Cover Letters

The Purpose of a Cover Letter

The cover letter, or letter of application, gives you the opportunity to introduce yourself to an employer and make connections between the position you are applying for, the skills or experiences you offer, and the organization. While a resume is a summary of your experiences, achievements, and skills, a cover letter highlights key elements that you want a potential employer to note. Be sure to relay relevant academic and work experience as it connects to the position and organization. A cover letter should introduce yourself and answer any questions employers may have. There are some situations when applying online in which you do not have an opportunity to submit a cover letter.

Preparing to Write a Cover Letter

Before you write your cover letter, it is important to conduct research on the position and the organization to which you are applying. Identify and learn more about the organization's goals, mission, products, and services. This information can often be found on the organization's website. The next step is to identify why you want to work for the particular organization. Communicate your reasons and interest to the employer in your cover letter. This is an opportunity to let the employer know the organization matches your values. The goal is to demonstrate to the employer that you will be a great match both for the position and for the organization.

Address and Greeting Suggestions

- The address section should begin with the date, followed by a blank line and then your address, followed by a blank line and the receiver's name, job title, organization name and address.
- It is highly recommended that you address the letter to a specific person. Verify the spelling of his/her name and his/her official title. Always make an effort to obtain the appropriate name and salutation; a simple phone call or visit to their website can often help identify the correct person.
- The greeting should be simple – "Dear Ms. X:" or "Dear Mr. Y:" Do not include the person's first name in the greeting.
- Use a "block format" for the entire letter. Left-align all paragraphs, do not indent, and separate paragraphs with a blank line. The letter should be single spaced.
- The cover letter should be kept to one page.

    See **Knock 'em Dead Cover Letters** *by Martin Yate in the Career Center for more information.*

Introduction

The first sentence should state the purpose of your application. For example, "*I am interested in the research assistant position, as advertised in...*" If you are prospecting for unadvertised openings, an introduction could be "*I am writing to establish my candidacy in the event an opening occurs.*" Mention how you learned about the position and personalize the letter to a particular organization - convey to them that you are interested in them specifically and this is not a form letter. If someone referred you to the position, be sure to mention his or her name in the intro paragraph.

Example: *Dr. Waters in the English department suggested I contact you regarding a position as a journalist with The Portland Times. I understand that your recent merger with the Oregonian has created a need for qualified and enthusiastic reporters.*

Body

This is the place to connect and communicate your relevant skills and experiences as well as your interest in the specific position. Your cover letter, unlike your resume, should express some personality. You want the employer to be intrigued so they want to meet you in person. Although you don't need to repeat what is on your resume, you should highlight what is most relevant to the employer (i.e. particular classes, internships, achievements, or extracurricular activities). You should refer to experience(s) on your resume and highlight how that experience was beneficial and how it has prepared you for this potential opportunity. Balance confidence and humility. Address any weaknesses, employment gaps or career blemishes within the body. If you are open to relocation, mention that here as well.

> **Example**: *As the Public Relations chair, I created and implemented promotional strategies that resulted in a 75% increase in student involvement. I also wrote press releases and worked with local mass media outlets. This unique combination of creativity and strong communication skills will enable me to make outstanding contributions to XYZ Organization.*

Closing

Thank the employer for his/her time and consideration. Restate your contact information (phone number and email address) in case your letter becomes separated from your resume. Do not use your work contact information.

> **Example:** *I look forward to meeting with you to discuss the skills I can offer in more detail. I can be reached by phone at 503-943-7201 or by e-mail at career@up.edu.*

Application Methods

Hard copy

Hard copy applications should be mailed in a large envelope and the contents should not be folded. Your cover letter, resume, and references (if requested) should be paper clipped together on resume paper, not stapled.

Email

Ideally cover letters would be attached to the email in one PDF document containing your cover letter, resume and references (if requested). The filename of this document should be "Your Last Name – Application" or "Your Last Name – Position Title." If you choose to email the cover letter in the body of the email, be very brief.

A clear email subject line ensures that your email does not get discarded with the numerous junk messages that employers receive daily. Try using *"Application for"* and the position title. You can also include your name.

Signature and Enclosure Suggestions

- Use a professional salutation such "Sincerely," "Best regards," or "Cordially."
- Leave three blank lines after the closing salutation and then type out your name. Be sure to use both your first and last name; a middle initial is optional. If mailing a hard copy, individually sign in the space provided by those three blank lines.
- Leave one more blank line, and then type "Enclosure" if mailing and "Attachment" if emailing. This lets the reader know that your resume is enclosed with the letter and he or she should look for it.

Cover Letter Samples

For help on your cover letter or to see completed samples, visit the Career Education Center at the University of Portland. These resources can also be found online at https://www.up.edu/career/handouts/index.html

Today's Date

Your Street Address
City, State ZIP

First and Last Name of Employer
Title of Employer
Organization
Street Address
City, State ZIP

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name of Employer:

Your opening paragraph should state why you are writing. Name the position for which you are applying and the source where you identified it. State your specific interest in the organization – it is imperative that you "personalize" your letter to each organization. If someone recommended that you apply, be sure to include that person's name in the first paragraph.

Your middle paragraph(s) should highlight your qualifications specific to the position. Refer the reader to your resume in terms of your relevant qualifications. Give details of your background that will show the reader why she/he should consider you as a candidate. If you have relevant experience or related education, be sure to point it out, but DO NOT simply reiterate what can already be read on your resume. Remember that many employers utilize the cover letter to judge your writing and communication skills. Think of your resume as a marketing tool with "just the facts" -- no personality. Your cover letter should add a little "you" to the application. Balance confidence with humility.

In this last paragraph, you close by thanking them for their time and briefly restating your enthusiasm for the position. Depending on how proactive you want to be, you can state that you will contact the employer within a specific timeframe to follow up or to set up a possible meeting at his/her convenience. This is comfortable for some people but not for others. Include your email address and phone number in this paragraph.

Sincerely,

(If submitting a hard copy, sign your name in black or blue ink)

Type your name

Enclosure (or Attachment if emailing)