

## COVER LETTER GUIDE

The cover letter is often the first impression that a prospective employer will have of you, especially if they do not know you, or have not heard about you from their network of contacts. The most effective cover letters are tailored to a specific job. It is not uncommon to work on several drafts before you create a final version that clearly articulates your skills and understanding of the employer and job requirements.

While your resume briefly states your skills, knowledge, experience, and (most importantly) what you have achieved using your abilities, the cover letter gives you an opportunity to create a narrative that shows the path you have taken in your career or education, emphasizing the skills you've used along the way, and explaining why the position you are applying to is the next desirable step on this path.

Before you begin your first draft, consider the perspective of the person who will make the hiring decision. They will be asking:

- **What are the most important qualities you have to be successful in this role?**
- **Are you the type of candidate that will progress to the interview?**

Carefully analyze the job description and if possible, speak with a with a professional who works for the organization to identify the most important messages you need to convey in the cover letter. **A Cover letter is an opportunity to tell your story in a compelling way by making a claim and substantiating that claim with examples.**

Cover letters follow much of the same structure as an essay.

1. Present a clear thesis
2. Provide evidence to support your claims
3. Bring the story to a close with a succinct and compelling conclusion

**In addition, a cover letter allows you to:**

**Make a strong first impression** in the first sentence of the first paragraph. A persuasive first sentence tells the reader that you are serious and keeps them reading. Interesting and compelling information about your candidacy should be introduced in your first paragraph.

**Go beyond general statements** that could be true for most candidates. Common qualities or characteristics will not help you to uniquely stand out. Trust the resume to cover the basics and use the cover letter to highlight bigger patterns of success or share an anecdote about your achievements that relates to a requirement of the position.

**Tell the reader about you.** Communicate your interest and motivation to apply by connecting your background and interests to your knowledge of the organization. Avoid reporting facts. The reader already knows his or her organization but wants to know about you and why you are applying. This is a great opportunity to show your level of research on the position.

**Use evidence to build credibility** around every claim in your letter. The reader wants to believe you and needs detailed illustrations of your past success to do so. Be specific and include examples of where you have demonstrated skills relevant to the role for which you are applying.

## COVER LETTER WRITING TIPS

Here are tips to guide your creation of an exceptional cover letter. Remember Career and Post Graduate Development CAN HELP! Once you create a draft, request assistance from a career advisor in the Career & Post-Graduate Development office, 110 Bomberger. Please make an appointment on Handshake.

1. *Personalize* letters. If necessary, call the organization to learn the name of the appropriate individual, his/her title, and the correct spelling. The company's website may also provide these details.
2. *Individualize* your letter for each employer and position; never mass-produce job search letters.
3. *Maintain balance* in your letters. Job search letters should maintain a professional appearance and tone while reflecting your natural style and personality.
4. *Be specific and direct*. Avoid clichés and get to the point in an efficient and effective manner. Cover letters are traditionally one page in length.
5. *Use positive and active language*, conveying energy, productiveness, and **benefit to the employer**. Your letter should be work-centered and employer-centered (what you can do for the employer), not self-centered (what the employer can do for you).
6. *Tailor your letter* when responding to a job post, thoroughly read and re-read the description to determine what competencies the potential employer is seeking. Try to speak to the "need" of the organization -- some reading between the lines may be necessary so that your letter will be focused toward a specific position.
7. *Accentuate the strengths* and qualities you can offer the employer. Avoid apologizing for strengths you lack.
8. *Be available*. Make sure you tell the employer how you can be reached during the day. Include your phone number and an email address that you check several times each day in the header.
9. *Proofread thoroughly* to ensure an error-free document. Do not rely on spell check – have a friend or a career advisor in Career and Post-Graduate Development review your cover letters. Keep a copy of all letters that you send out in your job search files.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

#### Career and Post-Graduate Development

*Guide, Template and Samples:* <https://www.ursinus.edu/offices/career-and-post-graduate-development/resume-and-cover-letters/>

#### Indeed

*Tips, Template and Samples:* <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/college-student-cover-letter>

#### Live Career

*Samples for different types of letters:* <https://www.livecareer.com/resources/cover-letters/how-to/write/6-simple-steps>