Anderson:

## Content

The first thing you need to write is your name and contact information on the top of the letter. Following this information, indicate the name and address of the reader. Since this letter is addressing a specific person or organization, it is good for you to start with the name of the person or organization starting with "Dear." Generally the cover letter consists of at least three paragraphs. The first paragraph is about the reason for applying. The key tip of this paragraph is describing the reason in different way to start the letter. For example, write you experiences or the motivation you had which inspired you to apply for the job. The second paragraph is about your background. Since you will write your background specifically in the resume, write yourself briefly. In the last paragraph, you need to mention that your resume is placed on the next page and the contact information. At this moment, indicate your expectation to be called from the reader, and also show you sincerity. At the bottom of the letter, leave the space for your signature and write the "enclosure." Cover letter should be written in formal language. Thus, be careful with the word choices. Do not use slang or jargon. It will ruin your cover letter, even your image to the reader. The important thing in writing the cover letters is that it should be compliment to the resume. If the information in cover letters and resumes are redundant, it will give less effect to appeal to the reader. Always proofread your cover letter. The reader will notice your ability to describe yourself in the resume. Think they are your English instructors.

## VARIATIONS IN THE GENRE OF COVER LETTERS AND RESUMES

### DIFFERENT SCENARIOS IN WHICH TO EMPLOY THE GENRE

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For writing creative resumes and cover letters, you can change some of content from the standard text. For example, you can use the cover letter and resume which address Couple Management, attached in Appendix II. As you can see in the example resume below, the format is the same. It is one-page length and portrait shape. However, if you would like to change the shape, you can, but it will be less space to put everything you want if it is landscape shape. For the content, it is much different than the standard text. The content includes more personal facts. If you see the example text below, it says about the personality, religion, and interests which you can not notice in the standard text. Just be creative. The readers will impress your creativity and want to read your resume and interview you. Also, the use of words is less formal and they are not the past verb form. For personality section, it does not start with verb. For word choices, use words which can attract readers, but still avoid using slang or jargon.

### DIFFERENT GENRE TO EMPLOY IN THE SCENARIO

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Cover letters are meant to serve as an introduction and personable compliment to the resume, while rhetorically strengthening the argument that the reader should grant an interview to the writer. They summarize the personal skills supported by the evidence of the resume and allude to further contact while establishing a personal connection with the reader, whether

that is one person or an entire company. However, cover letters are, like resumes, scanned. And business letter format, being in paragraph form, is not conducive to being clearly understood when scanned. A greeting card is. Of the more personal genres, cards are, with their juxtaposition of image and short text, the most effective modes of communication when scanned.

A balance is necessary though. Because this is still a formal communication between applicant and reader, a card in lieu of a cover letter would need to maintain a formal tone. In the example provided in Appendix II, a formal tone is used in the message. The message is a distilled version of the standard sample cover letter, whose content strategy is already so perfected by the strong influences of the specific, purpose driven social environment.

This technique of disembedded genre proves an effective tactic. It interests the reader and draws attention to the writer's creativity. The color and image choices are as strategically aimed at the specific audience as the word choice in this variational cover letter and the standard it redresses. The resume is mounted on coordinating card stock to underscore the relationship of coordination between the two. In a genre where convention is expected, a well-executed break with convention could prove an effective strategy to achieving the purpose: landing the interview.

## CONCLUSION

With a more profound understanding of the social forces shaping the convention of resumes and cover letters, and implementing the tips given for producing cover letters and resumes, we hope that you will become a successful user of the genre. Always keeps in mind that explicitly showing your purpose and choosing your words carefully lets the reader see your strengths most clearly. Also, you should keep in mind that demonstrating everything about oneself, no matter how coherently, in a one-page paper is not enough. It will win you the interview, but not necessarily the job. Applying the expanded understanding of strategies to communicate effectively in any genre, whether textual, verbal, or in any mode, will help you the rest of the way. Hopefully, this guide will help you make the first step to a successful future in a career of your desire.

*Appendix I: Full Examples of Standard Resumes and Cover Letters by  
Recent College Graduates*

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**MI-HYUN HONG**

451 4<sup>th</sup> Ave South #333  
Anywhere, WA 98000  
(123) 555-8888  
[applying@u.college.edu](mailto:applying@u.college.edu)

August 8, 2006

Anderson's National Chemistry Laboratory  
Address  
Seattle, WA 98034

Dear Mr. Anderson:

As a recently graduated Chemistry major of the University of Washington, I am prepared and willing to devote my time working in the chemistry field. I have a strong passion for chemistry, and with my multiple experiences and education I feel that working in the chemistry field will give me not only the chance to share my knowledge with others but also the chance to learn more from the working experience and its surroundings.

When I found out that you were hiring and I recognized your enthusiasm for chemistry, I strongly wanted to be part of your company's family. I recently acquired my B.S. in chemistry from the University of Washington in June, 2006. I have a wide range of experiences from writing lab reports and daily construction inspecting reports to researching in both organic and inorganic fields. These experiences have shaped me into a hard worker who can get along with others.

The enclosed resume includes more information about my education and work experiences. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (123) 555-8888 if you have any further questions. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Mi-hyun Hong

Enclosure

# **MI-HYUN HONG**

451 4<sup>th</sup> Ave South #333  
Anywhere, WA 98000

(123) 555-888  
[applying@u.college.edu](mailto:applying@u.college.edu)

**OBJECTIVE:** To use my knowledge in a Chemistry environment and to obtain a position in the laboratory.

## **EDUCATION:**

**University of Washington, Seattle, WA**

- **Bachelor of Art in Chemistry, June 2006**
- **Cumulative GPA: 3.78**
- **Departmental GPA: 3.89**
- **(Courses taken: Organic, Inorganic lab, Biochemistry lab, Microbiology lab, Physical Chemistry, Quantitative analysis lab)**

## **WORK EXPERIENCES:**

**University of Washington, Department of Chemistry, Seattle, WA**

Research assistant

- Prepared materials and assisted students with the lab reports
- Synthesized and characterized novel drug-delivery agents and therapeutics for use in Boron neutron capture therapy for cancer

Lab technician

- Participated in environmental study in New Mexico
- Participated in bauxite leaching project
- Utilized wet chemical, electrochemical, AA and other spectrophotometric analyses
- Developed a specific ion exchange resin
- Gained experience in IR, NMR, X-ray, and organic synthesis

Chemistry tutor

- Oversaw other students with assignments and lab reports
- Developed other students' knowledge of Chemistry
- Motivated students to become interest in Chemistry

# Jenepher A. Schulte

(123) 555-8888  
applying@u.college.edu

13301 SE 79<sup>th</sup> PL #C333  
ANYWHERE, WA 98000

August 8, 2006

Human Resources  
Ben & Jerry's Homemade, Inc.  
30 Community Drive  
South Burlington, VT 05403-6828

Dear Hiring Professional:

Your quality ice creams have been dear to me since childhood. As I am nearing graduation at the University of Washington Business School and looking towards career and future, I hope to work for a company dear to me and, like myself, seeing growth in their path ahead. In my growth as a professional, I have grown an appreciation for companies like Ben and Jerry's Homemade, Inc. that strongly value quality and innovation, as well as socially and environmentally aware business practices. I am writing to inquire about a position in your sales department, seeking a full time post in the field of international business. I was referred to the company by Janice Smith, Director of Finance. Enclosed is my resume, which outlines the experience and credentials that I have to offer as a potential member of your team.

Experiences in class, internship, and workplace have developed the personal skills that would make me a very beneficial addition to the company. They have shaped me to be a skillful team member, as both leader and participant. Instilled in me are a strong work ethic, drive to succeed, and ability to work well under pressure. My unique combination of skill, experience and interest makes me a candidate for your team.

Please consider me in your recruiting and interview process. I have deep respect for the social efforts Ben and Jerry's Homemade, Inc. has made itself known for. The company's progressive values compel in me a strong desire to be a part of the company. I offer a strong set of personal and academic qualifications, and I hope that I match the needs of Ben and Jerry's Homemade, Inc. An interview would allow an opportunity for further discussion of my qualifications and capabilities in relation to your needs. I will call you next week to follow up, and you can reach me at (425) 466-6951, or jeneps@u.washington.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jenepher A. Schulte

Enclosure

# Jenepher A. Schulte

(123) 555-8888  
applying@u.college.edu

13301 SE 79<sup>th</sup> PL #C333  
ANYWHERE, WA 98000

## Objective

*To obtain a position in the business field where I can apply and further develop my skills in international strategic marketing, leadership, and management, while helping the company to reach its profit goals.*

## Education

**University of Washington, Seattle, WA**  
**September 2005 - expected May 2009**

- Bachelor of Arts in International Business, with honors
- Minor in Italian, studied abroad at UW Rome Center Summer 2007
- Cumulative GPA: 3.66

**Eastlake High School, Sammamish, WA**  
**September 2002 - June 2005**

- Succeeded in AP Calculus and English.
- Completed training in Microsoft Office applications.

## Work Experience

**University of Washington, Business School, Seattle WA**  
**September - December 2008**

**Teaching Assistant**

- Led 15-student classes, supplementing the professor's lecture.
- Assisted students, gave students feedback, prepared class materials, graded papers.
- Served as a liaison between students and professor.

**Nordstrom, Int'l Sales Department, Seattle WA**  
**June - September 2008**

**Intern**

- Helped plan meetings and presentations, general office support.
- Built relationships in the Seattle and international business communities.

**Il Fornaio, Milan, Italy**  
**September - December 2007**

**Barista**

- Supervised store, including opening/closing store and managing shifts with up to three employees, while serving customers their pastries and beverages.
- Handled cash deposits, tills and employee concerns.
- Strengthened people meeting and Italian language skills.

**Lawrence Anthony Salon and Spa, Seattle WA**  
**August 2005 - April 2007**

**Receptionist Lead**

- Managed front desk employees, including hiring, training, scheduling, and handling their concerns, as well as stylist/receptionist concerns

## Résumés & Cover Letters

- Managed retail inventory, including making and receiving orders.
- Greeted, checked out, and scheduled clients at high-end salon and day-spa.

### Leadership and Awards

- Member of Business School Honors Program
- Dean's List 2005-2009

*References provided upon request.*

*Appendix II: Full Examples of Variation Resumes and Cover Letters by  
Recent College Graduates*

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Anywhere, WA 98000  
(123) 555-8888  
[applying@u.college.edu](mailto:applying@u.college.edu)

August 8, 2006

Couple Management  
Address  
Seattle, WA 98034

Dear Mr. Anderson:

To become a part of someone means showing the will to love my future partner, even the bad qualities he has. In my point of view, the most important thing before knowing someone better is sharing one's personality, hobbies and interests so that each couple can have happier time in each of their future.

After I saw your ad in the Seattle Times and went over your website, I though I would try your service because there is not enough time to meet someone I desire in this busy society. The proposal you listed and the stories of people with successful experiences led me to send you this letter.

The enclosed resume includes more information about my personality and other background information. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (206) 407-6304 if you have any further questions. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Mi-hyun Hong

Enclosure

# **MI-HYUN HONG**

451 4<sup>th</sup> Ave South #333  
Anywhere, WA 98000

(123) 555-8888  
[applying@u.college.edu](mailto:applying@u.college.edu)

**OBJECTIVE:** To share my information with others and to find a qualified person who can be with me for the rest of my life.

**APPEARANCE:**

- 5'3" height 108lb
- 32-25-34
- Brown eyes, black hair
- Short hairstyle
- Clean skin type

**EDUCATION:**

**University of Washington, Seattle, WA**  
**Bachelor of Science in Chemistry, June 2006**

**Lake Washington High School, WA, June 2001**

**PERSONALITY:**

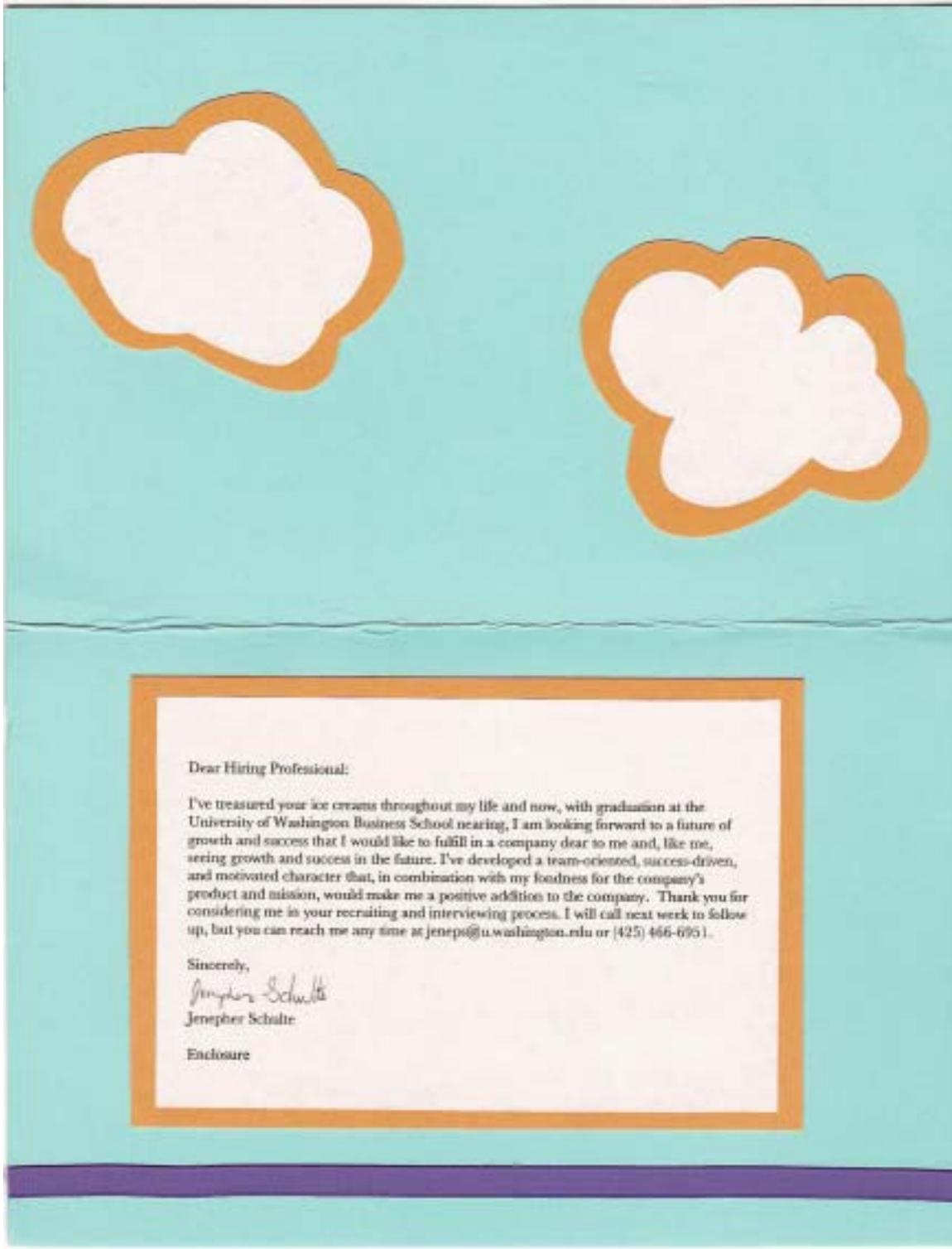
- Easy and out-going
- Like to talk with people
- Find pleasure in helping others
- Have both many boyfriends and girlfriends

**INTERESTS AND HOBBY:**

- Enjoy watching musical performances, especially operas
- Like jogging and exercising
- Love to read poems, and listen to hip-hop or pop songs

**RELIGION:**

- Christianity



Dear Hiring Professional:

I've treasured your ice creams throughout my life and now, with graduation at the University of Washington Business School nearing, I am looking forward to a future of growth and success that I would like to fulfill in a company dear to me and, like me, seeing growth and success in the future. I've developed a team-oriented, success-driven, and motivated character that, in combination with my fondness for the company's product and mission, would make me a positive addition to the company. Thank you for considering me in your recruiting and interviewing process. I will call next week to follow up, but you can reach me any time at [jenepps@u.washington.edu](mailto:jenepps@u.washington.edu) or (425) 466-6951.

Sincerely,

*Jenepper Schulte*  
Jenepper Schulte

Enclosure



## JENEPHER A. SCHULTE

(123) 555-8888  
APPLYING@U.COLLEGE.EDU

13301 SE 79<sup>th</sup> PL #C333  
ANYWHERE, WA 98000

### OBJECTIVE

- To obtain a position in the business field where I can apply and further develop my skills in international strategic marketing, leadership, and management, while helping the company to reach its profit goals.

### EDUCATION

*University of Washington, Seattle, WA* *September 2005 – expected May 2009*

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*Teaching Assistant*

- Led 15-student classes, supplementing the professor's lecture.
- Assisted students, gave students feedback, prepared class materials, graded papers.
- Served as a liaison between students and professor.

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#### *Intern*

- Helped plan meetings and presentations, general office support.
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*Il Fornaio, Milan, Italy* *September – December 2007*

#### *Barista*

- Supervised store, including opening/closing store and managing shifts with up to three employees, while serving customers their pastries and beverages.
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