

Cover Letters: Showcasing You, Your Skills, and Your Experience

Purpose

The main purpose of a cover letter is to introduce yourself to the employer and to supplement and clarify the experiences you have highlighted on your resume. Cover letters are also where you help the employer understand why you are interested in the organization and the specific position for which you are applying. Your goal in the end is to leave the employer wanting to know more about you, your skills, and your experiences so that they invite you to interview with them.

You should never underestimate the power of a well-written, solid cover letter! An applicant with average qualifications might gain more interviews because of their well-written cover letters, while candidates who are extremely qualified might be overlooked because their cover letter is poorly written and weak. Use your cover letter to showcase your professionalism, personality and style. While it might seem daunting at first, writing a cover letter actually helps you prepare for an interview.

5-Key Steps to Developing a Solid Cover Letter

- **Step 1: Research**
 - Identify the company's mission, vision, values, awards, and key products/services
 - Get a sense of the image the company is trying to project
- **Step 2: Analyze the Job Description**
 - Identify the skills and qualities the employer lists as necessary for the position
 - Think beyond what is listed and consider what other skills might be needed for the position
- **Step 3: Determine How Your Skills & Qualities Align with the Job**
 - Review your resume and reflect on the experiences you have had
 - Identify relevant examples from your experience that you can showcase in your letter
- **Step 4: Write Your Letter**
 - Make sure to include the 3-key parts: Introduction, Body and Conclusion
 - Keep your content focused, clear and concise
- **Step 5: Format, Proofread, Peer Review and Revise**
 - Once your content is solid, format your letter and ensure it is consistent and uniform
 - Read over the letter and make revisions as necessary
 - Ask a friend, family member, professor, supervisor or someone in Career Services to review your letter and then revise it once again

The 3-Key Parts of a Well-Written Cover Letter

- **Introduction**
 - State why you are writing the letter, include the name of the organization and the position you are applying for
 - Mention how you learned about the position
 - Demonstrate your interest and enthusiasm in the position
 - Briefly explain to the employer why you are interested in the organization

- **Body**
 - Highlight your relevant education, certification and experiences without simply restating your resume; the goal is to share the value of your experiences and what you learned from them
 - Demonstrate your skills and strengths
 - Emphasize what you can do for the employer, not how you personally will benefit from the position
 - Be enthusiastic; it should be clear to the employer why you are a good fit for the position and the organization
- **Conclusion**
 - Reiterate your interest in the position and the organization
 - If necessary, explain anything alarming or out of the ordinary on your application and resume
 - (e.g., “Although I am currently studying abroad, I am still available to interview with you via Skype and I will be back in Vancouver as of December 20, 2015.”)
 - Thank the employer for their time and consideration
 - Convey excitement and let the employer know that you are looking forward to hearing from them

Formatting Your Cover Letter

- **Appearance**
 - Your cover letter should look like a professional business letter and it should be uniform with your resume (i.e., you should use the same header and font and similar formatting)
 - It is best to address your letter to a specific person or to the selection committee
 - Avoid “To Whom It May Concern” and “Dear Sir/Madam”
 - At the end of your letter, close with either “Sincerely”, “Respectfully”, or “Regards” and then your printed name below it
 - If you are printing the letter out to submit it hard-copy, be sure to sign it
 - Make the document easy to read! Select a font that is easy to read and avoid using a size smaller than 10 point and try to leave one inch margins around the page
 - If you are emailing or submitting your cover letter electronically, be sure to send it as a PDF document; this ensures that your formatting remains intact
- **Length**
 - Be as focused, clear and concise as possible so you can keep your letter to 1-page
- **Language**
 - Your reader might not be familiar with all the places you have worked and all the activities you have done. It is important to avoid jargon, acronyms and abbreviations
 - Spelling and grammar matter; avoid run-on sentences and other errors

Is Your Cover Letter Ready to be Sent?

Before sending your letter off to a potential employer, you should consider the following things:

Is your letter...

- Focused, clear and concise
- Properly formatted
- 100% honest
- Proofread and peer reviewed
- Revised and free of errors

Does your letter...

- Expand on your resume and speak about your relevant skills/experience
- Explain why you are a fit for the position and address how you will be an asset to the company
- Represent your communication and writing skills well
- Communicate your interest and enthusiasm about the position and the organization