



**FOLLOW YOUR
PATH:
COVER LETTER
GUIDE**

Paul Smith's College
Center for Academic and Career
Success

The Basics.

What is a cover letter?

- A cover letter is your personal introduction before a potential employer reviews your resume.
- Should convey personality, be unique, and memorable.
- Can highlight and allow you to expand key things on your resume, but should NOT be a repetition of things already on your resume.

Basic Guidelines:

- Cover letters should be personable and tailored to the job you are applying to.
 - Similarly to building a resume, look at the job posting to determine what qualities they are looking for in a candidate.
- The content of your cover letter is not as strict as the content in your resume, but there are some things you *should* include:
 - Your contact information: name, home address, email, phone number
 - The contact person's name and contact information (typically listed in the job posting)
 - The job title you are applying for and where you found it
 - Some **key** qualifications such as skills and experiences that make you a good candidate
 - Why you want to work for this organization
 - Dates you will be available to work
 - A call to action
 - **NOTE:** Have something on your resume you want to clear up to your potential employer? Explain in your cover letter!
- Try to make your cover letter as memorable as possible- remember the burger analogy in our resume guide? Same thing goes here! Some ways to keep your cover letters memorable are:
 - Do not use cookie cutter templates- you are **not** cookie cutter!
 - Use an appropriate voice and tone. Keep it professional, but add a little personality to show you are not a robot.
 - Tell a story. Use anecdotes of past experiences that could tell the employer of your qualifications and/or why you want to work for their organization.
- **Proofread** your cover letter! There should be NO spelling or grammatical errors. It could cost you an interview! Have your cover letter reviewed by several people including professors, Peer Mentors, Writing Tutors, Center for Academic and Career Success, family/friends, etc.

Do's and Don'ts.

Do. Research the company before writing your cover letter.

Do. Begin your cover letter with an eye-grabbing sentence.

Do. Tell the company how YOU can help THEM.

Do. Personalize each cover letter to each job posting.

Do. Use key words mentioned in the job posting.

Do. Highlight or expand on particular skills applicable to the job you are apply to.

Do. Focus on your strengths.

Do. Quantify your work and back up your claims with experiences.

Do. End with a call to action.

Don't. Begin your cover letter with a cookie-cutter sentence such as, "I am applying for..."

Don't. Copy and paste your resume into your cover letter.

Don't. Mention lack of experience.

Don't. Discuss why you need the job.

Don't. Use a template.

Don't. Reuse the same cover letter for every job.

Don't. Ramble. Everything should be clear, concise, and organized.

Don't. Go over a page.

Don't. Be too informal. Communicate your personality in a professional matter.

Don't. Forget to PROOFREAD. Did you change the subject of the job posting? The name of the addressee? The name of the company?

Format.

Your present address

City, State ZIP

Email

Phone

Date

Contact person's name

Title

Company

Street Address

City, State ZIP

Dear contact person's name:

Paragraph One – *The Hook*... The opening paragraph is used to state precisely why you are writing the letter and entice the reader to read on. Name the position and how you became aware of it.

Body Paragraph(s) – *The Sell*... Here is where you sell your qualifications and personality. Tell the employer what **you** can do **for them**. Sell yourself by describing two or three of your best qualifications and explain why you are the right person for the job. Use bulleted lists to show *their* requirements and *your* qualifications are a perfect match. Maybe give a brief description of your academic background and how it relates to the position. Compare your resume to the job description and tailor your qualifications to fit the position for which you are applying. Give reference to the enclosed resume and invite the reader to review it.

Paragraph Four – *The Closing*... Impress with a positive action paragraph. Use your best manners to request an interview at the employer's convenience. Be sure to include all the pertinent information as to how you can be reached, and what dates you are available to work. Thank them for their time and consideration.

Sincerely

Type your name

(If using your signature leave space to sign above typed name)

Enclosure: Resume, References (list additional application materials enclosed)

Cover Letter FAQ.

Q. I am having trouble writing my cover letter, and I need someone to look it over. Who can I go to?

A. You can go to Peer Mentors, the Writing Center, the Center for Academic and Career Success, professors, advisors, family and friends.

Q. The job posting does not indicate I need a cover letter, so I'm all good, right?

A. While it is not *required*, it is recommended you send a cover letter to all jobs you apply for. Remember: this is your tool to stand out among the rest, showcase some personality, and clear up anything on your resume. Do you write essays without an introduction? Then you shouldn't submit resumes without cover letters!

Q. Who do I address the cover letter to?

A. Typically, this will be the hiring manager and their information is listed on the job posting. If not, always go the extra mile and contact the company to determine who it should be addressed to. This will make you stand out, and show them you care! Avoid addressing the letter "To Whom it May Concern."

Q. How long should a cover letter be?

A. A cover letter should be only one page, organized in different paragraphs. One rule of thumb is your potential employer should be able to read each paragraph in 10 seconds or less. Reading hundreds of cover letters is cumbersome- we need to *effectively* communicate all the important information, without dragging it out.

Q. I don't know how to write a cover letter, and I found a standard cover letter online. Can I use that if I change the details?

A. Do you want to impress your potential employer? Write your own, personalized, and unique cover letter.

Q. Okay, I wrote a cover letter. Can I use the same cover letter to apply to different jobs?

A. NO! Just like a resume, you should tailor your resume to each job you are applying for. Look at the job posting to determine what the job is looking for, and highlight those skills or experiences. It is okay to use a similar template for each cover letter, but remember you want your cover letter to be unique!

See next: Interviewing Guide

Previous: Resume Guide