



Cover Letter Quick Guide

Introduction: What is a Cover Letter?

Cover letter and resume – these documents usually go hand in hand when applying for jobs.

A cover letter does more than just introduce you and your resume. It compliments, not duplicates, the content in your resume to share why you are the candidate for the job. It is one of the very first documents the hiring manager views, so a cover letter is very important to making a first impression. A cover letter is sometimes optional, but providing one shows your genuine interest in the job because it requires time and thought. It is a great opportunity to provide a preview into your skills and qualifications. It's also a time to showcase your writing skills!

Along with providing an introduction, a cover letter serves several other purposes:

To share key accomplishments/experiences | Because your resume is formatted in bullet points rather than full sentences, a cover letter is the ideal place to share more fully some of your best professional accomplishments and experiences that shaped you into the professional you are today. How do these make you the right fit for the position? What experiences have you encountered? What significant tasks were you assigned? What do you bring and how does it relate to what the company/organization needs? Through your cover letter, you can call attention to specific elements in your resume in greater detail.

To showcase top qualities/skills | A cover letter is the ideal place for you to talk about your strongest qualities, whether it be your technical, communication, or analytical skills. You will engage the reader more if you share these skills in the form of a quick 3-part story: What was the issue? What did *you* do to solve the problem? What was the result? Be sure that these skills are mentioned in your resume. The best skills to highlight are the skills that would be most useful performing the job for which you are applying. Use the job description or posting to pick out key words/skills that are most important. For example, if you are applying to a nursing position, you do not want to highlight your art skills. It would be better to focus on your active listening and communication skills.

To express genuine interest | Show the employer you are genuinely interested in working for that company: address the letter to the hiring manager/company and say

how your goals are aligned with the organization's goals, meaning that your efforts upon employment will be to edify the company.

To initiate further communication | After showing genuine interest, take it a step further and let the reader know how you can be reached, should the hiring manager be interested in moving forward with your application.

A cover letter is a great way to portray your skills and your professionalism. Take advantage of this great tool and use it to make a great impression.

Types of Cover Letters

There are two major types of cover letters and both are used very differently:

Application Letter | This is the most common type of cover letter. You are writing to apply to a job advertisement. Openly advertised positions are easier to apply for because the employer clearly states the qualifications and requirements of the job. However, there is more competition for these positions, so your cover letter may give you that extra edge.

Letter of Interest | This is an informational interview on paper. Your main purpose is to see if there are any open positions that have not been advertised to the public and to learn more about the organization. By contacting the employer first, you are showing initiative and determination. In this letter, you should state why the company and industry interests you and what skills/experiences you can bring to be an asset to the company. It helps to be specific – indicate which department and position are most interesting to you. That way, your letter of interest can be forwarded to the appropriate person.

Format: Short and Sweet

A cover letter is brief and to the point. It is not an autobiography or a chance for you to explain everything from A to Z. Remember, you only have a few seconds to grasp the reader's attention, so you don't want to intimidate him/her with a three page essay. Below are a few things you should keep in mind when writing a cover letter, followed by a few sample letters.

White Space | You don't ever want to submit a cover letter (or resume) that looks too busy (lots of text or crammed). Be cautious and add spaces between paragraphs. Also, keep your paragraphs short and your margin size between three quarters and one inch and three quarters ($\frac{3}{4}$ " – $1\frac{1}{4}$ ").

Three-Quarters | Be mindful of the length. A cover letter that is three quarters or 75% of the page is a safe length but definitely no more than one page. This is a good way to

show that you can be clear, concise, and to the point. On the other hand, a cover letter that is three lines long is invaluable and pointless because it lacks substantial content related to your application.

Font | Select a clean, professional font for your cover letter. Times New Roman, Arial, and Tahoma are always safe choices for any professional document. As for the font size, 11pt to 12pt is good. If need be, 10pt font is acceptable, but anything smaller than 10pt is difficult to read. The standard black font color is the best, and no special formats are required (ex: **bold**, *italics*, underline, ~~strikethrough~~, ^{superscript}, _{subscript}, ALL CAPS).

Consistency | Whatever format you choose, be sure to keep it consistent with your resume and any other application material you submit. You want the reader to feel that he/she is reading the same person's resume and cover letter.

There are various formats for cover letters. There is no correct way – it is whatever format you feel most comfortable with. Select a format that is clean, professional, and easy to read.

Before You Begin to Write Your Cover Letter...

- ***Get the name (and gender) of the hiring manager or internal recruiter.*** Do not use “To Whom it may concern”. One way that you can get this information is by doing a People Search on LinkedIn. You also could do a Google Search, make a phone call, or go to the company/organization's website.
- ***Do the research.*** What exactly is doing the research?
 - Finding the values of the company/organization
 - Learning the company/organization's history
 - Identifying its major clients
 - Learning its employment needs and hiring trends
 - Reading through the website, particularly its recent news
 - Finding out the hiring trends within the industry

After Writing the Cover Letter ...

- ***Print the cover letter in order to see what will actually be submitted.***
- ***Check for:***
 - Correct alignment
 - Misspellings & Grammatical errors
 - Run-on sentences
 - Correct address and names being used
 - Your signature
 - The date
- ***Have someone read your cover letter for a second opinion.***

Organization & Content: Application Letter/Template

FirstName LastName

Your Street Address

City, State Zip Code

(3 spaces)

Month Day, Year

(2 spaces)

Mr./Miss/Dr. FirstName LastName or ATTN: Hiring Manager

NAME OF COMPANY/ORGANIZATION

Street or P.O. Box Address

City, State Zip Code

(2 spaces)

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. LastName:

(2 spaces)

[Introduction] Explain why you're writing the cover letter. For which job are you applying? At what organization/company? Where and when [ex: website or newspaper with month and date] did you find this position? State the exact position title and, if provided, the reference number. A strong, impactful closing sentence usually states why you are highly qualified for this job.

(2 spaces)

[Body- 1 to 2 paragraphs] In this paragraph, you should go in-depth about your strongest qualities that will make you successful if hired for the job. If you are unsure as to which skill to highlight, revisit the job description and see what the main duties/qualifications are. Mention specific qualifications stated in the job ad which make you a good fit for the employer's needs. This is also a great place to explain in detail your accomplishments – was there a problem and how did you fix it? What was the result? Tell why you are interested in the employer or the profession/field/industry. Relate your background to the employer or position. Expand on transferable skills that are on your resume. Include a sentence that demonstrates you have conducted some research on the company/organization. Note its focus or mission.

(2 spaces)

[Closing] Thank the reader for his/her consideration. You can also use this space to very briefly reiterate two or three top qualities. Passively mention that you would be interested in meeting to further discuss your unique qualifications (meaning you want an interview). Also, let the reader know how you can be contacted and when.

(3 spaces)

Sincerely, [*Sincerely is the safest and most recommended closing to use.*]

[5 spaces; *Your handwritten signature here if you are mailing a hard copy*]

Your typed name

More Tips on the ‘Body’ Section of the Cover Letter

The body of the cover letter is the focal point- the place where you grab the reader’s attention to *your* resume.

Here are four main things to remember:

1. **Keep the cover letter at one page, with three to four paragraphs. Be concise.**
2. **In the first paragraph:**
 - **Show your enthusiasm in the first sentence. Then tell how you heard about the position.** Provide the name of the person who referred you, if applicable. Tell why the company/organization appeals to you. If someone is recommending you, then make reference to him/her and the positive things said of the company/organization. Make sure you get their permission first before putting them in your cover letter.
3. **In the second to third paragraph:**
 - **“Connect the dots for the employer”** Show how your interest led you to applying for the company/organization’s position. Explain this in relation to seeking the position, be specific and make connections when you can.
 - **Show that you can fulfill the key requirements outlined in the job description**, talking directly to the employer. Explain how your academics, work, volunteer and/or extracurricular experience make you qualified for the position and/or a good match for the organization/company. One way to do this is by quantifying your accomplishments.
 - Try to include additional information instead of repeating information from your resume. If you do include information from your resume, word it differently.
 - **State how and what you are going to contribute to the company/organization.** How will you make things better for your manager/supervisor?
 - **Be careful not to use the word “I” too often!**
 - To make your cover letter even more unique, share your passions related to the type of work for which you are applying and what events in your life have led you to your current job/career pursuit.
 - Show what soft skills you have with an example. The Oxford Dictionary defines soft skills as “personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people.”
4. **In the last paragraph:**
 - **Let the employer know your desire for the interview.** Provide a time that you will make a follow-up call and actually make that call. Leave all contact information for him/her in case there are further questions. Thank the person for the time considering your qualifications.
 - **Avoid “I look forward to hearing from you” and “Please feel free to call...”;** these are presumptuous.
 - At the end of the letter, be assertive. In a sentence, remind the employer that you would be a great asset to the company and why.

Cover Letter Sample: Application Letter

Wilamena Workhard
123 Fourth Street
Rockville, MD 20850

May 26, 2014

ATTN: Mr. Sam Flowers, Human Resources
Universities at Shady Grove Hospital
25765 Internet Lane
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Mr. Flowers:

I am grateful to be applying for the Patient Access Rep 1 position posted on indeed.com. As a recent graduate of an administrative medical assistant program, I am eager to contribute to a team of professionals, applying what I have learned and delivering quality health care services. With my past work as a medical receptionist and in clerical and retail positions, I can say that I am equipped well to fulfill the Patient Access Rep 1 position at Universities at Shady Grove Hospital.

Each day at ABC Health Care, I grew in how to provide good customer service and in how to facilitate a smooth operation of the office. I made sure of each patient (old or new) having a positive experience. At the front desk, I gave each person my full attention and prepared him/her for the visit by pulling his/her chart and verifying form of payment as quickly as possible. Before the patients' arrival, I ensured that the rooms were clean and neat. This is just a glimpse of my daily experience at ABC Health Care. My total experience- with the office manager being a good trainer in the order of things- allowed me to grow to total independence in completing the day-to-day duties and in problem solving. Having a smooth operation with a smile on my face was not a painful effort.

I am ready to work and willing to learn, bringing my best daily to the patients and to the team. Enclosed is my resume. If you have any questions or would like to set an appointment for an interview, please email me at ABC123@school.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to discussing the position with you!

Sincerely,

(Make 5 spaces here and include handwritten or electronic signature.)

Wilamena Workhard

Organization & Content: Letter of Interest/Template

The content of the letter of interest cover letter has the same essential pieces, just different content in some of the sections:

Your Information | Full name, Address, Email, Phone Number (this information should match the information on your resume)

(3 spaces)

Date

(2 spaces)

Recipient/Employer's Information | Hiring Manager's Name (if applicable), Company Name, Address

(2 spaces)

Salutation | Examples of appropriate salutations: 'Dear [Recipient's Name]' or 'Dear Hiring Manager'

(2 spaces)

Introduction Paragraph | Explain why you're writing the cover letter. Why are you interested in this specific company? What draws you to it? Be specific in what your interest are – what is your academic/professional background? What department and position are you interested in? Somewhere in this paragraph, you want to state that you're writing to inquire about open positions.

(2 spaces)

Body Paragraph | In this paragraph, you should go in-depth about your strongest qualities that will make you successful at that company. Because there is not set of qualifications or requirements given to you by the employer, think about which of your skills are going to be most important for that company.

(2spaces)

Closing Paragraph | Thank the reader for his/her time and consideration. You can also use this space to very briefly reiterate two or three top qualities. Passively mention that you would be interested in meeting to learn more about the company and open positions. Also, let the reader know how and when you can be contacted.

(3 spaces)

Closing | 'Sincerely' is the safest and most recommended closing to use.

(5 spaces- Your signature goes here)

Signature | A hand signed cover letter is recommended, but you may type your name if it is electronic.

Cover Letter Sample: Letter of Interest

Erin Johnson
777 Lucky Drive
Rockville, MD 20850

February 14, 2014

WAUSAU FINANCIALS
ATTN: Mr. Tom Benson
4148 Arizona Avenue
Columbia, MD 21041

Dear Mr. Benson:

I am interested in finance and would like to inquire about open positions at Wausau Financials. Wausau Financials has been regarded as one of the best companies at which recent graduates can start and build their career path. I would be interested in learning more about the company and about available opportunities as an analyst in the budgeting department.

I have a Bachelor's degree in finance from Maryland University and have completed coursework that will allow me to be successful as a budget analyst. In addition, I completed two internships focusing on finance and spent a summer work for Hedge Fund Corporation at its New York City headquarters.

My resume, which is enclosed, contains additional information on my experience and skills. I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss more about entry level analyst positions with you or another team member. I can be reached via my cell phone (555-555-5555) or by email at erin.johnson@aol.com. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to speaking with you about this exciting opportunity.

Sincerely,

(Handwritten or electronic signature goes here)

Erin Johnson