

When we were first given the assignment for Project II, I was a little overwhelmed. I wanted to choose a piece of my writing that I cared in order to create a project that I enjoyed working on and would look back and feel proud of. But while browsing some of my academic and extracurricular pieces of writing none of the topics were really jumping out at me.

Then I decided to browse a folder on my computer titled “Professional.” There I found a cover letter I had written for an internship for *BuzzFeed* in their Food Editorial department. I remembered how at the time I wrote it, I thought this cover letter was a great representation of who I am. But when I read it over I almost couldn’t get through the whole page before seriously considering why I had written the way I did. This made me question the idea of cover letters in general, and helped me form my initial argument that cover letters do not portray who people truly are.

[See Blog Post 1 below]

Then it came time to write our proposals. Although still a little unsure what my project would turn out to be, I knew I wanted to write an editorial piece that revealed flaws in cover letters and explores why they still exist as a component of job applications. I also knew I wanted to include some sort of “meta” element where in my piece I utilize typical aspects of a cover letter while at the same time mocking them. Looking back, I think my proposal was pretty accurate in detailing certain aspects of my project.

[See Project II Proposal below]

After having a quick meeting with T I decided to change some small details around. The biggest switch I made was my publication. Originally I thought my piece would be published somewhere like *The Huffington Post* or *The New York Times*, but after some consideration we decided that *The New Yorker* would be more appropriate due to the nature of my topic as well as my desire to include satire. At this point I began gathering all of my thoughts onto a Word document. This document became the place where I made note of my ideas—big or small—and collected sources as well as crafted a rough outline of how I envisioned my project to turn out.

[See Project II Brainstorm below]

Next it came time to start thinking about sources for our project. I knew that I wanted to conduct some sort of survey in order to find out opinions of fellow college students. From there, I started doing more research and found some compelling articles that discussed topics such as why cover letters shouldn’t be used, why cover letters are more important than résumés, and the issue of whether or not cover letters are fading in importance. These sources helped reaffirm my argument because I realized how big the conversation surrounding cover letters already is. In addition, although initially in my list of possible sources, I ended up not interviewing a business executive because I wanted my project to focus on my viewpoint of the source material I collected.

[See Blog Post 2 below]

[See Annotated Bibliography Draft below]

After some more research and many brainstorming sessions I was ready to begin writing my mock article. One source that became very significant was a real article for *The New Yorker* titled, “Pets Allowed” that I used as a model. I utilized this article as a reference for the style, tone, and formatting of my own piece.

[See Sample Article link below]

When I finally sat down to write the bulk of my article I was shocked at how easily the words flowed from my mind. This was one of the first pieces of writing where I did not have a detailed plan of what to include or write about. I enjoyed this freedom to *just write*. It didn't hurt that I was very invested in the topic as well. Overall, I think most of my expectations for Project II were met. With the exception of a few formatting issues while using *NewsJack*, things seemed to run smoothly once I got going. I definitely did not expect how easily my ideas would come to me at some points, especially since I didn't have a clear vision of how my article would turn out. I ended up just “going with it,” and I am very happy I made this decision. Additionally, something else I noticed is that even when I did experience writer's block or lack of direction with my article, I was able to further explore my sources and uncover new dimensions of my topic. I liked how each my sources provided distinct information, and that I was able to piece them together in my final draft. I also love how real my article looks—*NewsJack* is a great tool.

For me, this project was a very positive experience. Not only was I able to write about a topic I am truly interested in, but I also learned a lot about myself as a writer. Now, onto Project III!

[See Project II Draft below]

Blog Post 1: *The Professional Self*

After experiencing the workshop process and reading some of my fellow classmates' "Why I Write" essays, I started to notice a common theme. *We as college students rarely get to write about what we want to write about*. This idea jumped out to me, and once again became relevant when we started to discuss projects 2 and 3. I was both excited and slightly overwhelmed upon learning that we have full control of what we write about for these projects. I started thinking back on pieces of writing from my college (and even high school) career, but nothing easily came to mind. This was a little frustrating, but after going through documents on my computer I was able to come up with a few options.

The first piece of writing I am considering is an essay I wrote last year in a Writing class about new media. It was called a "digital media self reflection" and I wrote about how I

rely on digital media to enhance and shape my memories. I thought it would be cool to transform a piece that discusses how media influences my life into something that expresses this notion through an actual new media platform. Additionally, I liked that this essay is somewhat personal, which provides an opportunity to do some research and see how other people experience digital media. I think this essay has potential to make for a very intriguing project, but another piece of writing has caught my attention even more.

Over the past two years I've often felt that I write more for a professional purpose than an academic purpose on a weekly basis. Between updating my resume, writing various cover letters and filling out applications, it seems I spend a lot of my time writing as what I call my "professional self." While browsing through past pieces of writing, one cover letter in particular caught my eye. It was for a BuzzFeed Food Editorial Internship, which at the time I considered my dream job. I want to use this piece to explore the reasons that our generation is expected to write letters in which we declare our qualifications in what usually feels like a fake way. I think I could utilize surveys and interviews to find out my peers' opinions, and hopefully repurpose this letter into a meaningful 2nd and 3rd project. One idea I had is to discuss alternatives to these lengthy and dry letters, for example a digital resume like the one below. Although I am not sure what exact direction I want to go in, I am pretty confident that I want to use my cover letter for this repurposing project!

Project II Proposal

Briefly describe original source material/paper

My original source material is a cover letter that I wrote last year while applying to a BuzzFeed Food Editorial Internship. The piece is about 400 words, and includes four concise paragraphs in which I explain why my specific qualifications and involvement on campus make me the perfect fit for this position.

Questions? What research will you need to develop the idea in a new way?

The main questions that I have so far revolve around how I am going to actually repurpose my cover letter. I want to try and express the "typical" aspects in a cover letter while also making some sort of argument about if they are necessary anymore, or if there are better alternatives. Some research methods I have thought of so far are looking into articles that have already been published about the pros and cons of cover letters, as well as possibly interviewing/surveying my peers or even business executives to get their opinions about the matter.

Describe new project

As of now I am envisioning my new project to be an opinionated news article that also includes the typical aspects of a cover letter. I want to write about why it has become the norm to write these personal declarations that more often than not cause someone to stretch the truth or falsify who they are in order to get a job. I am hoping that my research will help me better narrow in on an argument, because at my current stage of the planning process I am still a little unclear as to what I will be arguing.

Who is your audience? Why?

I think my audience includes any young adult who has, is, or will be applying for internships and jobs. Business professionals and recruiters could also fit into my audience because they might be interested in how applicants feel about cover letters as a part of the hiring process. I think my topic is very relatable to many demographics not only because most people know what it's like to apply for a job, but also the process involves both the applicant as well as the business, which ultimately doubles the group of who is invested.

Where would you publish this piece? Why?

I think I would publish this piece on an online news website, for example *The Huffington Post* or *The New York Times*. I think either of these publications makes sense because they attract a wide range of readers, which is helpful for my project since my audience could potentially be both young adults as well as older business professionals. Additionally, news sites often publish opinionated articles about compelling topics that relate to people's lives, and I think my project fits well into these categories.

What are the genre conventions? How do they suit your subject?

Genre conventions of sites like *The Huffington Post* and *The New York Times* include writing that covers a wide range of subjects (politics, business, lifestyle, opinion, etc.), and is always thought of as the "newest" or "most updated" content. Article titles are catchy but not cheesy, and images and videos are often included in order to enhance the readers' experience. This seems very relevant to my subject in that it is somewhat flexible, and I think makes the most sense in terms of available publication platforms.

Why this project? What compels you?

This specific project interests me because lately it has felt like I write more for a "professional" purpose rather than a personal or academic one. Applying for a job is something that almost everyone goes through at some point in his or her life, and I think it is very compelling to investigate why practices such as writing a generic cover letter have become the norm. I think I will gain a lot out of this project, and will be able to refer to and think back on it far beyond my time in this class.

Project II Brainstorm

Publication: article for *The New Yorker* (Website? Magazine?)

- Business section
- Copy the format (font, about the author, images, etc.)
- Use *Newsjack* website

Project: personal essay recounting my experience with cover letters while also arguing that they are outdated—satire!

*Create survey

- <https://umich.qualtrics.com/ControlPanel/?ClientAction=ChangePage&s=MySurveysSection&ss=&sss=>

***Sample articles**

- <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/10/20/pets-allowed?intcid=mod-most-popular>
- <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/11/03/floating-feasts>

SOURCES

1. <http://www.forbes.com/2009/04/27/intern-history-apprenticeship-leadership-careers-jobs.html>
2. <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/09/the-cover-letter-a-short-history-of-every-job-seekers-greatest-annoyance/279564/>
3. <http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2014/05/kill-the-cover-letter-and-rsum.html>
4. <http://www.theemployable.com/index.php/2011/12/13/the-life-and-death-of-the-curriculum-vitae-the-500-year-history-of-the-cv/>
5. <http://fortune.com/2012/06/08/are-we-killing-off-the-cover-letter/>

Outline:

--Finish explaining what cover letters are (key components)

--Explain downfalls

- People stretch the truth, the letters aren't always read, they need to be more visually accessible and keep up with our changing technological advances

--Data from survey as support!

--Information from sources!

--Include more cover letter elements/satire

--Describe personal experience

--Photos!

--About the author

--Styling of *The New Yorker*

--Looking ahead: Project 3: Pinterest board

Blog Post 2: *Business Insider: Cover Letter Edition*

For my repurposing project I finally decided to use a cover letter I wrote last year and transform it into a piece that argues about the importance of cover letters in the hiring process (I'm still deciding whether this will be a "pro" or "against" argument). I thought it might be helpful to research conversations about cover letters that are already happening in order to get some ideas for my project.

I was originally searching for articles that explain why cover letters might not be necessary anymore or that they do not accurately represent an individual, but I was struck by a Business Insider [article](#) that begged to differ. The article is titled, "Why Cover Letters Are Important" and this simple yet powerful heading definitely grabbed my attention right away. The article goes on to explain how cover letters can be more important than résumés because they have the power to reveal someone's work ethic and

attention to detail. I thought this article was interesting because before I read it I was in the mindset that cover letters are too arbitrary and often express false representations of an applicant.

My original idea for project 2 was to write an editorial piece that includes all of a cover letter's typical components, while at the same time arguing that they might not be the best way of communicating one's qualifications. Before I found the Business Insider article, I couldn't help but notice how many links there were to articles about "how to write the perfect cover letter." I included an image to showcase these search results, and I definitely want to try to include this idea in my project: the fact that the structure and content of these letters is so generalized that anyone with Internet access can learn how to "perfect" them.

[How to Write the Perfect Cover Letter](#)

[Madison.com](#) - Sep 5, 2014

Your **cover letter** is typically the first impression you make with the hiring manager, so you'll want to put in the effort necessary to get it right.

[4 Nifty Ways to Make Your Cover Letter Amazing](#)

[Business Insider](#) - Sep 10, 2014 [Share](#)

Just like these great pairs, your **cover letter** and resume make a match made in heaven. When written the right way, these two documents can ...

[5 tips on writing a cover letter](#)

[KSL.com](#) - Sep 24, 2014

A **cover letter** accompanies your resume and/or job application and gets sent directly to the person filling the position. It's a chance for you to ...

Annotated Bibliography Draft

Annotated Bibliography

Interview with a business executive and/or recruiter.

In this interview I plan to speak in-person or over the phone with someone who has been involved in the recruiting and hiring process for his or her company. I want to learn their general opinion about cover letters, as well as ask them whether or not cover letters are effective or if they think there are better alternatives. This source will be very useful to my project because it provides me with first-hand information about what business professionals think about cover letters. It should be interesting to learn one "side" of the

argument, especially since it is one that I do not believe I could find from any other form of research.

Online survey of my peers (college-aged students).

For this research method I am going to create a survey using UM Qualtrics with five or more questions regarding cover letters. I want to send the survey out to my peers using social media in order to reach as large of a group as possible. I am imagining these survey results to be the bulk of my research due to the fact that my main audience is college-aged students, and it should be helpful to learn their opinions on the matter. Additionally, I think it will be very useful to compare these results with the information I gather from my interview in order to see both sides to the argument.

Martin, Emmie. “Why One Executive Says Your Cover Letter Is More Important Than Your Resume.” *Business Insider*. 22 Sept 2014. Web.

<<http://www.businessinsider.com/why-cover-letters-are-important-2014-9>>.

This article is about the fact that cover letters are often more significant than resumes when it comes to one’s chances of being hired. The author quotes communications specialist Lauren Nelson multiple times in explaining how cover letters provide a glimpse of someone’s personality. Although the article ultimately argues the complete opposite of what my initial thoughts about my argument are, I still think it will be useful in providing a look into the conversations that are already happening surrounding this topic. I am also excited to explore Nelson’s opinions using other forms of research in order to determine if these letters do in fact depict accurate representations of one’s personality—because as of now I disagree with this notion.

Wilson, Dennis. “Are We Killing Off The Cover Letter?” *Fortune*. 8 June 2012. Web

<<http://fortune.com/2012/06/08/are-we-killing-off-the-cover-letter/>>.

I am very glad that I came across this article. Not only does it line up with what my ideas for my argument are, it also makes notes of the fact that recruiters are divided over whether cover letters are still useful. The author explains a brief history of the cover letter in addition to describing multiple reasons why cover letters just “don’t cut it” anymore. I think this article will be extremely useful, especially the section that describes how cover letters came to be. I believe it is important to know how and why cover letters originated when analyzing if they are still effective today.

Sample Article

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/10/20/pets-allowed>

LETTERS THAT SHOULD BE OBSOLETE

Why cover letters are actually covering up the truth, and not in a good way.

BY SARA ESTES



CREATIVE SELF-MARKETING,
YOU'RE DOING IT WRONG

Clearly this person knows what his cover letter is actually saying.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF IMGARCADE.COM

To whom it may concern:

I probably should not have used that salutation. It's not very professional, right? If I had done the proper research, I would have somehow managed to find the name of someone who might actually read this letter. Or, maybe get lucky and realize that my dad's college roommate's cousin is the head recruiter for Company X.

If only every cover letter introduction could be this honest.

It is no secret that young adults—especially us millennials—face competition that is more cutthroat than ever. I may not be talking about athletics; but finding a full-time job or summer internship might as well be a sport. Not only are college students fiercely searching for a paying job upon graduation, they are also constantly looking for internship opportunities: short-term positions at companies that are often low-level work and even more often are unpaid. In addition to the beloved résumé that every future-professional “should” have, many job and internship applications also require a cover letter. These letters act as a supplementary component of an application, and provide a way for the applicant to further explain his or her qualifications and relevant past experiences. Although seemingly transparent based on their description, I am not

convinced that these one-page declarations are the best way to represent those who write them.

Take myself as an example. If you don't know me, I apparently describe myself as someone with strong communication skills and an excellent ability to connect with and understand others. Don't forget my organization and time-management skills or high emotional intelligence. Did I mention I have the drive to succeed? If by some miracle you are not already nauseous from learning about "me," I salute you. I cannot help but cringe reading back on the adjectives I so proudly used to describe myself. It is not that I don't believe that I am someone who can communicate clearly, do my work efficiently and ultimately push myself to be better, because I (humbly) think I do often possess these qualities. It is the nature of my language that truly makes me want to delete every trace of this piece of writing.

Who was that person? There is no way that it was the real me.

These bits of proud words reside in a cover letter I wrote a little less than a year ago. It was the spring of my sophomore year of college, and I could not have ignored the lurking pressure to find a summer internship even if I wanted to. At the time, I thought the internship to which I was applying was my literal dream job. Looking back, I now have a new career pathway in mind (which is probably a good thing considering I was turned down for this job), but I am still thankful for this experience. I guess whoever said to learn from our failures actually knew what he or she was talking about. But the lesson that resonated with me was not one about perseverance, chasing my dreams, or taking my future into my own hands—even though these are important things to remember. It was more of a realization, one about the ridiculousness that is writing a cover letter.

Let's start with a simple fact: the majority of job or internship applications require a cover letter. And if they don't, you should probably still send one (apparently everyone is supposed to know this). The bottom line is that many people, across all demographics and professions, write cover letters. At some point in time it was decided that a one-page letter suffices as a way for someone to declare who he or she is and why they deserve to be considered for a specific job. In fact, résumés and in turn cover letters were introduced into the world by none other than Leonardo Da Vinci. Yes, you are reading that correctly.

As stated in an article from [TheEmployable](#), Da Vinci did not necessarily write what we might call a modern-day cover letter but he is credited for the first-ever CV. Short for Curriculum Vitae—the Latin expression for “the course of my life”—a CV is simply defined as a place to put one's achievements. In 1492 Da Vinci wrote down his skills and capabilities and sent the document to a potential future employer, the Duke of Milan. Fast-forward to the 1950s and CV's begin appearing as a component of job applications everywhere. Soon thereafter, the supplement shifted to a two-part package consisting of a résumé and a cover letter. This infamous bundle has been a key factor in job applications since our nation's transition from a manufacturing to service-sector economy, which caused the percentage of white-collar jobs to nearly double. Unlike the factory jobs

before them, services require more interactions with customers and therefore raises the necessity to qualify the people behind the accomplishments listed in their applications.

CHEMIST.....

Industr'l Paint Chemist

"DUTCH BOY PAINTS"

To formulate pigmented industrial finishes . . . Work in modern paint laboratory in metropolitan N. Y.-N. J. area . . . B. S. degree & 3-5 yrs experience required. Salary based on exp & potential . . . Many benefits including profit sharing...

SUBMIT RESUME WITH
Cover letter to Ind'l Relations Dept.
NATIONAL LEAD CO
(Atlantic Branch)
PO BOX #831
Perth Amboy, N J

From a 1956 New York Times classified add for Dutch Boys Paints.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THEATLANTIC.COM

It has been noted that cover letters aim to introduce the “human behind the accomplishments,” or in other words, explain qualities about someone that a straightforward résumé cannot. This is already contradictory, considering the fact that these explanations about who someone truly is come packaged in a formal letter. Especially for young adults like myself, it seems odd that the best way to elaborate on our qualifications is through a formalized letter—it leaves a lot of room for truth-stretching even just in the rigid nature of the writing alone. But let’s not just rely on my opinion alone.

In a survey of University of Michigan undergraduates, 17% of the sample answered “no” to the question: “Would do you say that your cover letter accurately represented you as a person?” At the time, I’m sure all of these students were trying their best to properly portray themselves to their future employers. But it is very easy to write down a sentence here or there—or] an entire paragraph—that embellishes one’s achievements and skills. Additionally, 51% of the surveyed students admitted that they felt they *needed* to stretch the truth in their cover letters “a little bit” in order to impress potential future employers. This “little bit” can go a long way, and it is very clear that the culture of cover letters has taken a dishonest turn. Before we know it, using Microsoft Excel in one college course turns into a paragraph about someone’s “high proficiency in Excel and analytics.” Clearly the latter statement sounds a lot more legitimate, but is it accurate? That’s for the applicant to know and the employer to (hopefully) never find out.

If these results don't get your wheels turning, how about the fact that the majority of cover letters are never actually viewed by company reps? Or, the notion that they can ultimately lead to discriminatory practices? We'll start with the lesser of two evils.

Companies receive an endless amount of cover letters for each job opening they have. That being said, there is no possible way that all of these letters will be read. In an article for [Fortune](#), a survey of over 2,000 managers, HR representatives and recruiters conducted by Phil Rosenberg found that 90% of these people ignored applicants' cover letters all together. That's a lot of wasted time and effort put forth by these applicants. As for the letters that are read, it is safe to say that they do not provide nearly enough—or the right type—of information to accurately judge someone's character and abilities. This causes perfectly qualified people, whether their cover letters are read or not, to slip through the cracks.

Now onto the more controversial topic. In an article for [New York Magazine](#) about how the résumé and cover letter bundle have got to go, discrimination is brought into the conversation surrounding cover letters. It has been found that specific elements of someone's cover letter, for example their “normal sounding” name or lack thereof, college alma mater, or gender can spark instances of discrimination. These attributes have the power to invoke confirmation bias: a phenomenon in which people (the readers of the letters) tend to seek out evidence that confirms what they already think to be true. Even something as simple as the thought, “Ivy League grads are smarter,” might cause the reader to look for more positive attributes rather than negative, just because they assume this applicant is extremely intelligent. Although this particular case seems somewhat trivial, a larger issue arises when this mental phenomenon is applied to attributes like race and ethnicity.

For me, cover letters raise a lot of questions.

If cover letters are meant to express who someone truly is, why are they required to be so formal and structured?

If they are supposed to be transparent and straightforward, why do so many people resort to purposely misrepresenting who they are in their cover letters?

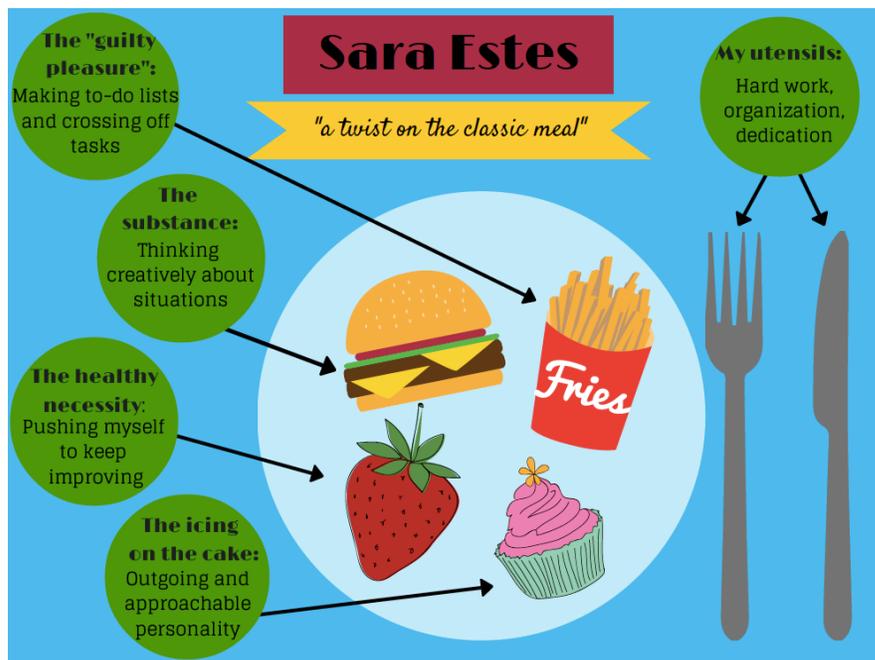
Why are cover letters so often required if the majority of them never get read?

Rather than trying to answer all of these questions, there needs to be one overall answer; a solution. It is the year 2014. Technology has helped advance and improve so many companies, and it is time for the application process to be transformed as well. An applicant should not have to sacrifice who they are for who they think the company wants them to be. But whether this means the introduction of a more creative and visual form of a cover letter, or the downfall of them all together is not for me to decide.

For now, I leave you with how I wish I was able to describe myself in that god-awful cover letter that I wrote. Keep in mind that exclamation points are completely acceptable in my fictional professional world.

Hi! My name is Sara Estes and I'm a junior at the University of Michigan studying Economics, Writing and Digital Studies. If I had to describe myself in three words or less I would say three isn't enough. I believe in showing, not telling. I am a perfectionist. I am a hard worker, but also know how to prioritize my time and what I dedicate myself to. I like to think that I am very dependable; I can't stand the idea of letting people down. I cannot say that I am extremely skilled in this field of work yet, but I am eager to learn. One thing I am sure of, though, is my passion. I believe it will take me to great places and will help me achieve my dreams, one in particular being this internship position.

And thus in a world full of rules and expectations, I will not allow myself to cover up who I am.



Sincerely/Best Regards/Cheers,
Sara Estes