

#### OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT

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# **Cover Letter Format and Content Guide**

#### **Instructions**

- Find a job posting that's of interest to you. Sites like www.indeed.com and www.simplyhired.com may be helpful in locating a job of interest.
- Carefully review the purpose of a cover letter, cover letter tips and cover letter format before you draft a cover letter for the position.
- Draft your letter in Microsoft Word format.

### **Purpose**

It has been said that you seldom get a second chance to make a first impression. In a competitive job market, your cover letter and resume are often your first impression.

The purpose of a cover letter is to provide an engaging personal introduction, connect your unique qualifications to the specific qualifications for the position, and to pique the employer's curiosity enough that they want to see your resume. In many cases your cover letter will also serve as a "writing sample"; it will be a reflection of your ability to communicate well in writing.

## **Cover Letter Tips**

- Always send a well-written cover letter with your resume, unless the employer specifically requests that a cover letter not be included.
- Use a standard, business-letter format when writing your cover letter. Times New Roman and Arial at an 11- or 12-point size are appropriate. Use one-inch margins (top, bottom, left and right), as your letter should be like a "picture in a frame." Do not use bold, italics, or underline.
- Whenever possible address your letter to a named individual, ideally the one responsible for hiring. Do not address a letter to "Dear Sir/ Madam" or "To Whom It May Concern." You can call the employer and ask for the name and title (including correct spellings) of the hiring manager, or perhaps even find this person on the employer's website or sites such as LinkedIn.



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- Employers typically assess two criteria when considering applicants your unique qualifications for the position and "your fit" for the organization. Therefore, you'll need to research the employer's mission, vision, values, and culture. It's important to present a clear representation of your interests, values, personality, and skills as well as to show the employer how these fit with their vision, mission, values, and culture.
- Customize or tailor each cover letter you send to both the position and the employer. Focus on the specific contribution you will make the value you will bring in providing solutions to their job needs. Whenever possible, use "keywords" from the job posting, employer website, and the industry in general.
- Allow the letter to be an expression of your unique personality, skills, and experience while also maintaining a business-like approach.
- Keep the cover letter concise never more than one page. Do not use long, chunky paragraphs. In most cases, employers will not take the time to read them.
- Use the cover letter to subtly address any potential "red flags," such as employment gaps, assumptions about age, reasons for a career transition, and anything else that cannot be explained on your resume.
- Avoid negativity. Never use the cover letter to talk badly about a previous employer, colleague, or work situation. If you do, employers will assume that you will talk the same way about them.
- Remember that your cover letter is a writing sample and may be used as such by the employer. Pay close attention to the "readability" of the letter.
- Proofread, proofread do not send a cover letter with any typographical errors, misspellings, or incorrect punctuation or grammar. Although you should use spellcheck, do not rely on it. Have someone else proofread your letter as well. It needs to be perfect in every way!
- Don't use slang or acronyms in your cover letter. You may know what it means, but the employer may not.
- If you plan to mail the letter, use high quality paper that matches your resume and print it on a laser printer.

Il or 12 pt. text is an appropriate, legible type Size.



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Your Street Address Your City, State, Zip Code

Date Letter Sent

Mr./Ms./Dr. First and Last Name of Contact Person Title of Contact Person Name of Organization Street Address City, State, Zip Code

Try to address the letter to a named individual.

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Last Name of Contact Person:

Your opening paragraph should arouse interest and curiosity. Start by indicating the specific position you're applying for, and how you found out about the position. Briefly state what sparked your interest in the position. From your research, provide a statement or two about why you would be a "good fit" for the organization.

Your middle paragraph(s) — two concise paragraphs at the most — should highlight your specific qualifications for the position. What makes you special and unique in regard to your qualifications for the position? What value will you bring in relation to your experience, education, and skills? Cite specific accomplishments and achievements that display evidence of your ability to do this job in a way that meets (or exceeds) the employer's expectations. Do not simply rehash your resume here—provide some relevant highlights.

Your middle paragraph(s) can also be used to explain things that your resume may not. Use your cover letter to explain gaps in employment, reasons for a career change, assumptions about your age, and other potential "red flags." Be positive and professional.

Use your closing paragraph to reinforce your interest in the position. Ask for action — namely an interview — and indicate that you look forward to hearing from them to schedule a date and time to talk. Include your contact information — phone number and email address — even though that information is on your resume. Thank them for their time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Your Full Name (signed in black ink) Your Full Name (typed)

Enclosure(s): Resume (and any other documents requested by the employer)

