Writing your cover letter

Cover letters introduce your story and create a first impression for employers. They link your resume to the position, showcasing your knowledge of the organization and highlighting relevant skills. Start by researching the organization, considering what intrigues you and what you have to offer.

What to include

Your cover letter should include 3-4 paragraphs with the following information:

**First Paragraph**

The main purpose of the first paragraph is to introduce yourself and tell why you are writing. You want to grab the employer’s attention: why you are interested in this position and/or why this organization. Use your community: if someone has referred you to the organization (a current employee, friend, family member) include his or her name in the first sentence.

**Second/Third Paragraph**

Tell the employer your story: describe your qualifications for the type of position you seek using specific examples from academic, work, volunteer, and/or co-curricular experiences. Connect your accomplishments, skills and knowledge directly to the type of position, organization and/or field. Avoid repeating facts outlined on your resume by focusing on key concepts.

**Final Paragraph**

Summarize or give a final statement of interest/qualifications. Thank the employer for his/her time and consideration. Plan to follow up with the employer with a phone call or email.

Want some help getting started?

Answer some of these questions to help you consider what you want to say in each paragraph.

**Paragraph 1:** Why are you interested in this position/this organization? What in the posting made you say “I’ve got to apply!”?

**Paragraphs 2-3:** What 2-3 experiences connect your skills to those listed in the position? What made you say “I can do that!”?

**Paragraph 4:** What final point do you want to make?

Quick Tips:

- Use LinkedIn/Facebook and the organization’s website to gather information for your cover letter. Focus on skills and attributes the employer is seeking in applicants. Discuss these skills in the body of your cover letter.
• Letters addressed to a specific person demonstrate a higher level of investment and enthusiasm for the position; so try to find the name of the person you want to read your letter.

• Cover letters also showcase your writing abilities. Therefore, it is imperative that your cover letters be error-free and grammatically sound. Avoid beginning every sentence with an “I” statement.

• Underline the verbs in the job posting to identify key skills.

• Avoid cover letter clichés (e.g. ...make me an outstanding candidate).

**Quick Formatting Tips:**

**Font:** 10 to 12 point, in the same font as your resume.

**Paper:** The same as your resume — a quality bond (also matching envelope, if possible).

**Margins:** 1 or 1.25 inches.

**Layout:** Left justified, beginning no more than 2 inches from the top.

**Style:** Positive language, confident but not imposing, concise with supporting detail, written in active verb voice.

**E-mail:** Use body of e-mail as cover letter starting with salutation.

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