

Cover Letter FAQ

WHAT THE HECK IS A COVER LETTER?

We know, no one really writes letters anymore. So we'll help you out here. A cover letter is a formal letter that you write to an employer, which introduces your skills, experience, and interest for a particular job and organization. In short, the purpose is to land you an interview with the organization.

IT SEEMS LIKE I'M REPEATING WHAT'S ON MY RÉSUMÉ. WHAT'S THE POINT?

The cover letter is meant to supplement your résumé, not repeat your qualifications. Think of it as a way to explain your experiences, to express your interest, and show the employer why you're qualified by using specific examples. You can also use this space to explain gaps in employment and reasons for relocating to a new state or country. It's a great way to demonstrate your strong writing skills and reasons why you want *this* job at *this* particular organization.

WHAT ARE SOME QUICK TIPS FOR WRITING A GOOD COVER LETTER?

Step One :

Target each letter to the specific job and organization. Never send out a generic cover letter (you wouldn't want someone to send you a generic birthday card, would you?) Write your letter to a specific person and tailor each one to their needs. We know, it's a lot of effort — but it may be what separates you from everyone else who didn't get an interview.

Step Two :

Focus on what you can do for *them*, not what they can do for you. Yes, express interest in the job, but make sure you tell them why your skills will be valuable to the organization. This means researching their values, priorities, and needs — and then inserting your value into that.

Step Three :

Address the letter to a person. Do a little research on LinkedIn, Google, CareerShift, or the company website to determine the appropriate contact.

Step Four :

Use a standard font like Times New Roman, Arial, or Calibri. Make sure it can be easily read on all computers.

Step Five :

Keep it short. One page maximum and use 10–12 pt. font (same size as résumé).

Step Six :

Proofread! Check for spelling and grammar errors. Important: double check that your letter is addressed to the right person at the correct organization.

Step Seven :

Drop names. If the employer knows and respects someone who referred you to the organization, mention that person's name early on.

Step Eight :

Write professionally, but in your voice. Your style should be conversational, but professional. Let your personality shine through.

Sample Cover Letter

Your Street Address

Your City, State Zip (or you can just paste your résumé header in this space)

Current Date (Month Day, Year)

Employer's Full Name, Title

Department Name

Organization Name

Street Address

City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Last Name:

Paragraph 1 (Intro): This paragraph should be short and sweet. Just like an essay, you're creating a blueprint for the employer by stating 1: why you're writing and 2: why you're interested. Be sure to include the name of the job for which you're applying and the name of the organization. You can use this space to demonstrate your interest and show that you've done your homework. Know a lot about the organization? Show them how excited you are to work there. Introduce a few of your strengths that match with skills listed on the job description. Remember: this is just your introduction. You will have space to elaborate in the next paragraph.

Paragraph 2 (Body): During the next 1–2 paragraphs, you will show the employer why you're the best person for the job by explaining the skills you mentioned in the previous paragraph. Use stories or examples to show the employer how you've used these skills in other roles, and then connect it back to the job itself. You want the employer to begin imagining you in the role for which they're hiring. Paint a picture!

Also find ways to demonstrate what sets you apart from other applicants. Did you study abroad? Did you complete three internships? Did you take a gap year? Did you pay for your own education? Find ways to share accomplishments that show your character and ability to do the job well. If you need to explain things like employment gaps on your résumé or reasons for relocating — this is a good place to do that. You can also showcase some soft skills that are sometimes challenging to articulate in a resume. These might include a strong work ethic, sense of humor, results-oriented work style, etc.

Paragraph 3 (Conclusion): Very briefly summarize the contents of your letter. Then, express your interest in an interview. Indicate how the employer can reach you. Finally, thank the employer for his or her time and consideration.

Closing (Sincerely,)

Signed Name

Your Name Typed