

Case Study: Write It Well and UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business

In 2011, Write It Well partnered with UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business to help students secure internships and jobs that would launch their postgraduate careers. The students' cover letters could result in either silence or interview offers from the hiring managers who read them.

We developed tools to help Haas students write superb, arresting cover letters—illustrating the process through letters in four professional fields. Our writing tools had to be attractive, customized to various industries and specialities, and compatible with mobile devices so that students could read them on the go.

CHALLENGE

Write It Well's advice on cover letters had to match the caliber of the positions that Haas students apply for. As one of the world's premier MBA programs, the school is committed to equipping its students to enter the business world, excel there, and become leaders in their fields.

The associate director of programs and advising wanted students to hone their knowledge of business writing by receiving individualized feedback on their cover letters. A Haas career services manager also wanted students to see exemplary letters they could use as models when they wrote for a supremely busy and demanding professional audience: today's hiring managers.

Write It Well received cover letters from 125 Haas students. We were asked to evaluate individual students' writing skills and help them write even stronger letters. Each student had to receive feedback on his or her letter's clarity, concision, correct language, and audience focus.

Next, we were asked to create a set of PDF packages in four professional fields: investment banking, consulting, marketing and strategy, and product management. We were asked to identify letters for each package that would be safe models for many students to use when they drafted their own cover letters.

SOLUTION

We evaluated students' writing by Haas's quantitative and qualitative criteria. Our individualized feedback on students' punctuation and grammar included nuances of language that few business writers know. We offered the students strategies to relate their accomplishments in focused and impeccable language.

Using Microsoft Word, we helped each student tailor his or her letter to one organization and its staffing needs. We ranked each letter on how well it fulfilled its primary goal: demonstrating a very good fit between one student's abilities and the demands of a given position.

Write It Well then used Adobe InDesign to create four mobile device-ready PDFs. Each one featured both problematic and exemplary drafts of the same cover letter. We annotated each draft with detailed notes on its language as well as its success at presenting a student's achievements in the context of stated job requirements.

RESULTS

Haas representatives were extremely pleased with Write It Well's deliverables. We demystified key aspects of effective business writing and demonstrated how written communication is a critical professional skill. Impressive job applications are crucial to professional success, and careful writing is crucial to both successful job applications and successful job performance.

We provided Haas students with writing techniques for their future success. They were able to carry our professional tools anywhere—adding conscious strategies for effective writing to their formidable business acumen.

