



How to Write a Professional Cover Letter

What is a Cover Letter? What is it for?

- Makes a clear connection between your skills/ goals and the organization's needs/ values
- Presents your qualifications, stressing skills
- Complements information in resume
- Presents a professional image
- Demonstrates written communication skills

Resume vs. Cover Letter Basics

Resume

- Sentence fragments (bullet points)
- Demonstrates formatting skills
- Highly scannable (easy to read)
- Establishes credibility
- **Highlights** your past professional experience (not comprehensive)

Cover Letter

- Prose (paragraphs)
- Demonstrates writing skills
- Tells a memorable story using the WHO method (**What** did you do? **How** did you do it? What was the **Outcome**?)
- Connects past experience with future potential

Composing a Cover Letter

Step 1: Introduction

Hook the reader. Don't wait to let them know why they would want to read the letter. Hooks can be as simple as, "I am writing to apply for ___ position" Often they highlight a connection you have with the company or recruiter. It's a good idea to include your reason(s) for wanting to work at the company in the introductory paragraph. Then, at the close of the paragraph, provide a **preview**. Tell them what they're going to be reading about, i.e., your top selling points. (Note that these selling points should be directly in line with what the employer is looking for—gleaned from the job announcement.)

Hook:

Preview:

Step 2: Body



- What are your top two **selling points** for *this position*?
 - A selling point could be a skill, a personality trait, or a quality—and should match what the employer is seeking
 - Be specific!
- What is the best **example** from your life experience for each of your selling points?
- Why/how is this selling point **relevant** to the reader?

Body Paragraph #1: Introduce Selling Point #1

Introduce Selling Point #1:

Example: Use a W-H-O story (What you did, How you did it, and the Outcome) from your experience to “prove” that you have the skill you are talking about. Why this is relevant to the job and/or company?

Body Paragraph #2:

Introduce Selling Point #2:

Example: Use a W-H-O story (What you did, How you did it, and the Outcome), typically pulled from a different experience than Selling Point #1, to “prove” that you have the skill you are talking about. Why this is relevant to the job and/or company?

Step 3: Conclusion

Recap your strengths. Remind them of your top selling points.

State **action items**. What do you want to happen next? Are you going to follow up? Examples of next steps could be: “I look forward to the next phase of the hiring process,” or, to be direct and assertive, “I will contact you next week to follow up.” (Note that you will need to have a specific contact name and phone number/email address if you want to follow up.)

Recap:

Next steps:

Writing Tips



- Avoid passive language

"I received an award for highest sales"

vs.

"I earned an award for highest sales"

- Use empowering language

"I would appreciate the chance to meet with you"

vs.

"I look forward to meeting with you..."

- Do **NOT** convey negative information

"Although I have not had the opportunity to gain a wide variety of paid experience in finance, I have gained general experience in my field through internships and stock-trading simulations"

vs.

"I have gained experience in my field through internships and stock-trading simulations"

- Use spell check AND a human proofreader (Note: spell check does NOT read all CAPS)
- Cut extraneous and useless words. Keep sentences and paragraphs short. Don't fill with fluff – they'll be able to tell you're padding, trying to make it longer.
- Check for coherence and readability - read your letter aloud
- Be the employer: would you be interested?
- Let a day pass and reread it
- Ask someone else to read it