



Cover Letters

WRITING BOX

Congratulations! You're about to apply for the coolest job. Your resume's ready... but... someone mentions a **cover letter**...?

Whether the application specifically asks for it or not, a one-page cover letter should accompany a resume. Typically this is the first contact between you and the hiring manager. The cover letter introduces you more fully than the plain facts of a resume. Be clear and specific about how your skills and experiences both match the requirements of the job and will be value-added to the organization. The cover letter outlines why you should be hired and helps you stand out from other applicants. It inspires the reader to set up that phone or in-person interview because they want to get to know you better and already “see” you in the position!

What is a cover letter?

While a resume outlines the details of your skills, education and work experience, a *cover letter* highlights your attitude, work ethic, personality, particular qualifications, and creative problem-solving. Use the cover letter to showcase how well you match the needs of the team or the company, and how your knowledge and abilities add value to the organization.

Think of a cover letter as a way of clearly establishing how your goals fit seamlessly with the company's values (as expressed through the requirements for the job). Why should you be the new hire?

What are the most important components of a cover letter?

First, you need to prepare. For example, do some research about both the job itself and the company. Study the organization's website (especially the "About Us" tab) to learn about the company's history, values, and mission. Do employees take part in community outreach? Does the company support scholarships? Reference some of this in your cover letter to demonstrate your interest in and admiration for the organization. What do these values and commitments mean to you? How do your goals align with those of the company/team? What challenges does the organization seem to be facing? Demonstrate that you understand what the organization needs at this very time.

Finally, use the language the employer/company does. This further demonstrates your understanding of the company and the particular job.

While cover letters vary, depending on the company you're applying to, they help distinguish you from other applicants and generally should include the following:

- Contact information and date
- Opening greeting
- Introductory paragraph
- Two to three central paragraphs that discuss your qualifications, values and goals
- Conclusion and next steps
- Close and signature

CONTACT INFORMATION/DATE:

Align information at the left margin. Double space between each category.

1. Start with the date. (double space)
2. Using separate, single-spaced lines provide:
 - a. Your name (and present work title)
 - b. Street address/apartment number (or PO Box)
 - c. City, state, zip code
 - d. Phone number(s) – clearly identified as home, mobile, etc.
 - e. Email(s) (then double space.)
 - f. Optional: Links to portfolio or social media, if relevant.
3. Again, on separate lines: (single space)
 - a. Name of hiring manager and title of the job you're interested in
 - b. Street address (or PO Box)
 - c. City, state, zip (double space)

***NOTE:** If submitting digitally, in the opening contact info

- a. You may leave out your specific street (or PO) address, just listing your name (title), city, state, phone, and email.
- b. Consider leaving off entirely the company name and all contact information for the hiring manager. From your contact info, simply jump to: Dear _____:

OPENING GREETING:

Find out the name of the hiring manager, if at all possible. Do **not** address your letter “Dear Sir” or “To Whom It May Concern.” Perhaps consult the company’s website, review the job posting, or even contact the business directly, explain what job you’re interested in and request the name of the specific hiring authority. Don’t worry about using Mr., Dr., Ms., etc., but simply state the name. Only use Dear Hiring Manager (or To Whom It May Concern) as a last resort. **DO** include appropriate titles – for example Dear David Fawcett, Asst. Manager, Human Resources.

(You may wish to insert the name of the position *here*, set off by double spacing – for example: Re: Assistant Director, Human Resources, Lakes Printing.)

INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

Introduce yourself by mentioning the *specific job* (or type of job) you're applying for and describe how your skills match the needs of the job or company. Start with a punch! Be enthusiastic about your career and the present job opportunity and show your personality. Catch the reader's attention!! Mention why you're interested in this particular job and/or why previous steps in your career have prepared you to be successful in this next position. Be sure to include keywords from the job ad and illustrate how your experience/skills/training match those requirements. Give a concrete example – such as a percentage improvement, amount of increase in revenue, exact numbers of enrollees, etc. – for the example you mention.

If you were recruited for the position by an employee of the company, or by a colleague/friend of the hiring manager, also mention that in the opening paragraph.

CENTRAL PARAGRAPHS (2-3):

After the generalities of the introduction, expand on points from your resume that illustrate the depth and breadth of the skills and qualities you bring to the position. Be sure to address all the “essential” requirements from the job posting; additionally, discuss as many of your skills from the “desirable” list as you bring to the position. Highlight a specific example from your past accomplishments for each category you discuss – this might be a story of how you solved a past problem or rallied a team to build a new approach. In short, discuss the best qualifications you have that match the job description.

Here also illustrate further any other important points from your resume.

CONCLUSION:

Thank the reader for their time and consideration, encourage them to review your resume, and introduce any remaining ideas, such as a brief discussion of any employment gaps. In summary, draw final connections between the position and your qualifications and previous successes. Suggest you're looking forward to next steps in the process (such as an interview).

CLOSE AND SIGNATURE:

Be formal, yet friendly, using such words as these: Sincerely, Best Regards, or Respectfully. Follow the salutation with a comma. On the next line (in an electronic cover letter) state your first and last names.

1. Align on left margin, same as contact information.
2. If *not* submitting digitally, after “Sincerely,” skip four lines, then write your full name. Be sure to sign in black or blue ink. (Do *not* use an electronic signature.)

Tips to help you with writing a cover letter

Hiring managers may read the cover letter first in order to decide if they should take the time to wade through the resume. So, as you write your cover letter, make sure to keep the following in mind:

General Tips

- Write a different cover letter for each application; tailor the letter to the specific job.
- Restrict the cover letter to 1 page
- If digital, save as .doc or PDF.
- In an online submission, consider embedding pertinent video links of you in action (e.g. speaking in public on behalf of an initiative).
- Name your attached cover letter file something like: First name-last name-cover letter.doc (e.g. David-Fawcett-cover letter.PDF).
- Use a professional email address. You may need to create one especially for the application (with a free email provider!), such as: dorasmyte@gmail.com (first name – last name).

Writing Tips

- Seek out online resources and examples of cover letters. The more cover letters you read, the better your own will be!
- Do not simply repeat information from your resume.
- Always include concrete, specific and personal examples to illustrate your points.
- Be personal but *avoid outright humor*. Maintain that professional attitude! Stay authentic and realistic. Avoid awkwardly formal language, as well as clichés and use a variety of active verbs – *initiated, collaborated, organized, revised*, etc.
- Avoid overusing “I.” Remember, the cover letter is not about you, but about what you bring to the company!
- Aim for tight writing. Think about how to communicate efficiently, with fewer words.
- Use a strong opening statement. Describe clearly and briefly why you’re interested in and perfect for the job.
- Consider bullet points to make certain sections stand out

Revising Tips

- Ask a friend or mentor to review your cover letter and make suggestions. Seek out someone in the particular line of work (say Human Resources or Nursing or Sales), who knows the key words and requirements of that type or organization. Use those, as well as key words from the job posting in your letter so that the applicant tracking software will keep your application for a second-round look!
- Proof-read carefully and use spell check.
- If the electronic submission system doesn’t provide a separate portal for the cover letter, perhaps include it in the same document/upload as your resume. However, if the job posting directs applicants NOT to send a cover letter, *do follow those directions!*
- As a final resort, consider using a short follow-up email to the hiring manager to mention the most important points from your cover letter.

- Consider including a link to a portfolio, website or samples of your work.

Formatting Tips

- Use a 10-12-point professional font such as Times, Helvetica, Calibri, Arial, or Verdana.
- Keep 1" margins on all 4 sides. (Only if you need more room to fit the letter onto a single page, use 10-point font and shrink margins to ¾" or even ½".)
- Consider the same header format as on your resume, as well as type of paper.
- Use the same type and size font for resume and cover letter.
- White space (between paragraphs, etc.) helps the hiring manager read quickly and pick out important points easily. Lists are also easy to scan.
- Single space. However, double space in these parts: after the date; after the opening greeting; between each paragraph; and before the close. For a paper letter, leave 4 spaces between the close and your name/title.
- Do not indent paragraphs.

NOTE: Companies that receive lots of applications for any one position often use special software on resumes and cover letters to scan for industry keywords.

Documents with a logical number of preferred keywords automatically emerge near the top of the pile for consideration. (Those cover letters with no keywords or very few simply get thrown away!) These keywords feature prominently in the job posting, so identify them by carefully reading the hiring materials and then use them in your cover letter. However, keep the writing natural and well organized. (Too many keywords makes your letter sound generic, full of jargon and impersonal. That style will also cause the software to toss out your letter!)

Further Resources

1. Example of cover letter:

https://www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/YouthCentral_CoverLetter_WorkExperience_March-27-2017.pdf

2. How to Write a Cover Letter in 2020: Beginner's Guide

<https://novoresume.com/career-blog/how-to-write-a-cover-letter-guide>

3. How to Write a Cover Letter for a Job in 2020

<https://zety.com/blog/how-to-write-a-cover-letter>

4. Many specific books are also available in your library!

For additional help in writing a cover letter, YpsiWrites offers one-to-one consulting. For more information, see ypsiwrites.com.

Cover Letter Examples: Sample 1

September 30, 2020

Tanika Reynolds
1124 Herndon Place
Springdale, MI 20205
787-555-1212 (cell)
tanika.reynolds@cellphone

Maryam Smith, Writing Center Director
University of Ann Arbor
Jones Hall
Ann Arbor, Mi 48888

Dear Dr. Smith,

I am writing to apply for the Online Tutor position. I believe that my university teaching of writing along with my volunteer writing consultant experience make me the ideal candidate for this position.

My work in the University Writing Center has provided me with unique opportunities to instruct students on an individual basis. In the Writing Center, we offer support to students across campus and work with many graduate and undergraduate international and English Language Learner (ELL) students. As a volunteer writing consultant through Eastern Michigan University's Office of Campus and Community Writing for YpsiWrites, I have also had the privilege of working with a diverse group of adults on many different writing projects.

As a part-time instructor in First-Year Writing and Children's Literature at Eastern Michigan University, I have taught a diverse population of students in a classroom setting, and on an individual basis. My main goal in any class I teach is to see my students gain confidence and grow as learners and writers.

I thank you for your time and attention and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Tanika Reynolds

(In paper, leave 4 spaces before name to actually sign in blue or black ink)

Cover Letter Examples: Sample 1 with Annotations

A. Contact information and date

September 30, 2020

Tanika Reynolds
1124 Herndon Place
Springdale, MI 20205
787-555-1212 (cell)
tanika.reynolds@cellphone

Maryam Smith, Writing Center Director
University of Ann Arbor
Jones Hall
Ann Arbor, Mi 48888

B. Opening greeting

Dear Dr. Smith,

C. Introductory paragraph

I am writing to apply for the Online Tutor position. I believe that my university teaching of writing along with my volunteer writing consultant experience make me the ideal candidate for this position.

D. Two-three central paragraphs: qualifications, values and goals

My work in the University Writing Center has provided me with unique opportunities to instruct students on an individual basis. In the Writing Center, we offer support to students across campus and work with many graduate and undergraduate international and English Language Learner (ELL) students. As a volunteer writing consultant through Eastern Michigan University's Office of Campus and Community Writing for YpsiWrites, I have also had the privilege of working with a diverse group of adults on many different writing projects.

As a part-time instructor in First-Year Writing and Children's Literature at Eastern Michigan University, I have taught a diverse population of students in a classroom setting, and on an individual basis. My main goal in any class I teach is to see my students gain confidence and grow as learners and writers.

E. Conclusion and next steps

I thank you for your time and attention and look forward to hearing from you.

F. Close and signature

Sincerely,

Name

(In paper, leave 4 spaces before name to actually sign in blue or black ink)

Cover Letter Examples: Sample 2 with Annotations

A. Contact information and date

January 15, 2020

Daniel Silver
2021 Golden Blvd.
Gateway, Montana 00000
(555) 555-5515
dsilver@popcorn.us

Archibald Magnet, Dir. Of Databank
Magnesium Industries, Inc.
PO Box 1111
Dusty, Iowa 22222

B. Opening greeting

Dear Archibald Magnet,

Re. Data Analyst

C. Introductory paragraph

I am eager to leverage my extensive academic and business successes along with my proven creativity and rich communication skills for the position of Data Analyst for Magnesium Industries. While a student at [university name], I participated in many extracurricular activities, which utilized and developed leadership skills. For example, as media director of the [school organization] team, in addition to attaining extensive knowledge of automotive engineering and the industry in general, I collaborated with and led my team to produce effective strategies to attract sponsors and alumni. One of the main tasks was to produce videos to increase the [product]'s audience, as well as generate excitement. Towards that goal, we edited each video with breathtaking background music and special effects, even including popular collegiate athletes in one! These videos remain some of the most viewed productions posted on the team's Youtube channels, also generating impressive reviews for our sponsor, [company].

D. Two-three central paragraphs: qualifications, values and goals

Certainly, my degrees in [major] and [major], plus additional finance courses have developed my quantitative skills in order to analyze models, observe trending patterns and solve complex problems. This allows me to deduce a practical conclusion from any given data set. Additionally, through my focus on programming and debugging, I regularly apply practical technical skills to create effective solutions. Since the technology sector remains an extremely competitive industry, with tremendous growth potential, my computer science background lends me a distinct advantage by providing alternate perspectives on a problem. Also, the finance coursework allows me to overlay what I learned in class onto the professional business world. These unique and diverse skill sets correspond directly with the business and technology components of this position.

Note as well that I have served as the vice-president of finance for [school] organization chapter, the largest, non-profit [category] organization for business professionals in North American. Recently I conducted in-depth analysis of the financial standing, market standing, past performance, and overall growth potential of each company that I pitched. My most successful stock recommendation, [stock name] resulted in over 65% realized capital gain. I look forward to bringing this type of growth to this team through innovation based on data.

E. Conclusion and next steps

I am particularly attracted to Magnesium Industries as it provides its analysts with hands-on experience in the financial and technology industries, and, therefore, unparalleled opportunities for professional and personal growth by challenging presuppositions and imagining new solutions. I look forward to talking with you and a cross-section of the team to further explore what we will tackle and achieve together.

F. Close and signature

With regards,

Daniel Silver

(In paper, leave 4 spaces before name to actually sign in blue or black ink)