

How to Write a Cover Letter

According to Forbes Magazine contributor, Seth Porges, (8-29-2012) at best, a cover letter can help a jobseeker stand out from the pack. At worst, it can make a promising candidate seem like an uncreative cut-and-paster. Sadly, the vast majority of cover letters read essentially the same: Retreads of resumes that ramble on while repeating the obvious. Would you read one of these to the end if it were put in front of you? Probably not, and nor would most hiring managers.

Forbes advises the following:

1) Don't repeat your resume

A lot of people write cover letters as if they were paragraph-form resumes. Fact is, your letter will be stapled (or attached to the same email) as your actual resume, so you can assume that they'll at least glance at it (and probably with a keener eye than your cover letter). Instead, use your cover letter to show personality, curiosity, and an interest in the field you are applying to work in. My favorite pro tip: Research the history of your field or company, and sprinkle some interesting historical facts into your cover letter (or even use one as a lead). If I was applying for a job in tech, I might talk about how thrilling it was to see Moore's law transform technology before my eyes, and how thrilled I am to be a part of this transformation. If I were applying for a job in fashion, I might talk about how much fashion has changed since the 80s (*a lot!*). Everything has a hidden history. Use it to show expertise and interest.

2) Keep it short

Less. Is. More. Three paragraphs, tops. Half a page, tops. Skip lengthy exposition and jump right into something juicy.

3) Address Nobody

Sometimes, you don't know exactly who you should be addressing your letter to...Nix the generic and bland "Dear Hiring Manager" or "To Whom It May Concern". If you absolutely don't know who you should be addressing, then don't address anybody. Instead, just jump right into the body of the letter.

4) Send it as a PDF

Not every office computer can read .docx or .pages files, but virtually everybody can open a PDF file without any conversion. File conversions are bad for two huge reasons. First, they are just as likely to not bother and move onto the next applicant. And, second, conversions can introduce formatting errors. PDF cannot be easily tampered with, and you have more control over how it appears on somebody's screen.

5) Never ever, ever use the following phrase

"My name is ____, and I am applying for the position as ____" They already know this, and you'll sound inexperienced.

6) Close strong

Finish off by quickly (and I mean *quickly*) explaining how your experience or worldview will help you at the job. That's key. That's the closer. And it can be done in one to two seconds. If it goes any longer, you're just rambling

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Additional Cover Letter Guidelines

When applying for a job, employers might request a cover letter along with your resume, references and other required documents. A cover letter is one of the best ways to convey why you are the best candidate for the internship, allowing you to expand on and show case key skills and experiences.

Here are several tips and examples to help you craft a cover letter for job applications. For more inspiration, browse cover letter samples to get an idea of what cover letters might look like for your industry or position.

A well-written cover letter should highlight relevant skills and experiences that make you the best fit for the role. It should also capture the employer's attention, convincing them to further review your resume. To meet these goals, it's important to include a few key pieces of information:

1. State the exact role you're applying for.

Starting your cover letter with the position you're applying for shows you've thoughtfully considered what makes you the best candidate for this specific position. It also implies that you've created a cover letter for their opening instead of using one general cover letter for all applications. It also reminds the audience about the position and provides context for the rest of your letter.

2. Use the right keywords

Employers often scan resumes and cover letters for **keywords** related to the role. Carefully review the job description and company website for clues on which you should include. For example, if the job description lists "time management" as a desired quality, try listing relevant examples in your cover letter.

3. Include relevant coursework

If you have little to no job experience, your relevant coursework can be helpful for employers. Include your completed courses relevant to the job description or industry. For example, if applying for a design position, be sure to list your design courses and any significant related accomplishments.

4. Call out relevant skills.

The body of your cover letter is where you can highlight relevant knowledge, expertise and education that will benefit the employer. Even if you don't have professional industry experience, you can include skills, you've gained in

previous jobs, volunteer positions, classes or projects you've completed, or achievements in extracurricular activities.

For example, if you're applying for a position as a reporter of an established publication, you could discuss your role as editor for a local paper, or how your previous job as an office receptionist taught you the importance of time management.

5. Explain why you're a good fit for the role.

You should include a one or two sentences relating your qualifications to the position. Carefully review the posted job description to understand which skills and experiences the employer is looking for. Align those with your own and decide which to prioritize in your cover letter based on the posting.

6. Describe what you feel you would gain from your employment.

In most cases, employers have built a program to help professionals better understand the industry and develop skills, experiences and relationships that will serve them throughout their career. In addition to explaining what you'll bring to the table, highlight what you hope to achieve and learn in the new position.

7. Review your cover letter before sending

When your cover letter is complete, set aside time to review and edit. When proofreading, check carefully for spelling, punctuation and grammar errors. If possible, ask trusted friends or family members to review your final draft for a third-party perspective.

SAMPLE COVER LETTER

Dear Mr. Jones,

I am submitting my resume for consideration for the position of XYZ posted by ABC Company. Given the skills and experience outlined in my enclosed resume, I believe I will be a worthy asset to your team.

Four years at XYZ College, and job experiences have enabled me to completed a great deal of coursework on cutting-edge design trends and best practices, including Principles of User Experience Design and Mobile Application Design, where I learned and applied skills such as user journey mapping, application wireframing and designing software for a variety of mobile devices and operating systems.

In addition, I volunteer with a local non-profit that collects donated clothes and furniture and redistributes it to families in need. I helped the web team update and re-launch an application that allows people in the community locate nearby drop-off points and schedule pick-ups.

Finally, my four years working as a computer analyst at company XYZ has taught me the importance of building a convenient and memorable consumer experience that aligns with the brand. It also helped me grow my skills in team collaboration, verbal communication and project leadership.

I believe I would make an excellent addition to your team. This job would help me grow my real-world experience in the technology industry and help me further develop and refine my application design skills.

I look forward to hearing from you!

*Sincerely,
John Brown*

SEVEN TIPS TO TAKE YOUR COVER LETTER TO THE NEXT LEVEL:

1. Verify everyone's contact information

Triple-check both your contact information and the information you have for your potential employer. Whether it's in your header, your signature, or both, make sure your phone number and email are correct, that no numbers or letters are transposed, and your email address is accurate. If you have one, include a link to your professional website or portfolio. Once you've confirmed all of your information, review the company's contact information, verify the spelling of their name (this may mean including "Inc." or "LLC" if applicable), and double-check the company's address.

2. Confirm that you're using the right greeting

Start by checking your tone — is it professional or more casual? Your choice of greeting will depend upon several factors, such as whether or not you know the hiring manager personally, if you are being referred by an employee, the type of job for which you are applying, and the overall company culture. If you aren't sure, opt for the more formal "Dear."

If you've located the name of the hiring manager and are addressing them by name in the greeting of your cover letter, double-check the spelling of their name before you send the letter.

3. Make sure you're sending the right letter

Chances are you're applying to multiple jobs, so you probably have several cover letter drafts. As you are reviewing your cover letter, make sure that it's referencing the correct position and the correct company throughout.

Because variations of your cover letter can add up quickly, it's a good idea to clearly label and organize each version. This will make it easier to reference previous versions when you want to reuse portions of various letters in new versions, improve future iterations or restructure your template altogether.

4. Pick your keywords wisely

Once you've completed the steps above, then move to the body of your letter. Make sure that you have cross-referenced keywords in the job description with your cover letter and aligned the language. You undoubtedly have a number of different talents, so find the best ways to state your skills and use the same keywords that the company uses in the job description. Many companies use software called an Applicant Tracking System (ATS). ATSs review and qualify applicants based on job description keywords, then rank each applicant within the company's database. If your keywords aren't aligned specifically to the job description, you might not get a response.

5. Choose the right file format

It's best to stick with file formats an ATS can easily parse. Choose .doc or PDF formats to ensure your file will be easily read by the system. Neither of these is the default option when you're saving a document. To choose the file format for your cover letter, click on File, Save As, and find the "Format" field. From a dropdown menu, you can select .doc or PDF.

6. Check length requirements

Check the application form to see if there is a specific word limit for your cover letter submission. If not, a general rule is that cover letters should be no more than a single page long, consisting of three to four paragraphs that underscore why you are a qualified job applicant — without repeating your resume verbatim. State why you are interested in the specific role, include targeted professional information, satisfy any directions listed in the job description, and demonstrate an understanding of the organization.

7. Proofread and proofread again

Once you've made it through all the steps listed above, it's crucial that you proofread your cover letter so you don't miss spelling errors, typos, or other details that can undermine your efforts. Reviewing every detail taking the time to get it right demonstrates a commitment to excellence that any hiring manager will appreciate.

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