

Cover Letter Guide



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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 show your knowledge and enthusiasm for the position and the organization. It also serves as a good example of your writing ability and should demonstrate how your education and experience qualify you for the opportunity.

Writing Your 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 the objective of your letter is (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 eRecruiting)

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

- What skills do you have that might be helpful for this position? Look at the job description to find out what the employer is looking for
- What experiences illustrate how and where you acquired these skills? (e.g., "Acquired a strong ability to multitask as a double major student athlete...")
- What personal traits are relevant to the position and how can you apply them to the needs of the organization? (e.g., "As a person who is passionate about equal access to education...")

Closing Paragraph - Make sure you are clear about:

- When and how you will follow up
- How and where you can be contacted
- Conveying a proactive attitude

Tips for Writing Your Letter

- **Look carefully at the qualifications and responsibilities** in the job description; be sure to **highlight the experiences** that you have had that best match the position
- 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.

E-mailing or Sending Your Letter by Snail Mail

- Either type your cover letter directly into the body of the email and include your resume (also, if requested, references or writing samples) as attachments **or** compose a short email directing the employer to read the attached cover letter and then attach the letter and your resume
- All attachments should be labeled 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
- If sending your materials via U.S. mail, print your cover letter and resume on high-quality paper; sign your letter and enclose all documents in a matching envelope

Have Your Letter Reviewed by the Bates Career Development Center

Please call the BCDC at 207.786-6232 for an appointment with a counselor or stop by during walk-in hours for a quick cover letter review.

Cover Letter Content and Format

Your present address
City, State Zip Code

Date of Letter

Name of Contact
Title of Contact
Name of Organization
Street Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Ms./Mr./Dr. (Name): If you do not have the person's name, try to get it. Call the organization and ask to whom you should address your cover letter. Do not write "Dear Sir or Madam." If necessary, you might address the person by title, "Dear Human Resources 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: 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. If possible, identify a couple of personal qualities that you believe relate to the job and add to your specific skills which 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