



# Cover Letter Guide

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Essential resources for long-term career planning

# Writing a Cover Letter

A **cover letter** introduces you to a prospective employer and explains why you are sending your resume. Your cover letter should demonstrate how your experiences and skills align with the position; how your values and enthusiasm matches the organization's core values and philosophy. Also, your cover letter serves as a writing sample detailing how your education and experiences qualify you for the position.

## How to Write a Cover Letter

**Opening Paragraph** - To begin your cover letter think about:

- Why you are interested in this field
- Why you are interested in this organization and position
- What is the purpose of your letter (e.g., to apply for a full-time position or an internship)
- How you discovered the opening and/or the organization (e.g., a personal referral, or Handshake)

**Body of your letter** - For this paragraph (or two) think about:

- Review the job description to determine the qualifications the employer is requiring; identify which skills you have that match the job description
- Include your personal traits that are applicable to the organization's needs (e.g., "My passion for equal access to education led me to research and write my thesis about...")

**Closing Paragraph** - Make sure you are clear about:

- How and where you can be contacted
- Conveying a positive attitude and your appreciation for being considered
- When and how you will follow up, if appropriate. Follow up is appropriate only if employer asks you to do so or if you are sending your resume when there is no specific job posted. Always read and follow any instructions you receive from an employer.

## Meaningful Tips for Writing Your Letter

- **Look carefully at the qualifications and responsibilities** in the job description; be sure to **highlight your work experiences** that match the position; reveal how you can add value to the organization
- Communicate your enthusiasm, but keep sentences short and clear; **use active, not passive, verbs**. For example, use "investigated", "gathered", "evaluated" instead of "was responsible for investigating, gathering, or evaluating" (see Resume Guide for an extensive list of action verbs)
- Begin the second paragraph with a **topic sentence**; consider the main points you wish to make and then create a sentence that introduces those ideas
- **Vary your writing** - do not start **every** sentence with "I"
- There is no "right way" or specific writing style for a cover letter; your letter should reflect who **you** are and **your** writing ability
- **Proofread** your letter to ensure that it is error free; sometimes one typo can cause your letter (and your chance at the job) to end up in the discard pile

## **Business Letter Format**

In order for your letter to be considered professional it needs to be in business format. Typically block style formatting is recommended. This format requires that you justify every line along the left hand margin. The header you use on your resume is fine for the header on your cover letter.

## **Saving and Emailing Your Letter**

- Save your cover letter and resume as PDFs. All attachments should be titled with your name for easy identification. Also include your name and the position for which you are applying in the **subject line of the email**.
- Compose a short email explaining to the employer that your cover letter and resume are attached.

## **Have Your Letter Reviewed by the Bates Center for Purposeful Work**

Please call the Bates Center for Purposeful Work at 207.786.6232 for an appointment with a counselor or stop by Chase Hall during walk-in hours and speak to a Purposeful Work Fellow for a cover letter review.

## Cover Letter Content and Format

Your present address  
City, State Zip Code

Date of Letter

First and Last name (Omit Mr./Ms. here; include in greeting below)  
Title of Contact  
Name of Organization  
Street Address  
City, State Zip Code

**Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Last Name:** If you do not know the recipient's gender identity, use the first and last name e.g. **Dear Cory Smith**. If you do not have the name of a specific person, try to get it. Review the job description closely for any details, research LinkedIn, or ask an internal contact for suggestions on how to address your cover letter. Do not write "Dear Sir or Madam" or "To whom it may concern." If it is impossible to find the recipient's name, address the letter generally by title, "Dear Human Resources Manager," "Dear Hiring Manager" or by organization, "Dear (Name of Organization) Representative."

**Opening Paragraph:** This paragraph is intended to express your interest **and** fit with the position, organization, and/or field. Include a sentence or two summarizing your interest and fit. Try to make it interesting, and find a way to incorporate specific information about the organization to demonstrate your genuine interest. If applicable, describe how you heard about this opening or internship. If a person referred you to the organization, mention the person's name and connection to the organization: "Nancy Smith, who is an alumna of Bates College, suggested that I contact you."

**Body Paragraphs:** This section consists of one or two paragraphs in which you tell the employer why you are a strong candidate for the position. Emphasize the **employer's needs** – not your own. Demonstrate your ability and desire to perform the functions of the position by providing examples from your work, academic, and/or extracurricular experiences. You may want to expand on your interest in the position and/or career field referencing specific academic and work experiences.

**Organize your paragraphs according to skills, not experiences.** Don't simply include a separate paragraph about your experience; make the connection between the skills the employer seeks and your experiences that support your qualification for the job. For example, demonstrate strong writing skills by referencing two or three accomplishments related to writing. If possible, also identify a couple of personal qualities that pertain to the job and make you a strong candidate (i.e., responsible, hard-working.) Try to offer specific examples of where these qualities have been demonstrated.

**Closing Paragraph:** Indicate your desire to arrange a mutually convenient time to interview; state when and how you will contact the employer, as well as how he/she may contact you. If you plan to visit the city where the organization is located, mention this because employers may be more apt to meet with you. Re-emphasize your interest in the position, thank the individual, and mention that you are looking forward to meeting him or her.

Sincerely,

Type Your Name