

What's in a Cover Letter?

A cover letter is a brief professional letter introducing yourself to an employer and answering any “Why?” questions they may have about your application. Why are you applying for this job or internship? Why do you want the role? Why are you an ideal candidate? C-O-V-E-R it all in your cover letter!

One-size-fits-all cover letters don't work. **Customize** your cover letter to fit the position you're applying to so that you show clear connections between your qualifications, the role you're applying for, and the organization you wish to work for. This will help **open** the door to an interview. You can do this by...

- ✓ Researching the company using its website and/or by talking to current or former employees; look for specific reasons why it's a great place to work that you can highlight in your cover letter
- ✓ Communicating why you're a great fit for the role, specifically, but also by communicating why you're a great fit for their company's culture and values in a “big picture” way—this can show long-term fit and growth potential
- ✓ Using similar wording and phrases from the position description when describing your qualifications
- ✓ Addressing your letter to a specific contact person at the organization if possible; it is acceptable to contact the company to ask for a contact name

A well-written cover letter is **visually** appealing and concise. Make a good impression by...

- ✓ Following the standard block letter format (see example on Page 2); this style doesn't use indentations
- ✓ Using the same header (name and contact information) and font as your resume so that the two documents look like a set that “goes together” or can be easily combined into one document if needed
- ✓ Keeping your cover letter to one page in length; most cover letters are three or four paragraphs long

The content of your cover letter should **expand** upon the content in your resume, not just repeat it word-for-word. This is your opportunity to really personalize your application and help the employer get to know you as a candidate. Do this by...

- ✓ Identifying your primary “talking points”—what are the main reasons why you're a great fit for the role and their organization and focus on highlighting these points in the body of your letter
- ✓ Being specific and using examples; avoid generic language (“I am organized.”; “I am a team player”)
- ✓ Grabbing the employers attention by showing your personality, enthusiasm, interest, and intellect

Finally, **review** your cover letter to make sure there are no typos, grammatical errors, or other missteps that could make a bad first impression on the employer. Finish strong by...

- ✓ Proofreading your cover letter to make sure it is error-free
- ✓ Making an appointment with a career services staff member so we can double-check your work



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Sample Cover Letter Format

Jon Doe

1234 Main Street, Somewhere, Iowa 5xxxx | Phone: 555-555-5555 | Email: jonedoe@email.com

Date

Contact Person's Name (if known)

Contact Person's Title (if known)

Company/Organization

Company street address

Company city, state, zip

Dear _____: (examples: Dear Ms. Jones, Dear Pat Smith, or Dear Hiring Manager)

Paragraph One: Why You Are Writing

Think of this first paragraph as an introduction, like one you might use to start a persuasive essay. Include two or three sentences stating what job you are applying for, how you learned about it (optional), any personal contacts or connections you have within the company (optional), and a transitional sentence or two that introduces the main talking points you'll be covering in the body of the letter.

Paragraph Two/Body of the Letter: What You Have to Offer

The body of your cover letter will typically be one to three paragraphs long (based on space availability and qualifications). The body paragraph(s) will be where you will identify and expand upon your main qualifications, your interest in the company/position, and your fit. Discuss the most relevant details of your experience and education; be specific and thorough; relate these points to how they would benefit the company.

Paragraph Three/Conclusion: How to Follow Up

Close by requesting a time to further discuss the position and your qualifications; provide your basic contact information (email and/or phone number) and invite the employer to contact you at their convenience. Close by thanking the employer for their time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Your name