

Cover Letter Guide

What is a Cover Letter?

A cover letter is a one-page formal business letter that introduces you to potential employers. It is often an employer's first impression of you. A cover letter expresses your interests clearly, highlighting relevant items on your resume. It shows how your skills and experiences align with your employer's specific needs. A cover letter is to supplement your resume, not reiterate it.

How Do I Start Writing a Cover Letter?

1. **Research the employer:** Learn more about the employer so that you can better demonstrate why you are a good fit for the organization.
2. **Analyze the job description:** Review the duties and qualifications of the job and design your cover letter to match them as much as you can.
3. **Apply your background:** Think about your background knowledge and skills in relation to the job; think about courses, class projects, work experience, internships, and extracurricular activities – the deeper you reflect on your strengths, the better you will write.

Content

1. Overall:

- Prioritize neatness and readability to attract the reader's attention.
- Be conscious of correct grammar, paper quality, and correct addresses and titles.
- Address the letter to a particular person by name when possible (i.e. Dear Ms. Smith,).

2. 1st Paragraph:

- State the position you seek and how you learned of it.
- Consider including particular knowledge about the reader's organization from your research to show your interest and how they can further help your own career path.
- Show that you know your career goals and the position.
- At the end of your first paragraph, write a "thesis statement" that includes 2-3 skills mentioned in the job description and best represents you as a candidate.

3. Body Paragraphs (usually 2):

- Make the employer interested by explaining what you can do for their company.
- Reference your thesis statement! Discuss one skill in your thesis statement in greater length by showing how you have demonstrated that skill through specific examples.
- Put yourself in the employer's position and present facts that will both be interesting and will accurately describe your assets and qualifications.

4. Closing Paragraph:

- Include your contact information, such as your phone number and/or email address.
- Thank the employer for their consideration.

Points to Remember

- Use 8.5" x 11" bond paper that matches your resume and do not exceed one page.
- Always include your address.
- Be specific: individualize the letter for the company, the position, and the field.
- Avoid unnecessary flattery, exaggeration, and/or being overly grateful.
- Sign your name in black ink.
- Avoid empty clichés such as "I am a self-starter" and "I am a hard worker."
- Don't explain why the job is important to you, instead demonstrate what you bring to the job.
- Keep copies of all your materials.



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Sample Format

Your Current Address

City, State Zip Code

Date (make sure you write it out – January 1, 2018 not 1/1/18)

Ms. Jane Smith, Title

Organization

Street Address

City, State Zip Code

Dear Ms. Smith:

1st Paragraph – Tell them why you are writing, name of the position, or field. Explain how you learned of this opening. This is the time to mention your contact in the company, a mutual acquaintance, a specific experience, or an article in a newspaper or magazine. Tell them why you want to work for this specific organization. Do your research – check the company website and look through the databases of newspaper and magazine articles. Stay away from generalities. Include your thesis statement with 2-3 skills, which you will highlight throughout the letter.

2nd Paragraph – Pick a skill in your thesis statement and support each one with two specific examples. If the job description mentions skills an applicant should have, those are the skills on which your cover letter should focus. Again, stay away from generalities. “My job as an administrative assistant taught me organizational skills” is not very strong. On the other hand, writing “While working as an administrative assistant to three departmental heads, I organized over 1000 files during my first month of work to make them more accessible in addition to performing regular job duties,” is stronger. Be concise and clear.

3rd Paragraph – Discuss another experience that highlights what qualifications and skills you possess that will be beneficial to the prospective employer. Do not forget to be specific with your examples.

4th Paragraph – Close by making a request for follow-up or indicate that you will follow up in the near future. Make sure your closing is not vague but makes a specific action for the reader likely. End with a polite statement such as “Thank you for your consideration.”

Sincerely,

(Your handwritten signature) <----- On Adobe viewer, scan a picture of your signature and insert it.

Type your name

Tip: Stop by the Career Exploration Center to view cover letter samples and receive a walk-in cover letter critique!

