

Cover Letter Writing Guide

ASHLAND UNIVERSITY CAREER SERVICES CENTER

254 Hawkins-Conard Student Center

Office Hours: 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

Monday – Friday and by appointment

419.289.5064

www.ashland.edu/career



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What is a Cover Letter? And Other Frequently Asked Questions

A cover letter is a professional business letter which accompanies your resume any time you apply for a position with a potential employer. The only time a cover letter does not accompany a resume is when you attend a job fair or you are bringing your resume to an interview. While a resume states the facts about your education and experiences, a cover letter introduces you to an employer and discusses your qualifications for a position. You should spend a significant amount of time writing your cover letter.

What is the difference between a cover letter and resume?

A cover letter is your first impression; it introduces you and your resume to a potential employer. It is the first document that a recruiter reads and it prepares them for the resume. It should include why you are applying, explain why you are qualified, and provide your contact information. A resume should list your qualifications, experience, skills, and education in an outline form, while a cover letter is written in a narrative form. A cover letter should not include statements from your resume but should highlight and draw attention to unique points in your resume.

A cover letter should also provide:

- In-depth explanation about important skills and qualifications that relate to job requirements.
- Insight to why you are interested in that particular organization and how you will contribute to/support their mission, goals and objectives.
- A sample of your written communication skills.

Why is a cover letter necessary?

Cover letters are one of the most essential components of the screening process. During this phase, applicants only have a few moments to grab the employer's attention. They are looking for qualifications and best fit for the company. The cover letter is your first chance to show the employer that you meet the company's needs. A well written cover letter will motivate an employer to review your resume or invite you for an interview.

Can I use the same cover letter for multiple job applications?

Since every employer is looking for a different set of qualifications and skills, each cover letter should be tailored for each job application. A cover letter should also express why you are interested in that particular organization or how you would be a good fit. You should modify each cover letter to fit the specific needs of each employer. You can start with a model that is easily customized for each application. See page 3 for a sample guideline.

How long is a cover letter?

A good cover letter is written clearly and concisely. It should fit onto one page that includes three specific paragraphs. Use a standard business letter format and **avoid jargon, slang, and contractions**. You can either use your resume heading to create a letter head appearance or use the standard business format. Use the following page to understand more about the format and content of a cover letter. This guide also includes additional tips about style and delivery. You should always have your cover letters reviewed by a trusted advisor, such as a professional in the field, a professor, or a specialist in the Ashland University Career Services Center. Realize that if you ask multiple people, you will get multiple opinions. Take all of the information into consideration and create a letter that represents you accurately and professionally.

Cover Letter Formatting & Style Guidelines

Formatting & Content:

- ◆ Write clearly and concisely, using correct grammar. Avoid jargon, slang, and contractions (i.e.: I'm, Don't, Isn't) and check for spelling errors (do not solely rely on spell check).
- ◆ Always include the name and title of the individual you are sending the letter to, if possible. If a name is not provided in the job description, call the organization or check the organization's website. You could also use other research tools like Reference USA or Career Shift.
- ◆ Be sure to highlight your strengths and key skills that relate to the position in application.
- ◆ Do not repeat statements from your resume.
- ◆ Write in your own voice, do not try to sound like someone that you are not.
- ◆ Close your letter with a request for an interview or the "next step" you are seeking.
- ◆ Exclude personal information, such as: marital status, children, hobbies, birth date, gender, race, height, weight, and health.

Style Tips:

- ◆ Create margins no smaller than 1 inch on all sides.
- ◆ Choose an easy to read font style (i.e. Times Roman, Arial, Arial Narrow, Calibri, Cambria, and Verdana) and size (typically 10-12 pt. depending on font). Preferably, use the font that you used in your resume.
- ◆ Always use black ink.
- ◆ Print on the same professional paper that you used for your resume.

Your street address
Your city, state, zip code

Today's date

Name of person
Title
Business/School
Street address
City, state zip code

Dear Mr., Ms., Dr., or Professor (Last Name):

1st Paragraph

State why you are writing and what you are seeking. Focus on how you will contribute to the organization based on your research of the specific organization (products, services, mission, goals).

You can tell how you learned of the position (a person, advertisement, AU Career Connect, website), if applicable.

The reason why you want to work for that organization and why you would be an asset to them should be clear to the reader.

2nd Paragraph

Cite your qualifications for the position, including: education, experience, skills and necessary qualities.

Incorporate those ideas into this paragraph and back them up with examples, but don't repeat your resume.

Instead allude to the qualifications you possess which will entice the reader to want to look at your resume.

Use language from the job description as you share examples of your work.

Give specific examples and quantify when applicable.

3rd Paragraph

State what documents are enclosed (if applicable) with the letter (i.e. resume, references, writing sample).

Ask for an interview professionally - tell the employer you would like the opportunity.

Provide your contact information and how and/or when you can be reached.

Close with a strong positive statement. Thank them for looking over your materials.

Sincerely,
Your Name Signed

Your Name Typed

Enclosure (if enclosing a document/if sending by U.S. mail)

Cover Letter for Internship Example:

123 ABC Road
Ashland, Ohio 44805

January 4, 20XX

Janet Smith
Lead Designer
Couture Fashions
987 ZYX Drive
Columbus, Ohio 11111

Dear Ms. Smith:

As a third-year student in Fashion Merchandising and Business Administration, I am interested in contributing my skills in merchandising and sales through an internship with Couture Fashions. The Visual Merchandise and Sales Internship that was posted on the AU Career Connect Recruiting Database is the type of position that would not only allow me to contribute my skills, but would also offer the opportunity to work for an award-winning designer.

While working on my degree at Ashland University, I have increased my knowledge and experience in fashion, business, and communication. I have also completed coursework in textiles and merchandising, as required for the internship. My sales experience was strengthened as a result of my work as a Sales Associate at The Fashion Boutique. Skills in money management, customer service, and persuasive communication are areas of strength I would contribute to your internship. At The Fashion Boutique I had the opportunity to dress windows and create displays, which has further developed my passion for merchandising. I have developed excellent time management and interpersonal skills through my on campus employment, involvement in two honor societies and volunteerism while maintaining high academic standards. Through these experiences I have created various marketing materials, developed strong technology skills, and collaborated with my peers on a wide range of creative projects. The combination of my fashion merchandising knowledge and experience, as well as my leadership skills, would make me an excellent candidate for your internship.

Enclosed is a copy of my resume and references. I would like to discuss my qualifications with you in greater detail. I can be reached at (555)121-1234 or astudent@ashland.edu. I am very interested in becoming a contributing member at Couture Fashions as your summer intern. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Ashland Student

Ashland Student

Enclosure

Cover Letter for Full-time Position Example:

Ashland Graduate

123 ABC Road Ashland, OH 44805

(555)121-3434

astudent@ashland.edu

April 20, 20XX

John Smith
HR Administrator
Environmental Resource Management
987 ZYX Drive
Smithville, Ohio 11111

Dear Mr. Smith:

Your recent job posting for a Research Associate with Environmental Resource Management listed on EnvironmentalCareer.com is an exciting opportunity that would be great match for my skills. After reviewing your website and researching your organization, I have become very interested in a position with your Environmental Research Department. I strongly believe in your mission to provide high quality service to the community. My education and experience in scientific research is relevant to what you are seeking.

My excellent academic record in Environmental Science along with my minor in Biology has prepared me for a career in environmental research. During my undergraduate career I completed a great deal of laboratory and field experience in biology and chemistry. I worked with a variety of test samples, examined specimens, and entered all of my findings into databases for analysis. My internship with XYZ National Park offered me the chance to join a team of three people to conduct extensive fieldwork in outdoor labs to assess water chemistry. Not only did I gain valuable research experience, such as collecting and analyzing data; but, I also developed teamwork, communication, and time management skills. I am eager to begin a career in research, and I would bring my strong work ethic and passion for science to Environmental Resource Management.

I have enclosed my resume that further outlines my skills, academic achievements, and experience. I hope that we can discuss in person my background and qualifications and how they will be a benefit to your organization and this position. I can be reached at (555)121-1234 or astudent@ashland.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ashland Graduate

Ashland Graduate

Enclosure

Reference Page

References are individuals who can provide information to potential employers about your abilities, skills, accomplishments, and potential as a future employee. Employers will request a reference page so that they can speak with references on your list to find out more about your qualifications and employment history.

A reference page is a professional document; it should accompany your resume as a ***separate document***. It should include your resume heading, contact information and 3-5 individuals who you have asked to serve as references, including their contact information.

Who should you ask to be a reference?

These should be people who can speak positively about your skills, accomplishments, and experience. Only include individuals that you believe will provide a strong and supportive impression. They should be people who have seen you in action, both inside or outside the classroom.

Consider asking:

- Employers or supervisors
- Faculty or academic advisors
- Internship and volunteer supervisors

Do not ask:

- Relatives and significant others
- Friends
- Co-workers
- Anyone who would speak poorly about your past experience

How do you ask individuals to serve as a reference?

Before including anyone on your reference page, always ask if they would be willing to serve as a reference for you. *As a general courtesy, you should also:*

- Provide them with a copy of your resume and let them know what experience you have gained since your last interaction
- Ask them to provide a phone number and email address in which they preferred to be contacted
- Let them know the types of jobs you are looking for and potential leads; keep them updated during your search
- Send a thank you note for agreeing to be your reference
- Once you have obtained the position thank them again

What should a reference page look like?

Begin at the top of the page with your name and contact information. You can use the heading of your resume. List your references on one sheet of paper and include all of their contact information, including: Name, Title, Organization, Address, Phone Number, Email, and Relationship to you. *For example:*

Dr. John Doe
Assistant Professor of Marketing
Ashland University, College of Business
401 College Avenue
Ashland, Ohio 44805
419.555.1212 • jdoe@ashland.edu
(Faculty Advisor and Internship Supervisor)

Delivering Your Cover Letter

When you have completed your cover letter and resume and have had it reviewed by a trusted advisor, it is time to send it to prospective employers. If you are applying for a specific position, adhere to the directions provided by the employer. Most employers will ask that you send a cover letter and reference page with the resume and/or application. For more information about writing resumes please see our **Resume Writing Guide**, found in the Career Services Center or online at www.ashland.edu/career.

Sending your Cover Letter Electronically:

If the employer has requested that you send your application through email or an online application system, follow these guidelines:

- Make sure that each document is saved as a separate document.
- If you are using Microsoft Office, save it as a 97-2003 Doc. (Not all employers have the updated version). You can also send your document as a PDF to ensure that the file can be read without any manipulation.
- When you save your cover letter, name the file professionally or use your name, for example: **E.Eagle.Resume** or **ErinEagle_CoverLetter** *Be sure to indicate which document in the title.*
- Make sure to send all of your attachments in one email, do not send them separately.
- Be sure to include text in the body of the e-mail that mentions the position being applied for, how you found out about the position, and that your cover letter and resume is attached. For security reasons, many people are weary of opening attachments; a blank e-mail with attachments may be deleted.

Printing your Cover Letter:

If the employer has requested that you send your cover letter and resume through U.S. Mail, follow these guidelines:

- Always print with black ink
- Print on professional paper, found in the CSC, Bookstore, Office Supply Stores, or Printing Services.
- Be sure that the text is large enough to read (no smaller than 10-12 font size).
- Make sure that no text has spilled off of the page; margins should be at least ½ inch to avoid that error.
- Do NOT turn in a document that has ink smudges, tears, crinkles, or stains.
- Do NOT staple your cover letter and resume together, instead use a paper clip to hold your documents together.

How Can the Career Services Center Help?

The Career Services Center offers a variety of services to assist students and alumni on career related topics. These services include the following:

Career Coaching Services – The Career Services Center provides assistance in the areas of self-assessment, career exploration, and next destination planning through individual appointments.

Job Search Assistance – Workshops are scheduled on topics including: resume and cover letter writing, interviewing techniques and job search strategies. You can also meet individually with a staff member to discuss your individual job search. Career Services staff can teach you to use social networks such as Facebook and Twitter to connect with professional communities and promote yourself around the web.

Resume and Cover Letter Assistance – Staff members are available to assist you in developing and enhancing your resume and cover letter to ensure these documents are marketing you in the best way possible. A separate cover letter guide is available at www.ashland.edu/career or stop by the Career Services Center to pick up a copy.

Mock Interviews – Students have the opportunity to participate in mock interviews, which are digitally recorded and reviewed for strengths and weaknesses. To schedule a mock interview, contact the Career Services Center at 419.289.5064.

SOAR (Seeking Opportunities and Achieving Results) – Established during the 2011-2012 academic year, this network of alumni and friends is available for current students who are seeking career information and advice. To learn more about SOAR or to request someone to network with, contact the Career Services Center at 419.289.5064.

Career Resource Room – A variety of career-related information is available for student and alumni use. Materials are also available to assist individuals with resume writing, job search techniques, and interview skills. Computers and printers for career-related activities are located in the Resource Room for student and alumni use. In addition, Career Assistants, who are student paraprofessionals, work with individuals on a walk-in basis and help them with career research, resume and cover letter development, and job search options.

Alumni Services – Alumni are encouraged to take full advantage of the services provided by the Career Services Center.

Career Services Center Website – All students and alumni are encouraged to visit our site on a regular basis at www.ashland.edu/career.

Job Search Services – In addition to the services mentioned above, the Career Services Center provides a variety of job search services which can be of assistance to students and alumni. These services include the AU Career Connect Recruiting Database, job fairs, mock interviews, Reference USA, Career Shift, Going Global and Eagle Exploration.

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