Cover Letter Writing Guidelines

A cover letter is an opportunity to describe your interest in and qualifications for a position. Cover letters also reveal a bit more about your personality and writing skills to recruiters. The goal of a cover letter is to sell the employer on how your skills and experiences make you the best candidate for the job. Again, spelling, grammar, or formatting errors can lead to a recruiter disregarding your cover letter. Always double-check your cover letter and have someone else read it before submitting an application.

The Office of Career Management is here to help. Whether you want help getting started, tailoring your cover letter to a specific job, or want someone to double check your spelling schedule an appointment or stop by our office, Copeland 209, from 1:00pm to 3:00pm for drop in hours.

Getting Started

You may write your first cover letter for a classroom assignment, but more often than not you will write a cover letter to apply for a job opportunity. When you sit down to write your cover letter, here are a few helpful things to have:

- A list of your career goals, skills, and experience. It can be helpful to write everything down, then focus on formatting.
- A cover letter template. We create our templates based on industry best practices and feedback from employers.
- A job description, when applicable. You should align your skills and experience to the qualifications in the job description.

Cover Letter Content

Date – This notes the date you applied for the position.

Employer contact information – This information should be available in the job posting or the employer's website.

Your contact information – This allows the recruiter to easily identify how to contact you.

Introduction – The first paragraph of your cover letter provides an introduction of you to the employer. It should include the position you are applying to, how you found the position, and introduce your fit for the position. The first paragraph is generally three to four sentences long.

Fit with Job – The second paragraph of your cover letter describes your fit for the position in detail. Describe how your qualifications match those in the job description and the value you can provide to the organization. Reference one or two specific examples. Do not repeat your resume word for word – provide more detail and information to highlight the achievements in your resume. The paragraph is approximately four to six sentences long.

Fit with Company – The third paragraph of your cover letter describes the synergies between you and the company. Establish why you are interested in the company, such as values or traits you are looking for in a company. Be sure to do your research – this can be done through previous conversations with the employer, an informational interview, or through your own secondary research. Do not copy information directly from the website. The paragraph is approximately four to six sentences long.

Closing – The fourth and final paragraph should restate your interest in the position, thank the employer for considering your application, and provide your contact information (phone number and email).

Best Practices for Writing a Cover Letter

As you gain more experience and identify your career goals and objectives, you will likely start customizing the cover letter template. As you feel comfortable changing the template, keep these best practices in mind.

- It is essential to have no errors (spelling, grammar, punctuation, and formatting). Always have at least one other person review your cover letter.
- Cover letters use easy to read fonts (such as Times New Roman, Garamond, Arial, Cambria, or Helvetica)
- Your margins should be no smaller than 0.5 inches. You can adjust your margins to help your resume fit nicely on one page.
- Text size should be no smaller than size 10 and no larger than size 14.
- Use abbreviations sparingly. Spell out your degree, the name of the university, and organizations to which you belong.
- Always PDF your cover letter before sending electronically to employers. It is more professional and prevents any changes from being made to your cover letter.
- Title electronic copies of your cover letter with your name, the company and/or position you are applying for, and the date of your application. Use the same style title as your resume.
- Print your cover letter on quality paper and use a laser or letter quality printer. White, cream, or ivory are appropriate paper color options.
- You must get your point across quickly and clearly. Use key words and well-written sentences points.
- Consistency is key. Your cover letter and resume should use the same fonts and have a similar style (margins, spacing, etc.).