

# COVER LETTER GUIDE

*A cover letter is a formal business letter used to draw connections between an applicant's past experiences and the position to which that individual is applying. It is a primary marketing tool for a job-seeker - it should complement the resume. While some employers do not explicitly state a cover letter is required, submitting one gives the applicant a strategic advantage and should be included.*

## Why should I write a cover letter?

- It is your job to convince employers that you are the right candidate to fill their position. Not only are you trying to convince employers you're the right person for the job, you are also showing them you know that to be true. Employers are looking for candidates who truly want to work at their organization and understand the specific demands of the position they are offering - they are not interested in hiring people who are applying to every single available job with the exact same cover letter.
- Cover letters are a test of your communication skills. Can you effectively communicate in writing? Do you understand your qualifications and are you able to express them to an employer? If you cannot articulate why you are an excellent fit, how can they see you that way? Employers will find it difficult to visualize your communication skills on the job.
- As stated above, a cover letter is a formal business letter. The format required is a bit dated (think "snail mail"), but necessary. You will most likely utilize formal writing skills in some capacity at your future place of employment. With this letter, you are demonstrating your writing ability.

## Tips & Tricks

- Never send the same letter to two employers or to an employer to which you have applied in the past. Always update according to the specific job posting and company needs.
- Keep a positive tone. Focus on what you can offer. Never cite negative experiences.
- Be concise, clear, and convincing. No fluff!
- When writing a cover letter for internships, state the semester you are available. When writing for a full-time job, state the month you graduate.
- Keep the cover letter to one page.
- Avoid repetition of verbs and phrases - utilize a thesaurus and our Action Verb handout.
- Use the job description to identify priority listing of key job requirements - write your cover letter to address them.
- Consider printing out a job description and highlighting key phrases. Use similar language to craft a focused letter, specific to the role and company in question.
- Do NOT regurgitate your resume.
- Expect to write several drafts your first time out (and even beyond) - Career Services can help you.
- Proofread to make certain your letter is error free - review spelling, grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure.
- Your cover letter heading should match your resume - they are a pair, not two completely separate documents.
- Create an image file of your signature and insert it into every cover letter - any letter you send should be signed.

## How do I send a cover letter?

How an applicant sends their cover letter depends on the manner in which an employer requests materials. Here are several ways to include a cover letter, but always try to deliver your application as each employer requests.

- Copy and paste the cover letter into the body of an email
- Attach to an email as a PDF
- Save as the second page of the resume, so it is one document with two pages
- Upload to an application platform as a PDF or Word document

## Cover Letter Dos

- Limit the cover letter to one page if possible, unless applying to academic faculty, teaching, or research positions.
- Use the same font and formatting in the cover letter as you use in your resume.
- Use the same header in both cover letter and resume.
- Use formal, professional language in a cover letter. This is true when sending your cover letter as text in an email as well.
- Personalize each cover letter to the specific position you are applying to.
- Address your cover letter to a specific person or the hiring manager whenever possible. If you don't know their name, use one of the following examples:
  - Dear Hiring Manager,
  - Dear **[DEPARTMENT]** Hiring Team,
  - Dear Recruiter,
  - Dear Search Committee Chair and Committee Members, (used for academic teaching positions)
  - To Whom It May Concern: — Note this last one uses a colon not a comma
- Check for typos, use spell check, allow multiple people to review your application materials, and make an appointment with Career Services to review your application before you apply.

## Cover Letter Don'ts

- Unless told explicitly not to, you should always include a cover letter in your application.
- Don't use text abbreviations or emoticons if you are emailing.
- Don't be too wordy or write just to fill the entire page.
- Don't submit a generic "one size fits all" cover letter; tailor your cover letter to fit each position. Thus, none of your cover letters will be exactly the same, though a lot of content will be similar in each.
- Don't repeat or summarize your resume in your cover letter. Instead, focus the cover letter on your enthusiasm for the job, excitement about working with the organization, to highlight unique skills that make you qualified for the position and a good fit for the employer.
- Don't overuse adjectives or superlatives, especially ones (e.g. "You are the best company in the world" or "I am the most hardworking student intern you'll ever meet.").
- Quantify if possible. "I've helped organize three club events, including two successful initiatives attended by 25 people" is a better descriptor than "I've helped organize several club events, including a couple successful initiatives attended by many people."
- Don't exaggerate your skills or experiences.
- Don't use MCC letterhead or logo in your cover letter.