

COVER LETTER GUIDE

WHAT IS A COVER LETTER?

A cover letter is a document that accompanies your resume and gives greater detail about your skills and the value you may bring to a potential employer. The cover letter is not meant to repeat the information on your resume, but rather should expand on your experiences and show they demonstrate your fit to an organization. Each cover letter should be tailored to the organization and position. Although a cover letter is not always required, it is highly recommended to include one with every application. The cover letter provides an additional opportunity to stand out as a serious candidate.

TYPES OF COVER LETTERS

There are two distinct types of cover letters that may be used in your job search.

Application Letter: An application letter is included when applying for a particular job. This letter responds to a specific job announcement and accompanies your resume.

Prospecting Letter: Research shows that many jobs are found in the hidden job market, meaning they are never posted to a formal job board. The prospecting letter is used to search for possible vacancies at a particular organization or within a specific industry even if a position has not been shared on a job board. The purpose of the prospecting letter is to get an interview. The prospecting letter will be structured similarly to the application letter, but instead of focusing on a specific job description, the letter should focus more broadly on your skills and how those skills make you a good fit for a position within that organization.

FORMATTING AND WRITING TIPS

- Keep to one page
- Margins should be between .5”-1,” depending on length of content
- Proofread; check for grammatical and spelling errors
- Avoid using under confident phrases such as “I believe” or “I think”; show confidence in your qualifications
- Avoid using clichés and over exaggerated phrases such as “I love”

HOW TO SUBMIT A COVER LETTER

When applying through a formal application, save your cover letter as a PDF to avoid formatting issues. Submit your letter through the application system, either as a separate document or as a single document with your resume.

When sending a letter by email, you may choose to include the cover letter in the body of the email or as an attachment. If you choose to include the cover letter as an attachment, the body of the email should include a short introduction of yourself, should reference your interest in a position, and should draw attention to your attachments.

PREPARING TO WRITE A COVER LETTER

Research the Employer Thoroughly: Your cover letter should be tailored to the organization. The reader should feel that the letter was written specifically for them and is not a general form letter. Look at the organization website, social media pages, and/or conduct informational interviews to learn more about their values, mission, and purpose.

Analyze the Position Description: Just as you should tailor the cover letter to the organization, you should also tailor it for each position. Highlight key words in the job description that you can use as a basis for your cover letter. It can be useful to analyze the position description using a t-chart. On one side, write specific requirements/skills the employer is seeking, and on the other side, write a note about how you can demonstrate that you have that qualification. You will not be able to discuss every qualification in your cover letter, so choose those that seem to be most important to the position.

Requirement/Skill	Your Qualifications
1. Ability to work well in a team 2. Excellent customer service skills	1. Group project in Psych 300 class 2. Customer Service Rep at Kohl's

If you are writing a prospecting letter, not for a specific job, analyze similar position descriptions to see the types of qualities similar employers are seeking. Use these descriptions as a basis for your letter.

Consider Your Value: What skills can you bring to an employer that will set you apart from another candidate? Focus on your positive attributes and experiences, and avoid drawing attention to your weaknesses or lack of experience. Most importantly, the cover letter should focus on what you can bring to the employer and not what the employer can do for you.

PARTS OF A COVER LETTER

Heading

- Write in business letter format
- May use same header from your resume or standard business letter heading for your contact information
- Include month, day, and year
- Address to a specific person whenever possible
 - If unsure of gender, use full name
 - If unable to find a name, address to “Dear Hiring Manager”

Opening Paragraph

- Begin with a hook; draw reader in and make them want to read more
- Indicate your reason for writing
- Describe how you learned of the organization or position
- Provide basic information about yourself (education, skills, experience)
- Sets up rest of cover letter

Middle Paragraph(s)

- Use the position description; highlight key terms, qualifications, and language
- Demonstrate you researched the employer
- Mention specific qualifications which make you a good fit
- Refer to and further explain relevant items on your resume

NOTE: If writing a prospecting letter inquiring about open positions, explain why you are interested in the organization and relevant skills you possess

Final Paragraph

- Indicate you are excited to talk with the employer and to learn more about their organization
- State how they may follow-up or your plans to follow-up
- Thank employer for their consideration

Signature

- End letter with closing such as “Best” or “Sincerely”
- If sending as an electronic document, type your full name
- If printing, leave space for a written signature



COVER LETTER FORMAT

Your Address
City, State, Zip

Date

Employer's Name
Employer's Title
Company Name
Street Address
City, State, Zip

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Last Name: (If you are unsure of gender, write the full name. If you cannot find a name, use "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Search Committee")

Opening Paragraph:

- Begin with a hook; draw the reader in and make them want to read more
- Indicate your reason for writing
- Describe how you learned of the organization or position
- Provide basic information about yourself (education, skills, experience)
- Sets up rest of cover letter

Middle Paragraph(s):

- Use position description; highlight key terms, qualifications, and language
- Demonstrate that you researched employer
- Mention specific qualifications which make you a good fit
- Refer to and further explain relevant items on your resume

NOTE: If writing a prospecting letter inquiring about open positions, explain why you are interested in the organization and relevant skills you possess

Final Paragraph

- Indicate you are excited to talk with the employer and to learn more about their organization
- State how they may follow up or your plans to follow up
- Thank employer for their consideration

Signature:

Sincerely/Best,

Full Name (If printing, leave space between for written signature)