



A cover letter is a document sent with your resume to provide additional information on your skills and experience. It is a tool to help introduce yourself in a memorable, personal way during a job application. Although you will need a unique cover letter for each job you apply to, this guide provides a general formula for writing them and a template at the end.

### Getting Started

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1. Read the job description, underlining the skills, tasks, and qualifications stated in the description.
2. Write down answers to the following questions:
  - What have I done – through prior work and volunteer experiences and courses or trainings – that demonstrates that I possess the underlined skills and qualifications and can do the tasks required? Write down specific examples.
  - What transferable skills do I have that would allow me to excel in this job?
  - What is it that energizes and interests me when I think about myself in this position at this organization?
  - In what ways is this organization's mission consistent with my own philosophy and goals?
3. Start writing your letter, using the Cover Letter Template if you find it helpful. Cover letters generally require several edits to get them to say effectively what you want them to say. If you are stuck on an opening sentence, move beyond that and start writing where you can. You can fill in and edit your letter later.

### Editing Your Draft

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- Once you have a rough draft, go back to the job description to check that you have indeed addressed the most important tasks and qualifications for the job.
- Read the letter as if you were the employer. Ask yourself the following:
  - If I were hiring for this position, does this letter tell me enough about the candidate to convince me that she wants to do *this* job? As opposed to being desperate for any job?
  - Is she truly interested in this organization and does she seem to understand what we are about?

- Does she have the necessary background and skills to do job, or do I think she could learn quickly?
- Are you writing from the perspective of what's in it for the employer? If all your paragraphs and sentences begin with "I", this might be an indication that you are writing more about what's in it for you. Try to rework your letter so you show what you can do for them, rather than how the position would be a good fit for you.
- Revise and edit as needed. Reread your letter word for word, frontward and backward looking for typos. Read the letter out loud. Spellcheck doesn't catch every typo or grammatical error. Typos in cover letters reflect upon your attention to detail. Check carefully and have friends proofread your letters as well.

## General Rules to Follow

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Good cover letters...

...are addressed to someone specific.

...clearly state what job you are interested in and how you heard about it.

...draw a direct link between what they need and how your skills and experience will meet that need.

...highlight transferable skills and specific strengths. Employers will be reading your materials to see if you demonstrate the potential to do the job and/or to grow into it, even if you don't have actual experience doing that type of work.

...reflect your knowledge of the company. Research who they are, what they take pride in, and find connections between their vision and your values, skills, and/or goals.

...reflect your attitude, personality, motivation, and enthusiasm.

...briefly explain why you're interested in the position. Explain how this position fits into your larger career goals but be sure to be brief and keep the focus on how you can serve the company not how they can serve you.

...are typo-free and both you and a friend have proofread them. Look for spelling, grammatical, and formatting errors.

...are one page, are well-formatted with a readable font (10-12) and have sufficient margins.

## Cover Letter Template

Your Name

Street Address *\*Most employers correspond via email and phone. A street address is not critical for either your resume or cover letter, instead simply list the city and state. A street address can actually be a way for employers to make pre-judgments about you depending on where you live (a low-income neighborhood, a subsidized housing development, or a notably wealthy area). Also, a neat way to link your resume and cover letter is to use an identically formatted header (with your name, city, state, phone number, email) on both, like a letterhead.*

City, State Zip Code

Phone Number

Email address

Date

Individual's Name, Job Title

Name of Organization

Street Address

City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Jones:

*\*Ideally you have someone specific to address the letter to – do some research and ask around. Not having the name of the person shows the business you don't care enough about the job to do a little research. If you really can't find the person's name, you can write "Dear Hiring Director/Team/Committee."*

**First Paragraph:** Clearly state what job you are applying for and where you saw the posting. Did anyone refer you? Include their name only if they would be able to put in a good word for you. Give a succinct explanation of why you are interested in the position – you'll go into more detail later – and express your enthusiasm! "I am excited about this position because I believe strongly in your restaurant's commitment to local food. I feel that my two years of experience as a prep cook and my team-oriented attitude make me a good fit for your kitchen."

**Second Paragraph:** Provide more details about your professional and/or academic qualifications. Use examples of experience, skills, and achievements to express how you can specifically fulfill the position responsibilities. Use action verbs and numbers (when possible) to expand on specific items from your resume that are relevant to the job you are seeking. Focus on your transferrable skills and directly respond to skills or requirements listed in the job posting. Do a bit of homework and demonstrate that you know enough about the employer or position to relate your background to the employer and position.

**Optional Paragraph:** Insert a short paragraph here to make note of anything that an employer might see as odd about your resume but you are easily able to explain. For example, if you haven't worked for a while: "Please note that I have spent the past year caring for an ill family member, but I am excited to get back to work." If you have a gap in your work history due to incarceration, or there's something else on your resume that would be similarly difficult to succinctly explain in a cover letter, don't mention it at all but be ready to talk about it in a positive way in an interview.

**Third Paragraph:** Give a strong conclusion about why you are a perfect fit for the job. If this job falls into your larger career goals, this is a good place to talk about that. Indicate that you would like the opportunity to interview for the position and state what you will do to follow up. Let them know you would be glad to provide the employer with any additional information needed. Write a gracious closing sentence, such as: "Thank you for your time, I will call your office next week to follow up on my application."

Sincerely,

Your Name Typed