

Cover Letter Writing Guide 2017-2018

What is a cover letter?

A cover letter is a one-page narrative used to introduce yourself, express your interest in a particular position or scholarship, explain your most relevant skills/knowledge/experiences to that opportunity and request an interview. The cover letter:

- Should be positive, clear, succinct and informative
- Serves as a writing sample so proper formatting, grammar, spelling and punctuation are critical
- Should motivate and persuade the reader to reach out for an interview to learn more about you

After reading a cover letter, the reader should understand the strengths and experiences you would bring to a particular position, as well as, a bit about why you are enthusiastic about the position.

Is a cover letter required?

The only time you should not include a cover letter is when a job or internship posting specifically states not to, which is rare. Even if the posting does not state that one is required, you should write a cover letter since it is great way to distinguish yourself from other applicants. The cover letter is your chance to share your story and to state your top “selling points” that relate to a potential employer’s needs.

It is imperative that you tailor each cover letter to the position description or opportunity you are seeking. Show that you have thoroughly read the position description and requirements and specifically state how your most relevant knowledge, skills and/or experiences would be a benefit in this role. By doing so, you indicate your respect for the opportunity, the organization, and the reader’s time.

Cover letter basics

A cover letter is professional correspondence and needs to conform to an appropriate block style format – left justified and single spaced except for a double space between paragraphs.

- **Create a “letterhead template”** using the format of the top of your resume with contact information.
 - Use an easy to read font that matches your resume in 11 or 12 point.
- **Use accurate contact information.** Recipients will use the information you provide so list an email and phone that you check and use regularly. Make sure you have a professional email and voicemail greeting and that you answer your phone professionally during your job search.
- **Margins** should be no smaller than .8 inches – the same as your resume.
- **Determine to whom to address the letter** if the information isn’t provided.
 - Use your investigative skills – if the posting says “send resumes to tdavis@company” or “apply to “HR Director”, visit the organization’s website or search LinkedIn to identify their full name
 - Use a professional salutation - “Dear Dr. Davis, Mr. Davis, or Ms. Davis:” – if you cannot find a name use “Dear Hiring Manager,”
- Avoid exclamation marks, humor, slang, exaggeration, abbreviations or smiley faces
- **Proof, proof, and proof again.** You don’t want the reader to think you are careless in your work. Use grammarly.com or another service if you are not a good proofreader. Read it out loud, slowly.

Outlining and Writing the Cover letter

Your writing should be in an active, confident voice and provide clear, concise examples. Vary sentence structure so every sentence doesn't begin with "I." Don't mention or apologize for any experience you feel you are lacking. Avoid using overused phrases like "contact me at your earliest convenience" or "I desire to be a member of your team". Remember that at least 80% of your letter should be **about what you bring that is valuable to the specific position**. Less than 20% should be about what you hope to gain from the experience.

- **Thoroughly review the position description**, including what experiences, skills and qualities the organization is seeking. Take note of preferred and required qualifications and use the most relevant ones in your cover letter and resume. If a good description of the organization is not provided, visit their website to understand the mission, client/product base, locations, and goals of the organization.
 - Identify the parts of the position qualifications that best describe your experiences and strengths.
 - If there are parts of the position description that you do not understand, contact internship and career development to ask or reach out to an alumnae in the industry to learn more.
- Outline your cover letter to focus on how the skills developed through your experiences will transfer to being successful in the position.
 - **Introductory Paragraph #1.** Indicate **the position** you are applying for and how you learned of it (if you have a unique connection to the organization, role, etc.) Provide a brief statement of the **top 2-3 reasons you are a good fit** for the position. Think of it as the thesis/topic sentence for the letter. Limit this first paragraph to 3 -4 sentences.
 - Note: Marketing, communications and writing positions often value a creative opening where you link yourself to the position/organization with a relevant introduction. For example, if the role is to be part of a sales team, the applicant might open with something about their competitive spirit or history in team sports.
 - **Supporting Paragraph #2.** In the next paragraph (5 or so sentences), support your topic sentence by providing the proof for why it is true. Highlight your 2-3 best examples of your relevant knowledge/skills/experience with more detail than what is on your resume and explain how these relate to the position.
 - **Closing Paragraph #3.** In your closing paragraph, **state your interest in the position** and **indicate that your resume is attached for their review** (and any other materials they require.)
 - When stating your interest in the position, it is most effective to state a reason that is beneficial to both parties. For example, "I am interested in further developing my experience in applied math" is beneficial to both. In contrast, "I believe this job will be good experience for my application for graduate school" is more self-serving.
 - Encourage them to reach out to you with questions or to arrange an interview. **Indicate that you hope to hear from them soon. Thank him or her** for their time and consideration of your application.
- **Always proof and PDF your cover letter before emailing**, unless the application specifically asks for a Word document (same with your resume) to preserve formatting.
- **Always include your cover letter with your resume.** When emailing, you can attach it separately or use it as the email's content when attaching your resume (cut and paste it into the email body).

Scottie Smith

ssmith@agnesscott.edu | 404.989.7000

Month Day, Year (for example: July 30, 2017)

Dr./Mr./Ms. First and Last Name

Title

Company/Organization Name

Organization Street Address

City, ST Zip Code

Dear Dr./Mr./Ms. Last name, or Dear Hiring Manager,

Introductory Paragraph #1: (3-4 sentences)

- State **Position** you are applying for and how you learned of it
- Briefly state **why** you are interested in this position
- **Topic Sentence - top 2-3 reasons you are a good fit** for the position

Supporting Paragraph #2: (5 – 6 sentences)

- Support your topic sentence by highlighting 2-3 of your best examples of academic, campus/service or internship/work experience related to the position to which you are applying
- Build on, as opposed to repeat, details from your resume
- State skills, knowledge or experience you have that the employer needs and the position requires

Closing paragraph #3: (3-4 sentences)

- Restate your interest in the position
- Indicate resume is attached
- Encourage them to reach out to you and express thanks for consideration

Sincerely,

Your First and Last Name