



Cover Letter Guidelines

Why are cover letters important?

- Create a first impression for the employer, ensure it is a strong one.
- Demonstrates the candidate's commitment to the position.
- Provides a sample of the candidate's written communication skills.
- Shows the candidate's understanding of the role and how their skills align.
- Convinces the employer that the candidate can do the job.

How to write a cover letter:

- Read the job description carefully. Tailor your document to what the employer is seeking.
- Identify 2-3 skills listed in the job description that align with your strengths. Provide concrete examples of how you have demonstrated each skill in past experiences.
- Incorporate language and/or key words from the job description to make it easy for the hiring manager to find the skills he/she is looking for.
- Show you have done your research on the organization / you are not sending a generic document by including some information/details specific to the company.

Cover letter tips:

- A good cover letter compliments your resume. It does not simply repeat the information found on your resume.
- A cover letter is a business letter and should be written in a formal tone. However, you want to ensure that you engage the audience, therefore do not shy away from injecting personality or including a short personal story if it will help connect you with the employer and is relevant to the proposed position.
- When possible, address the letter to a specific person rather than using a generic greeting. Use the correct title, i.e. Mr. Ms. Dr.
- If you use a generic greeting, Dear Hiring Manager or Dear Recruitment Team is appropriate.
- Do not highlight qualifications or skills you are lacking.
- Use the same header on both your resume and cover letter.
- Do not repeat your contact information in the concluding paragraph of your cover letter if it is included in your header.
- Your cover letter should be one page, properly formatted.
- Check spelling, punctuation and grammar, mistakes will NOT be accepted.
- Create your own email signature.

Your Name
Phone Number | Email | LinkedIn URL (if appropriate)
[Use the same header format as your resume]

Date

Contact's Name
Contact's Title
Organization Name
Street Address
City, Province, Postal Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Last Name *[if you are unsure of gender, omit salutation and write full name]:*

Opening Paragraph *Answer the question: Why are you writing this letter?*

State the position you are pursuing. Tell the employer briefly in one or two sentences why you are interested in the position and their organization. If you were referred by someone and have their permission, state their name and position. If relevant, you may indicate briefly other interactions you have had with representatives from the organization through a job fair / information session / coffee chat etc.

Middle Paragraph(s) *Answer the questions: What can you do for this employer? What key skills do you have that would make you a good fit? [2 paragraph maximum, consider focusing on hard skills in one paragraph and soft skills in the other.]*

The goal of the body paragraphs is to connect the dots for the employer. Relate your strengths to the particular demands of this position. This can be done using examples to support the *relevant* skills you have developed that relate to the job through coursework, activities, or work experience. You *do not* need to have directly related experience but do need to make the connection between the skills you *have* gained and how those skills are relevant to the role. Remember, do not merely provide a list of things you have done because this can be easily determined from your resume. Instead, make your case for *what you have to offer to this particular organization*.

Last Paragraph *Re-iterate your enthusiasm for the position and invite the employer to reach out to you.*

Restate your interest in the position and opportunity to join their team. Invite the employer to contact you with further questions or to arrange an interview. Thank the employer for taking the time to consider your application.

Sincerely,

Your Name
Program
McMaster University