

# COVER LETTER GUIDE

## PURPOSE

A cover letter is typically your first formal communication with a potential employer. It is used to introduce yourself and demonstrate to the employer how the skills and experiences presented on your resume align with the position you are applying to.

## FORMATTING GUIDELINES

- Business letter format
- Block paragraphs, not indented
- One page in length maximum
- Margins between .5" and 1"
- Typeface, font size, and margins consistent with resume formatting

## HEADER

In your header, include today's date and mailing information for both you and the employer. In lieu of typing out your mailing address at the top of the page, you may consider including the header from your resume.

Do your best to avoid addressing your cover letter with "To whom it may concern" or "Dear Hiring Committee". If the position description does not tell you who to address the cover letter to, try browsing their website or call their HR department and ask.

### EXAMPLE (STANDARD HEADER / RESUME HEADER)

#### MIRANDA SHAW

Providence, RI | 401-555-2345 | miranda.shaw@salve.edu

Date

Mr./Ms./Dr. Recruiter's Full Name

Recruiter's Title

Department Name

Company Name

Street Address

City, State Zip Code

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

-OR- RE: Position Title: (only if you can't find the recruiter's name)

## BEFORE YOU WRITE

### CONTENT

Cover letters introduce the reader to your personality, so they should supplement your resume, not reiterate it. Think about what you have learned from your experiences and why you are passionate about this particular opportunity and use that to guide your writing.

### TAILORING

Just like with your resume, you want to tailor your cover letter to the position you are applying for rather than sending a generic cover letter to each job you apply for. Think about what experiences and skill sets the employer will be interested in and refer to the position description.

### OUTLINING

Having a well-organized cover letter that reiterates your main points throughout helps ensure they stick with the reader. A common structure to use when writing a cover letter is the 5-paragraph essay. While it does not need to be exactly 5 paragraphs, a strong thesis statement in your introduction and well organized supporting paragraphs make your cover letter easy for the reader to skim. Keep in mind that not all employers may have time to read your cover letter word-for-word. It may be helpful to you to outline your main points and organize your thoughts before writing.

### EXAMPLE

#### Generic Statement

"I know my experiences and skills make me an excellent candidate for this position."

#### Specific Statement (Better)

"In this position with Mentor Foundation USA, I will use my background in social media marketing, and my experience as a mentor and student leader to help promote engagement and reduce substance abuse among youth."

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Updated Fall 2018



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## INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

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Your introductory paragraph serves to outline your cover letter for the reader. If the employer reads only your introduction and nothing else, they should still have a good sense of your main points. Your introduction should include the following pieces of information:

**1. State the job you are applying to**

This ensures that if the organization is hiring for multiple positions, they will know which position you are applying to if your resume and cover letter accidentally get separated from the rest of your application. This also serves to reiterate your interest in the position.

**2. Tell the employer how you heard about this position**

While the employer does not need to know what website you found their position on (unless they ask specifically), this is a good time to emphasize any personal connection you have to their organization. If someone from inside the organization recommended that you apply, this is where you should name drop.

**3. Briefly explain why you are interested in/qualified for this specific opportunity**

You should address this in one or two sentences; you can go into more depth in your body paragraphs. Be sure to refer to the position description when writing this part. Do you have specific skills and experiences that match what they are looking for? Is there something about this organization or opportunity that specifically excites you? This should be uniquely tailored to the job you are applying to.

**4. Briefly outline the main points that you are going to address in your body paragraph(s)**

The last sentence (or few sentences) of your introductory paragraph should serve as a thesis statement, or a mini outline for the rest of your letter. For example, if you are going to have two body paragraphs, one that emphasizes your academic work and one that discusses your past internship experience, the last sentence of your introductory paragraph should address both of those. E.g. "Through my academic coursework in cultural and historic preservation and the hands on experience I gained through past internships, I will be able to..."

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## BODY PARAGRAPH(S)

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Your body paragraphs should each be distinct and well organized. You can include as few as one paragraph, or as many as you like (that will reasonably fit on a page), depending on how many main points you want to address. Each body paragraph should elaborate on the brief points you made in your introduction, and provide specific examples and support as to why you are a good candidate for this position. Use the position description to help you organize your paragraphs and discuss experiences that seem to match up well with the job requirements. Be sure to include the following pieces of information in each body paragraph:

**1. Begin with a topic sentence that summarizes the main point of that paragraph**

If an employer only reads the first sentence of each paragraph, they should know what that paragraph is about. For example if you start a paragraph with, "Through my internship at the Newport Art Museum, I...", the employer knows that you will be discussing your internship in this paragraph. If you want to discuss something other than this specific internship (like a second internship, academic coursework, extra-curricular activities, etc.), you should do so in a new paragraph, or change your topic sentence to address the multiple items.

**2. Each main point you address should be tied back into the position you are applying to**

Even if it seems obvious, tie everything you write back to the position you are applying to. State the position and organization by name. For example, if you have written a paragraph about your internship experiences, you should include a sentence about how you can use the skills you learned from that internship at this specific company. Be as specific as possible and show that you've read the position description and done your research into the organization.

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## CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH

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The conclusion of your cover letter should reiterate your main points to make sure they stick with the reader. Be sure to include the following in your conclusion:

- 1. Thank the employer**  
If you haven't already, take the time to thank the employer for considering you for this position.
- 2. Restate the position you are applying to**  
This affirms your interest in that specific position and shows the reader that this is not a generic cover letter you send to multiple jobs.
- 3. Briefly restates your main points**  
In a sentence or two, summarize the main points in your body paragraph. This ensures that they stick with the reader.
- 4. Provide your contact information (even if it is at the top of the page)**  
You should include a sentence with your email and telephone number. You might also include the best times to reach you and/or your availability to start working if needed.

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## PLAGIARISM AND USING SAMPLES

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If you are using a sample cover letter to help you start writing, be sure to **use your own words** and show your unique personality. Do not simply remove the words from the sample cover letter that do not apply to you and plug in your own. A quick Google search will alert an employer that the writing is not your own. **If you would like a sample cover letter to reference, the Office of Career Development is happy to provide one, with the understanding that you will use it as a reference only and your cover letter writing will be your own.**

