



COLLEGE OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

Writing Cover Letters



What Is a Cover Letter?

A cover letter is a one page formal business letter that introduces you to potential employers. It is often the first impression an employer has of you.

What Does a Cover Letter Do?

A cover letter expresses your interests clearly to an employer, highlighting relevant items on your resume. It shows how your skills and experiences align with your employer's specific needs—the entire resume should not be reiterated. The ultimate goal of a cover letter is to get the employer to read your resume and give you an interview.

How Do I Start Writing a Cover Letter?

1. Research the employer: show why you are a good fit for the organization by matching your skills, abilities, and values.
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. Analyze 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. Remember to be as specific and concise as possible. Do not exceed one page.

Content

1. Overall:
 - Look good visually and be easy to read to attract the reader's attention.
 - Be conscious of correct sentence skills, grammar, paper quality, and correct addresses and titles (no errors!).
 - Address it to a particular person by name and use a colon (i.e. Dear Ms. Smith:).
2. 1st Paragraph:
 - Should arouse the reader's interest.
 - State the position you seek and how you learned of it.
 - Consider including some particular knowledge about the reader's business/organization from your research to show that you are very interested in them particularly and are not just looking for any job.
 - Show that you know your career goals and the position.
3. Body Paragraphs:
 - Should make the employer desire to interview you by explaining what you can do for his/her company.
 - Put yourself in the employer's position and present facts that will both be interesting and will accurately describe your assets and qualifications.
 - The prospective employer will be interested in your ability to make and/or save money, conserve time, to effectively assume and discharge responsibility and to produce results more rapidly and economically than anyone else.
 - Do not stress your bad points or unemployment.
4. Closing Paragraph:
 - Should request action.
 - State a specific time frame of when you will follow up either by phone, e-mail, etc.
 - Thank them for their consideration.
 - Closings such as "sincerely," or "regards" are most often used.

Points to Remember:

- Use 8.5" x 11" bond paper that matches your resume.
- Always include your address.
- Be specific: individualize the letter for the company and write that you are interested in a specific position or field.
- Avoid unnecessary flattery, exaggeration, and 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".
- Keep copies of all your materials.
- Don't explain why the job is important to you, instead explain what special skills and qualities you can bring to the job.

Sample Format

Your Current Address
City, State Zip Code
Date (make sure you write it out – January 1, 2012 not 1/1/12)

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. Refer the reader to an enclosed resume and/or application form.

2nd Paragraph – This is where you explain why you are perfect for the job. Mention several of your skills (no less than two and no more than four) 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 remarkably better. 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. How are you going to be profitable for them? Do not forget to be specific with your examples.

4th Paragraph – Close by making a special request for follow-up and 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. If your request is for further information concerning the opening, it would be polite to enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope. End with a polite statement such as “Thank you for your consideration.”

Sincerely,

(Your handwritten signature)

Type your name

Enclosure

Tip: Check the Career Guide for samples of cover letters to get an idea of what they typically sound like. Career Guides are available in the The Career Exploration Center in 162 MVR, which also welcomes walk-in resume and cover letter critiques. If you have questions or just want someone to proof read your materials, come in anytime Monday – Thursday 10am-4pm and Friday 10am-2pm.