

Cover Letter

When applying for a job, a cover letter should be sent or posted with your resume or curriculum vitae. Typically, a cover letter is a one-page document that explains to the hiring manager why you are an ideal candidate for the job. It goes beyond your resume to explain in detail how you could add value to the company.

It can be daunting to write a cover letter that really emphasizes the qualities you have to offer an employer. Taking stock in your value and then working to highlight those traits succinctly in a well-written letter can be a great confidence-builder. You'll know your letter is perfect when you read it and think, "Hey, I would interview me!"

What to Include in a Cover Letter

Keep in mind that your cover letter doesn't have to be boring. Taking some time to showcase your personality and how it will be an asset to the employer can help your application get noticed. Follow these tips on how to write an effective cover letter.

Tailor Each Letter to the Job Using Keywords

It takes a little extra time, but be sure to write a unique cover letter for each job. Your cover letter should be specific to the position you are applying for, relating your skills and experiences to those noted in the job posting.

One useful way to tailor your letter to the job is to use keywords from the job posting. Circle any words from the job posting that seem critical to the job, such as specific skills or qualifications.

Try to use some of these words in your letter. This way, at a glance, the employer can see that you match the requirements of the job.

Demonstrate How You Will Add Value

Think of concrete ways to prove you will add value to the company. Include examples of specific accomplishments from previous jobs. For example, if you helped reduce turnover by 10% at your last company, or if you implemented a filing strategy that reduced file errors by 15%, include this information. Try to quantify your successes when possible to clearly demonstrate how you could add value to the company.

Edit Your Letter

Your cover letter is your first, and best, chance to sell the hiring manager on your candidacy for employment, so make sure it's perfect. Read through your letter, proofreading it for any spelling or grammar errors. Ask a friend, family member, or career counselor to read it as well. You want to make sure the letter is polished before submitting it.

Keep it Professional

When it comes to choosing a font to use in your cover letter, your best bet is to keep it simple and professional. You want your words and message to stand out, not your font choice.

Avoid using unprofessional novelty-style fonts such as Comic Sans, handwriting, or script-style fonts.

Ideally, the font used in the cover letter will be both the same size and style as the one used within your resume, to help you present a cohesive package. Review these tips for determining the right font for your cover letter, as well as what size it should be, and which styles are and are not appropriate to use in a cover letter.

Choose One Simple Font

Using a simple font will ensure that your cover letter is easy to read. Basic fonts like Arial, Courier New, Calibri, Verdana, and Times New Roman work the best. Most word processing and email programs will default to a professional and easily readable choice.

Limit yourself to one font in your cover letter; it's best not to mix several fonts in one document.

There is no need to use different styles in a cover letter. Avoid underlining or italicizing, and use boldface text only when emphasizing quantifiable achievements that need to “pop” on the page.

Pick an Appropriate Size

Depending on how much content you have in your letter, select a 10- or 12-point font size.

It's best if you can format your cover letter so it fits on one page, with margins that are no larger than 1” and no smaller than .7”.

If your letter includes a heading with your name and contacts information, you may choose to make this font slightly larger.

How to Make Your Selection

Select a font from the list at the top of your document before you start writing your letter, or:

Type your cover letter.

Highlight the content of your letter.

Either select the font from the pop-up window or select the font from the list at the top of the document.

Select the font size you want to use the same way.

Proofread your cover letter.

Print your cover letter, even if you are going to upload it online, to make sure that it is formatted, properly spaced, and looks the way you want.

Include Plenty of White Space

Regardless of the font size, you select, there needs to be space at the top of the letter and between each paragraph and each section of your cover letter. Here's how to space your cover letter.

When you are using Microsoft Word, select a template for your letter. If you're using a different word processing program, the process is similar. Select the content of your cover letter, then choose a font and a font size.

You may need to try a couple of different sizes to make sure that your cover letter fits on a single page. Review these formatting tips to be sure your letter will make the best impression.

How Long Should Your Cover Letter Be?

Should you keep your cover letter short or should it be a full page or longer? Your cover letter should be no longer than one page. If you're sending an email letter, it can be even shorter.

In fact, as far as how long your cover letter should be, shorter is better. The exception would be when an employer requests a letter that's a specific length or number of words.

In general, a Saddleback College survey reported that 70% of employers wanted a cover letter of less than a full page and about 25% said the shorter the better.

Here are the preferences for cover letter length from the employers who responded to the survey:

Full page – 12.6%

1/2 page – 43.7%

No preference –5%

The shorter, the better –1%

Your letter should concisely highlight your most relevant qualifications for the job and what you have to offer the employer.

Cover Letter Word Count

There is no specific word count you should aim for when writing a cover letter (unless the employer gives you a specific word count). Instead of focusing on the number of words, focus on making your cover letter one page or less, with a readable font and font size, and enough white space between paragraphs and in the margins.

Your goal is to highlight your most relevant qualifications for the job, rather than repeating everything that's on your resume.

However, if you use the 12-point font mentioned above, a full page letter, not including the heading or signature, would be approximately 250 to 300 words.

You might want to hand a printed out version of your cover letter to a friend or family member and ask them if the letter seems too wordy, or too difficult to read.

Email Cover Letter Length

When sending an email cover letter, it's even more important to be concise. The first paragraph is what readers pay attention to when reading an email. The rest of the message is typically skimmed. Two paragraphs – one that serves as an introduction, and one that explains your qualification for the job – and then a closing is sufficient.

Use a Concise Subject Line

You can also make your email cover letter stand out with a clear, concise email subject line. Typically, you want to include the title of the position that you are applying for and your name. For example: Editorial Assistant-John Smith (try to keep it less than 30 characters).

This is about as much as people can see on their mobile devices, which is often how people check their email.

How to Format a Cover Letter

Just as important as the length of your cover letter is the format. You will want to choose a font that is simple and legible (such as: Arial, Calibri, Verdana, or Times New Roman) in a readable font size (typically 12 point).

Your letter should include:

Heading (hard copy letter)

Salutation

Introductory Paragraph

Your Qualifications (one to three paragraphs or a list of bullet points)

Closing

Signature (include your contact information in your signature when sending an email letter)

Your margins should be 1-inch all around, with the text aligned to the left.

You also want to leave space between paragraphs in your cover letter, as well as between your salutation and the text (and between your text and the signature), so that your letter is easy to read.

A good rule of thumb is that you always want a good amount of white space on the paper. This will prevent your letter from looking too cluttered and difficult to read.

Cover letter sample

Cover Letter Format Guidelines

Your Street Address
City, State Zip Code
Telephone Number
Email Address

Month, Day, Year

Mr./Ms./Dr. FirstName LastName
Title
Name of Organization
Street or P. O. Box Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. LastName:

Opening paragraph: State why you are writing, how you learned of the organization or position, and basic information about yourself.

2nd paragraph: Tell why you are interested in the employer or type of work the employer does (Simply stating that you are interested does not tell why, and can sound like a form letter). Demonstrate that you know enough about the employer or position to relate your background to the employer or position. Mention specific qualifications that make you a good fit for the employer's needs. This is an opportunity to explain in more detail relevant items in your resume. Refer to the fact that your resume is enclosed. Mention other enclosures if such are required to apply for a position.

3rd paragraph: Indicate that you would like the opportunity to interview for a position or to talk with the employer to learn more about their opportunities or hiring plans. State what you will do to follow up, such as telephone the employer within two weeks. If you will be in the employer's location and could offer to schedule a visit, indicate when. State that you would be glad to provide the employer with any additional information needed. Thank the employer for her/his consideration.

Sincerely,

(Your handwritten signature)

Your name typed

Enclosure(s) (refers to resume, etc.)

(Note: the contents of your letter might best be arranged into four paragraphs. Consider what you need to say and use good writing style. See the following examples for variations in organization and layout.)

Taken from: <http://www.career.vt.edu/JOBSARC/coverexamples.htm>

Activity 1. Search a cover letter from internet and find out if all the essential elements are present in it or not. Is this cover letter written according to pattern?