

Cover Letter

What is a cover letter and what is its purpose?

A cover letter, or letter of interest, is designed to introduce you and your background to a potential employer. Your cover letter should supplement the info on your résumé. It is another tool for an employer to get a better sense of your qualifications and to ensure they are aware of your most relevant experiences.

How is a cover letter different from a résumé?

- Your résumé just lists qualifications. Your cover letter explains how those qualifications have prepared you to do the job you're applying for.
- Your résumé focuses on the past - what you have done. The cover letter focuses on the past and the future - what you WILL do for the company and how you can add value to the organization.
- Your cover letter directly discusses your interest in the job and the company and the research you've done.
- Your cover letter more clearly demonstrates your ability to communicate in writing (or inability to do so!). A poorly written letter may be rejected before the résumé is even considered!

General Tips

- Your letter should be single space, 3-4 paragraphs and only one page; longer letters are less likely to be read.
- Tailor the cover letter to each position. Although parts of your cover letter may be useful for several different job/internship positions, avoid writing one generic cover letter for use with all opportunities.
- Your letter should be addressed to a specific person connected to the role - ideally the hiring manager or recruiter name, try your best to find the name of a specific person even if it takes a little research - call, ask current employees (alumni), look online, etc. Sometimes it's even okay to use an educated guess. If you can't find a specific contact person connected to the opportunity you may use "Dear Hiring Manager" as a general salutation. Do not use "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Sir or Madam".
- End the cover letter with your name. Include phone, and email under your signature or in the footer of the letter.
- The cover letter should present clear and accurate information that highlights the academic background and work experience you have to offer the organization. Try to focus on what you can do for them and what value you can bring to the role and the organization.
- Personalize each cover letter by including something specific about the organization and/or its products or services.
- The letter MUST be completely error free - no spelling, syntax, grammar, punctuation, or formatting errors. Keep in mind that the cover letter is an example of your writing and communication skills. One of the top reasons recruiters cite for removing a candidate from consideration is a cover letter or résumé with errors.
- Write intelligently and professionally, using relevant terms and industry language when appropriate, but don't overdo it. Overly inflated language or overuse of industry language can create an awkward letter.
- If an employer is not asking for a cover letter, you can usually take that at face value - no need to include one as it's most likely a waste of time. If it is an optional document, it's up to you to include, but it may be worth it, especially for a position you really want.
- Before submitting your cover letter, always convert the document to a PDF. You should review the PDF again to ensure the formatting is correct before sending. Include your name in the file name.

Cover Letter

Cover Letter Walk-Through

Current Date (Write out Month)

Contact Name, Title

Company/Organization Name

Department or Division

Street Address

City, State, Zip Code

This is a general outline of a cover letter. You don't have to organize your cover letter exactly as described below but it may be a good place for you to start. Do what makes sense for you but it must be well-written and error free.

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Individual's Name OR Dear Hiring Manager:

Paragraph 1 (Introduction): Concisely state your purpose for writing the letter. This paragraph is usually only a couple sentences long. Here, you will specify the position you want to be considered for. You can include how you learned about the opening, but this is really the most helpful if you heard of the opening from someone the employer knows, such as a current employee or a contact of the employer. (A note about name-dropping: Make sure the name you are "dropping" makes strategic sense.) You can also include a brief introduction as to why you're interested in the position and/or company, or why you're qualified for the position. Just like you would in an essay, you are introducing the ideas you will talk about in the rest of your letter.

Paragraph 2 (Body): Tell the employer why you're the best candidate for the job, and how you will contribute to the success of the organization in this role. Use the job description to determine what the employer is looking for so that you can align yourself with it. Highlight your strongest selling points and connect your most significant accomplishments to the top requirements in the role, but don't just restate your résumé; instead, explain HOW your qualifications have prepared you to excel at this job. Consider your education and/or training, experience in paid jobs, internships, fieldwork, volunteer work, extracurricular involvement, etc.), skills and abilities, accomplishments in your field, personal characteristics/strengths, and any other qualifications you may have.

Paragraph 3 (Body): Explain your interest in the position and the company. Just stating that you're interested isn't going to cut it. It is important to employers that they are able to see that you've done your research on their company and on the position; this is how they will KNOW you really want this particular job. So, do all the research you can on the company, looking for things like its mission and values, its products or services, its history and its future goals, its accomplishments, performance, reputation, etc., and find things that you identify with. Demonstrate that you've done your research by mentioning specific things about the company in explaining why it fits with your interests, goals, working style, values, etc.

Don't, however, talk about things that are all about you and not the work, like "this company pays well" or "I wouldn't have to move." Focus instead on aligning yourself with what the company cares about - things like their mission, achievements, initiatives, etc.

Paragraph 4 (Closing): Very briefly summarize the contents of your letter. Then, express your interest in an interview. Indicate how the employer can reach you. Finally, thank the employer for his or her time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Don't forget to SIGN your name here! An electronic version of your "signed name" is first.

Your Name Typed

Your Telephone and Email address here (or put in footer)

Cover Letter

The Quick 5-Step Start:

1. Write several (4-5) opening sentences that will catch the reader's eye and then select your favorite. On the Piper Center's home page, you will find several helpful examples to get you started.
2. List three skills required by the job/internship position for which you are applying. Then list examples of accomplishments that demonstrate your ability to utilize each skill. Turn this list of examples into a sentence format.
3. Outline why this organization would want to hire you. What do you have to offer the organization that would make you a top candidate?
4. Say what you know about the organization: background, size, products & services, community involvement, growth, and so on. Use bits and pieces of this information to personalize your cover letter. Show interest in each organization to which you apply.
5. Describe your greatest accomplishment — the one that relates most directly to the position for which you are applying. Make this into an impressive, eye-catching statement, something that will make you stand out in the potential employer/supervisor's mind.

Sample Outline

Opening Paragraph

- Indicate your reason for writing.
- Articulate the position or type of work for which you are applying.
- If you learned of the position through a contact at the organizations, mention this person here.
- Briefly summarize the qualifications that you have for the opportunity you are seeking (this piece of information may be part of a catchy opening sentence).

Body Paragraph(s)

- Explain how your academic/work background has prepared you for the position.
- Connect your past experiences to the top 3 or 4 most important qualifications for the position.
- Paint a picture of your skills and qualifications giving examples. Examples should show how you've utilized key skills and how those skills transfer into the prospective position.

Closing Paragraph

- One sentence summary of your interest in the role.
- Refer the reader to the enclosed résumé.
- Indicate your desire for a personal interview.
- Thank the contact person for their time.

Should you get an interview, review what you wrote in your cover letter and résumé so you can be well prepared to answer questions.

Once you're drafted your résumé, visit the Piper Center to have a Peer Adviser or Career Coach review it with you!