# ASPER MBA COVER LETTER GUIDE

CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTRE





# **MBA COVER LETTER GUIDE**

### A Good Cover Letter is Essential!

Have you heard that cover letters aren't important? That employers ignore them to focus on the resume? Don't believe a word of it!

A nationwide survey by Robert Half (2015) found that 91% of executives believe the cover letter is valuable when evaluating candidates.

A resume tends to be facts-based and more formal but a cover letter can be infused with personality. A cover letter highlights your key accomplishments and fit for a job opening. A cover letter allows you to direct the reader's attention to aspects of your resume that are most relevant, demonstrate your knowledge of the company you are writing to and express your interest and enthusiasm for the position and company. Cover letters complement and reflect the content of your resume, but are not a duplicate of your resume.

Your cover letter can explain things your resume can't. If you have gaps in your employment history, are re-entering the market or changing the focus of your career, or relocating or conducting a long-distance job search, a cover letter can explain these circumstances in a positive way.

This MBA Cover Letter Guide is designed to provide you with an overview to help you when writing your cover letter. Cover letters vary in terms of style and formatting, but there are key elements that will help get you noticed. Remember your cover letter is a marketing document that markets you to potential employers. Along with a great resume, it's what will get you past the first screening and into an interview.

#### Top 11 Tips When Writing a Cover Letter

- 1. **Customize** for each position you are applying for, never use a generic letter.
- 2. Demonstrate that you have **researched** the company and understand their mission and values and how your personal and professional values align with theirs.
- 3. Use the same header, font style and size as on your resume.
- 4. Address it to the person who will be reading it (see page 6 for tips).
- 5. Keep it to one page with three to four paragraphs.
- Highlight your three or four key accomplishments/skills/experience – focus on the fit between your qualifications and the job requirements.
- 7. Use language that reflects the company's language and job posting.
- 8. Use your creative writing skills to enhance content on your resume, avoid just copying your resume.
- 9. Tell the reader what you <u>do</u> have, not what you <u>don't</u> have.
- 10. Edit for spelling, proper grammar and typos.In a competitive market, one mistake can make the difference.
- Request action ask for an interview and tell them you will follow up on the letter – then, DO SO!

#### Good to Know!

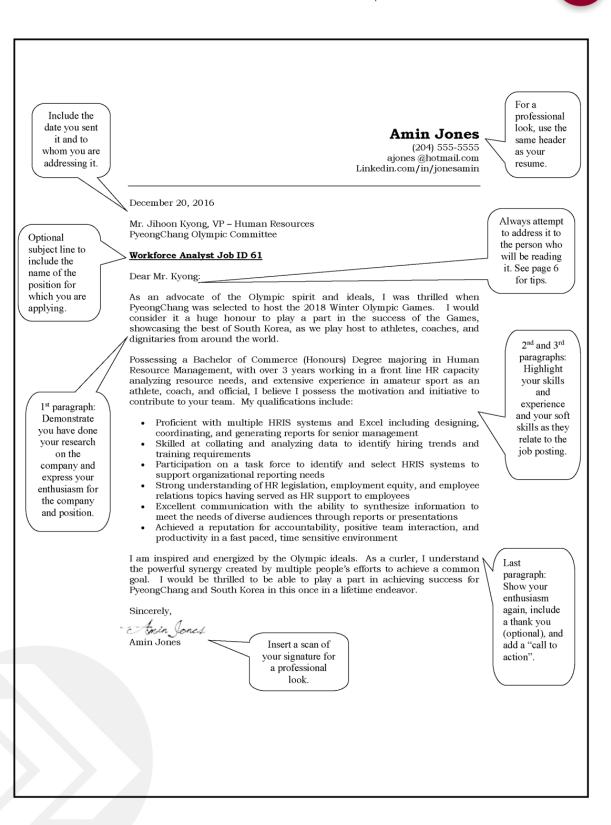
48% of hiring managers say they automatically dismiss a resume or cover letter that is not customized!

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#### Job Posting and Cover Letter at a Glance:



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# Show You Get the Company Culture

When it comes to cover letters, hiring managers want the answers to two major questions: What can you do for us, and how will you fit in if hired?

It's the latter half that is harder to communicate in the short constraints of a cover letter. How do you go about demonstrating that you understand the company culture before you've even stepped in the door?

Below you will find some strategies to let them know you understand the company culture, and better still, that you would be a great fit. These strategies will also help you determine if the position and company align with your values and will provide you with insights so you can shine in the interview – the ultimate goal of a well-crafted cover letter!

#### 1. Research, research, and more research....

Your first step should be getting to know the company's culture. Think of getting to know a company like getting to know a person – what are they like? Are they serious, fun loving, innovative, creative, well established, traditional, cutting edge, refined?

Start by looking at the company website. The content is likely written by members of the team so it offers the best insight to the corporate culture, or personality. Specifically look at the bio page—are there professional, black and white headshots of each person, accompanied by a laundry list of professional achievements? Or are employees shown as cartoon caricatures with a Q&A listing their favorite movies, food, and '80s rock bands? Be sure to check out the company's blog, Twitter, and Facebook accounts, as well as any other social media platforms that showcase the brand's style.

Once you have discovered the voice or personality of the company, this is what you're going to want to use when you're drafting your cover letter. Write as if you were having a real-life conversation with the hiring manager, demonstrating that you get how things work there and can connect with their team on a human level.

For example, is the company all business, all the time? Get straight to your accomplishments, rather than waxing poetic about how much you love the company. Applying to a public relations agency? Be snappy and creative, and mention how much you loved a recent cover story on one of its clients. Is the company anything but ordinary? Don't be afraid to think outside the traditional cover letter format! This shows your creativity and fit for the organization.

If possible, talk to someone who works there to get the inside scoop. This can be extremely helpful in figuring out what the organization looks for in new employees.

## 2. Show Your Personality

The secret of the perfect hire is someone who is compatible both personally and professionally within the company.

One of the main decisions in choosing a new hire comes down to one simple human trait—will we all get along with each other? So, as you write your cover letter, don't just think about how you come across



professionally, but also how you'd fit in with the team on a personal level.

Try playing up the interests and parts of your personality that would resonate most with the company. If you read that the company frequently does team lunches, mention your foodie side. If you're applying to a startup that's immensely proud of its softball league, mentioning your love of team sports will dually show your attitude as a team player and possibly get you recruited to next season's team.

#### 3. Don't Break the Cardinal Rule

What is the cardinal rule, you ask? Don't reuse your cover letter—ever.

It's tempting, especially when you're deep into a job search and cranking out multiple job applications a day to re-use the same cover letter. From a hiring manager's perspective, it is always obvious when a candidate does so, even if there are no egregious mistakes like forgetting to write the correct company's name. Even if you are applying to companies within the same industry, you still need to work in the nuances that differentiate each organization. Mention specific examples about why this is the place for you and why you are the perfect match for the team. A great approach here is to name names. Checked out the company's client list? Mention your love for a particular client's ad campaign or a recent news item that shows your excitement for working with these brands. Noticed on LinkedIn that one of the founders attended your alma mater? Name-drop your university.

If you really want this job, prove it by writing something that you are passionate about. The more you can visualize yourself already as a member of the team, the easier it will be to write a cover letter that is both factual and authentic. Stay true to yourself, highlight your unique personality, and demonstrate that you will fit right in, and you're almost guaranteed to land an interview—and a job.

This article (adapted) was originally published on The Daily

Muse 2016. Copied from Forbes.com



"I really believe my research abilities would be an asset to whatever this company is called." ASPER SCHOOL OF BUSINESS | UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

# **SECTIONS IN A COVER LETTER**

#### **Opening Paragraph**

Open with an **attention grabbing sentence** that shows your enthusiasm and that you have done your research on the company. Clearly articulate how your professional and personal values align with the company and why you want to work for them. Include what position you are applying for and how or where you learned about the position.

The reader already knows how getting this job will benefit you, so you don't need to tell them. For example, they know it will be good experience, help build your career and look good on your resume, and so avoid focusing it on you. Instead tell them **what's in it for them**. For example, are you passionate about their product or service? Are you going to be a champion for the company because you believe in their values?

#### Middle Paragraph(s)

Can be one or two paragraphs and should highlight your accomplishments, experience, skills, education, credentials, as they relate to the position. Refer to the required qualifications on the job posting and prove how you meet these requirements. Use specific examples to convey expertise or scope of experience. Keep in mind to quantify your achievements using #, \$, % when possible.

Feel free to "mirror" or use key words and phrasing from the job posting as a way to align yourself to the position.

Always use positive and confident language. Tell the reader what you <u>do</u> have, not what you <u>don't</u> - "While I have never worked as an accountant before..." sets a negative tone.

#### **Closing Paragraph**

Express your enthusiasm for the position and company again. Include a call to action, "I look forward to meeting with you to discuss..."

Include your salary expectation **only if they have asked for it** (see page 10 for tips). And finally, make sure to thank them for their time and consideration.

#### Salutations – They can be Tricky

Make an effort to find out who will be reading the cover letter and address it to them specifically. Addressing it to "Dear Sir/Madam" or "To whom it may concern" is generic and adds no value.

So how can you find out who to address it to?

- Call the company's HR department
- If the job posting indicates the position reports to the Marketing Manager, find out who the Marketing Manager is, using Google and LinkedIn, for example.
- Ask a Career Consultant at the CDC

If you are able to find a person's name, keep it formal by addressing it "Dear Kelly Anderson" not "Dear Kelly". If you know the correct salutation, for example Mr. Mrs. Miss. or Ms., you can use it. However to avoid an embarrassing mistake (is Kelly female or male?) it's best to avoid using a prefix and use their first and last name.

If you are unable to identify the correct person, you can use "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Members of the Selection Committee". Or, perhaps even better, simply omit the salutation and start with a creative first sentence of the opening paragraph.



# **MARKETING LETTERS**

# How can I market myself to a company not currently hiring?

If you have identified a company that you are really keen to work for but they are not currently hiring, use a cover letter to introduce yourself and what you can offer the company.

This can be especially effective in gaining an informational interview or when you are relocating to a new city or region.

The key things to include in this letter are:

<u> $1^{st}$  paragraph</u>: the reason you are writing including any contact person or referral.

 $2^{nd}$  paragraph: the type of position you are looking for and most importantly, highlights of your qualifications and how these can be of value to the company – this will be based on your research.

 $3^{rd}$  paragraph: If you are requesting an interview to gather information, or to establish a connection, explain this and indicate you would like 15 minutes of their time.

 $4^{\text{th}}$  paragraph: Indicate how/when you will follow up. Be sure to thank them for their time and consideration.

# **THANK YOU LETTERS**

After the interview, it is important to follow up with a thank you letter in order to differentiate yourself from other candidates.

In a recent survey, 75% of hiring managers said receiving a thank-you letter from a candidate affects their decision-making process.

Beyond showing your enthusiasm for the position, a thank-you note also allows you to reiterate why you are the best person for the job. The letter is best sent via email within 24 hours of the interview, while you're still fresh in the interviewer's mind. It should be brief — no more than two to three paragraphs — and it should reference particular points from the interview.

#### What to include...

- Thank the person for meeting with you.
- Mention something you liked about the interview. Don't be afraid to make it personal by mentioning a little detail learned about the interviewer, such as a shared passion or an upcoming trip. This demonstrates attention to detail and makes the message more memorable.
- Re-iterate your key skills as they relate to the job.
- Show your interest in the job. In a competitive market, sending a thank you note shows you are professional and focused.

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#### Sample Thank You Letter

April 26, 20\_

Dharma Johansen Director – Business Development & Marketing Smith Agency

Dear Ms. Johansen:

It was very enjoyable to speak with you about the Account Executive position at the Smith Agency. The job, as you presented it, seems to be an excellent match for my skills and interests. The creative approach to account management that you described confirmed my desire to work with you.

In addition to my enthusiasm, I will bring to the position strong writing skills, assertiveness and the ability to encourage others to work cooperatively with the department. My artistic background will help me to work with graphic designers on staff and provide me with an understanding of the visual aspects of our work.

I understand your need for administrative support. My detail orientation and organizational skills will help to free your time to deal with more strategic issues. I neglected to mention during my interview that I had worked for two summers in an administrative support role for a landscape design firm. This experience helped me to further hone my administrative and client support skills.

I appreciate the time you took to interview me. I am very interested in working for you and contributing to the continued growth of Smith Agency. In the meantime, enjoy your trip to Rio. I do recommend Carnival Restaurant on Ave. Atlantica if you have a chance. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Jennífer Lee

Jennifer Lee

# HOW TO HANDLE THE SALARY QUESTION

#### What if they ask for salary expectations?

The answer depends on **when** you are asked.

The decision to disclose your salary expectations is based on many factors including the robustness of the labour market, your personal experience level – entry level, senior and your personal circumstances.

If you are asked for this information in the cover letter, then you may be able to defer the question until later in the process – ideally, after they have met you in person.

However, if you feel you must respond, or you want to, it's not as difficult as you may think! Emphasize that the opportunity to work in that position and for this company is primary and that salary is secondary.

Be sure to do your research however, because you do need to know your worth in the market and more importantly, what you will accept. Overstating your worth or understating it, can be detrimental to your job search.

#### Salary research tips:

- Use the Career Development Centre's MBA Grad Survey found on: http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/management /programs/undergraduate/cdc/mba\_career \_management.html
- Compare it to similar jobs
- Use the Government of Canada's "Explore Careers by Wages" website
- Google it
- Ask friends and family
- Consider the industry i.e. government, nonprofit, private sector, etc.

When discussing salary, it's important to consider the company's total compensation package (training opportunities, vacation time, perks, etc.) not just salary.

**Example 1:** "Salary is only one of the factors I consider important in weighing a job offer. I'd be happy to discuss it once we determine I'm a strong candidate for the position."

**Example 2:** "I am keenly interested in the Manager of Employee Relations position. I am confident that we can come to a mutually agreeable salary once I have a better understanding of the role and responsibilities, and your total compensation structure."

**Example 3:** "I am keenly interested in the Manager of Employee Relations position. Based on my research of similar positions and combined with my prior experience, my salary expectations are \$60,000-\$70,000. I am open to discussing this and learning more about your total compensation."

# WOMEN AND THE SALARY QUESTION

Women are far less likely than men to negotiate at work, which typically costs women more than half a million dollars in earnings over the course of their respective careers\*.

Multiple studies have found that women miss out by failing to negotiate salary, promotions and other advancement opportunities that men commonly and aggressively pursue. The reluctance of female employees to advocate for themselves is often the difference between climbing the career ladder at a healthy pace and not climbing it at all.

\*Cited from the book **Women Don't Ask** by Linda Babcock and Sara Lashever.

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# **Cover Letter Checklist**

- ✓ Have you customized it for the company and position?
- ✓ Have you showcased your research on the company?
- ✓ Did you let your personality shine through?
- ✓ Does it include highlights of your experience that will interest the reader?
- ✓ Did you proofread carefully for typos and errors?
- ✓ Did you use the same header and font style as your resume?
- ✓ Is it one page in length?
- ✓ If you were the employer, would you call yourself for an interview?
- ✓ Read your letter aloud to hear how it reads.
- ✓ Do not rely on spell/grammar check to find all the mistakes.
- ✓ Have you had it reviewed by a Career Consultant in the Career Development Centre?

#### Sample cover letters

On the pages that follow you will find a variety of cover letters to inspire you.

For more inspiration or guidance on writing your cover letter, book an appointment with the MBA Career Advisor at the Career Development Centre. We are here to help you with your career success!



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# Lisa Cheng

(204) 555-6987 || lisa.cheng@samplemail.com

March 15, 20XX

Mike Jones VP Business Development McHire Companies 15 Walnut Street Winnipeg, MB L3Y 8T8

Dear Mike,

I am writing to you as a fellow graduate of The Asper School of Business and would sincerely appreciate any insight you could provide me about McHire Companies. I have been working in sales for almost seven years, and I am now looking to transition into corporate human resources at a company such as yours.

Although successful in my sales career, I have realized the aspects of my work I find most rewarding are all in HR-related functions. The following offers a few highlights of my qualifications:

- Solid foundation in HR affairs: As senior account executive, I have been responsible for a number of HR functions, including recruiting, interviewing, hiring, and training new employees. A quick learner of complex concepts and legal issues, I am eager to broaden these competencies.
- Dynamic communication style: I am adept in building relationships, consensus and a shared sense of purpose. I am known for my ability to quickly establish trust with employees, mediate disputes, and motivate others into action.
- Experience in corporate training: A constant throughout my sales career has been my passion for the design and delivery of staff-development programs. Comfortable and experienced giving both large- and small-group presentations, I have conducted hundreds of training seminars for diverse audiences across all organizational levels.

If you know of anyone within McHire Companies who might be looking for someone with my qualifications, I would be very grateful for your referral. Thanks in advance for any assistance you may be able to provide.

Kind regards, Lisa Cheng Lisa Cheng



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PETER BLACK, MBA (204)123-4567 | peter.black@email.com

September 12, 20XX

Nancy Montagne Medallion Financial New Cityland, CA

Dear Ms. Montagne,

As a highly skilled and experienced Financial Manager, I read your posting for a new Financial Manager with great interest. I am extremely enthusiastic about Medallion Financial's focus on risk management. My experience aligns well with the qualifications you are seeking at Medallion Financial, in particular my role as Financial Manager at Ajax Accounting, and I am certain I would make a valuable addition to your organization.

With more than 7 years of experience as a Financial Manager, I am adept in strategy development, performance tracking, and financial modeling. Moreover, while my onthe-job experience has afforded me a well-rounded skill set, including exceptional analytical and organizational abilities, I excel at:

- Developing and executing customized comprehensive financial strategies.
- Stimulating business and revenue growth with research-based approaches.
- Recommending and implementing successful cost-control strategies.
- Preparing detailed financial models and analytical tools.

In addition to my experience and personal qualities, I have a solid educational foundation, including an MBA majoring in Finance, and a passion for investment strategy, and would relish the opportunity to contribute to your ongoing strategic development.

Please review my attached resume for additional details regarding my expertise and career achievements. I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person to discuss how my experience and background meet your needs.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely, Peter Black Peter Black

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# **Frank Skinner**

(204) 123-4567 | <u>frankskinner@email.com</u> |linkedin.com/in/skinnerf

January 8, 20XX

Mr. Thomas Weasley Manager Human Resources GlobeX Inc.

Re: Marketing Consultant Position

Dear Mr. Weasley,

As an MBA graduate, I am aware of GlobeX's well-respected reputation and would love to be a part of your vision to be the leading business consultancy firm in Canada.

I recently acquired my Master of Business Administration degree from the Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba, specializing in Marketing. In addition to my academic qualifications, I have solid work experience at New Business Solutions where I held the position of Marketing Analyst for 3 years. This experience showed me first-hand how marketing endeavors impact the business world and introduced me to functional marketing areas such as market analysis, strategy development and market optimization. Throughout my experience I excelled at:

- Maintaining the company's social media profiles and maximizing their effectiveness.
- Conceptualizing project briefs and obtaining stakeholder buy-in.
- Designing and creating marketing collateral.

During the course of my MBA degree, I took a leadership role on a 4 month industry project working to develop a market strategy for a small start-up technology company. We utilized the 4 Ps of marketing, and developed a plan that when implemented in the real business environment, resulted in a successful launch and extensive profits for the organization. This experience, coupled with exceptional insight into the marketing world through study and practice will prove to be an asset to GlobeX.

My resume is enclosed for your reference and will provide you with further insight into my eligibility for the job. I will be in touch with your office over the next week to schedule an interview. Please contact me if you require further information.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Frank Skinner

Frank Skinner

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# TAJ AHMAD

(431) 121-7982 | taj.ahmad@email.com | linkedin.com/in/tajahmad

February 21, 20XX

Ms. Liza Wideman Recruiting Coordinator Great Strategy Consulting Firm Winnipeg, MB R3C 2E6

Dear Ms. Wideman,

I am writing to express my interest in securing an Internship position at Great Strategy Consulting Firm. I am a Master of Business Administration candidate graduating shortly from the Asper School of Business, specializing in International and Emerging Markets. I have considerable international work experience with a strong interest in business and a passion towards strategy. My area of focus and interest varies from business development to project management.

I have maintained a 3.95 GPA through a well-balanced MBA program, which is not only very analytical and technical by nature, but also helps to build leadership and team building qualities. I am extremely impressed with Great Strategy's approach to strategy consulting, especially within the Business Development and Innovation practice areas. I believe my academic background, business knowledge and industry experiences have provided me with the credentials needed to meet your expectations and beyond.

Prior to entering Asper, I held the position of Client Success Manager, at Humanity, in Islamabad, where I gained solid research, analytical and problem solving skills as I successfully maintained the company's existing relationships with a group of clients, effectively leading them to continue using Humanity's software platform for managing their business.

My background in generating innovative ideas and strategies to improve processes has provided me with a deeper understanding of multifaceted problems that companies encounter in their daily operations. Moreover, because of my work experience, I fully understand how important it is to have great team dynamics in today's multi-disciplinary business environment.

I am strongly interested in this position because I believe that consulting is a discipline that will force me to view problems not only from the client's standpoint but also from marketplace, best practices and "think out of the box" point of views.

I would appreciate the opportunity to interview with Great Strategy Consulting Firm for the position. Please find enclosed my resume for your review. I enthusiastically look forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

phmad Taj Ahmad



# **Heather Jones**

(204) 123-4567 | hjones@email.ca

April 17, 20XX

Edgar Mann Hiring Manager Wonder Web Inc. (204) 456-7890 edgar.mann@wonderweb.ca

**RE: Product Manager Position** 

Dear Mr. Mann,

I am extremely interested in the Product Manager position, posted on your website. Wonder Web is a leading company in the technology sector in Manitoba, and I am contacting you directly as recommended by Janna Dole, who was your representative at the annual Career Fair at the University of Manitoba. I strongly believe that my academic background, combined with my experience as Product Manager, makes me an excellent candidate to join Wonder Web.

I have recently received an MBA degree from the Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba, with a concentration in Marketing. My enclosed resume reflects both my 3 years of experience at Core Tech in Winnipeg as a Product Manager, as well as my internship at Twitter, where I had the chance to be part of the team that built out the proprietary search advertising platform.

I have experience at the helm of several key projects at Core Tech, where I was responsible for analyzing and developing KPIs, as well as coordinating, directing and making detailed implementation plans to accomplish goals and directing the integration of technical activities.

I am confident that my background provides the experience you require for this position. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss in detail how my skills would benefit Wonder Web in achieving its goals. In the interim, thank you for your consideration and forthcoming response.

Sincerely, Heather Jones

**Heather Jones** 

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**Connor Wells** MBA Candidate 204-555-5555 cwells@email.com ca.linkedin/in/cwells

October 1st 20\_

Ms. Theresa Banks Scotia Capital, Toronto, Ontario M5W 3T3

#### Investment Banking/Mergers & Acquisitions/Equity Capital Markets Associate Rotation Program

Dear Ms. Banks:

It is with great enthusiasm that I submit my resume for a position with the Investment Banking/Mergers & Acquisitions/ Equity Capital Markets Associate Rotation Program. I was very interested to learn about the full range of services and products Scotia Capital provides to their clients – I am keen to become a contributing member of your team.

Please allow me to highlight my qualifications as they relate to your requirements:

Your Requirements	My Qualifications
MBA degree completed by Spring 201	Expected graduation of Spring 20_ from the
	Asper School of Business with a Master of
	Business Administration degree.
Strong quantitative skills focused on financial	Over three years' experience working,
analysis and accounting theory.	researching and analyzing data in the financial
	sector.
Excellent communication skills and the ability to	Provided outstanding client service in retail
multi-task and adapt to situations.	settings, ensuring exceptional rapport with
	clients while fully meeting needs in a fast paced,
	changing environment.

In addition to the above mentioned skills, I possess strong attention to detail, exhibit a focused commitment to achieving results and the drive to complete projects on time through hard work and dedication to quality.

I am eager to meet for an interview during which time I can fully express my capacity and desire to contribute to Scotia Capital. I will call your office the week of October 15th to schedule a discussion at your earliest convenience. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to speaking with you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Connor Wells Connor Wells