



# SCIENCE CO-OP WORKSHOPS

CPSC

## **Module 1.2:** Cover Letter: Writing Easy and Eye-Catching Cover Letters (Pre-Reading)

**Computational Sciences**

# Overview



Structure of a Cover Letter

Writing and Editing Tips

What's Next

# Purpose of a Cover Letter



# 4 Key Paragraphs

## 1. Opening

- Why are you interested in applying? Personalize it and make it “reader-centred”
- Research the company, technology, product and/or service
- Include 2-3 concrete skills in response to the job posting (back up adjectives with proof)

## 2. Technical

- Highlight 2-3 technical skills from the job posting
- Provide support through academic or personal projects, Hackathons, etc.
- Showcase your technical depth and ability; not a mere recall of the different parts of your projects

## 3. Soft Skills

- Highlight 2-3 soft skills from the job posting
- Provide support through work/volunteer experience, extracurricular activities
- What other qualities are valued in this type of company?

## 4. Closing

- Summarize why you are interested in applying
- Request an interview
- Include your personal email AND [interviews@sciencecoop.ubc.ca](mailto:interviews@sciencecoop.ubc.ca) if they wish to schedule an interview

# Cover Letter Format

<Date> ← Format: October 13, 2022

<Company Name>

<Company Address>

<City, Province Postal Code>

Reference Line

**Re: Job Position Title**

Salutation

Dear <Name> / <Hiring Manager>,

*Opening Paragraph:* Demonstrate your understanding of the company and why you are interested

*2<sup>nd</sup> Paragraph:* Technical Skills that are relevant to the position you are applying for

*3<sup>rd</sup> Paragraph:* Soft Skills – ideally from your past experiences

*Closing Paragraph:* Conclude, ask for an interview

Sincerely,

[e-signature optional; don't leave any blank lines if you don't plan to insert your signature]

Your Name

# Cover Letter Format Tips

**\* Limit to one page**

- **Mailing Address:** Google search; if nothing turns up, leave the address blank
- **Salutation:** Use what is provided in the job posting (SCOPE will usually have a hiring manager/recruiter name)
  - “Dear Dave,” or “Dear Mr. Johnson,” and **not “Dear Mr. Dave Johnson,”**
  - “Dear Hiring Manager,” or “Dear Hiring Committee,”
  - **Do not write “To whomever it may concern”**
- **Reference Line:** Use this to indicate the position you are applying for
  - “Re: Web Development Co-op Position”

# 1: Opening Paragraph

## PURPOSE: WHY ARE YOU APPLYING?

- **Stand out:** start strong and make an impression by giving a sense of what you know about the company
  - What is your experience about the company or product: be genuine and authentic
  - Do your research (eg. LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, company website)
- **Get to the point:** state why you're interested in the company, position, tech stack, industry
  - No need to start with "*I'm applying for position X*" or "*I'm interested in the QA position posted on...*" – your reference line has taken care of the position; no need to repeat
- **State your strengths:** what *specific*, related technical skills and qualities do you have to offer?



## 2. Technical Paragraph

### PURPOSE: HOW DO YOUR TECHNICAL SKILLS MATCH?

- Connect the dots for the company
- Select 2 to 3 that are related to the job posting
  - If the job is just about Java or JavaScript, then do not mention C/C++
- Expand on one or two key things about your project(s)
  - Show your technical prowess/depth
  - Apply the S-A-R framework
- Address unique circumstances, if needed - e.g. a failed grade, gap year



# Translate your Resume into a Paragraph with Enriched Content (1)

## Resume

**NHL Fantasy League Database:** Designed and implemented NHL fantasy league database using Oracle RDBMS and Java. Implemented standard SQL queries, search and comparison queries, and trading features.

## Cover Letter

I recently implemented a fantasy hockey league using Java and Oracle RDBMS. This project involved designing a project from the proposal stage, iterating on schemas and finally implementing the application, including writing SQL statements for various search scenarios, rankings, and implementing player drafting and trading mechanics.

# Translate your Resume into a Paragraph with Enriched Content (2)

## Resume

A Travel Planning Social Network

Jan 2020 – Apr 2020

- Emulated a travel planning social media system utilizing PHP and MySQL.
- Used database normalization to future proof code and improve data integrity.
- Implemented various division, aggregation, join, projection, selection, update, deletion queries with interface for user to specify conditions.
- Prototyped in Figma and fulfilled UI with HTML, CSS and JavaScript.

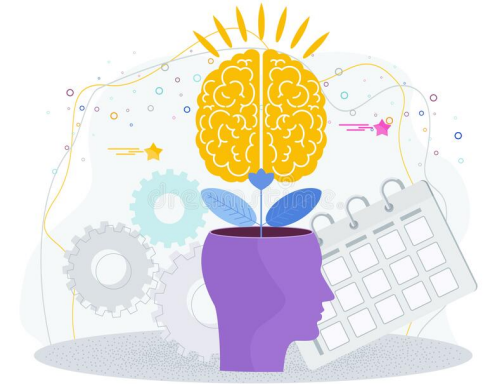
## Cover letter

As a team of three, I worked to emulate a travel planning social media system in MySQL, PHP and JavaScript where we used database normalization to future-proof our code and improve data integrity. My responsibilities included implementing user-facing and interactive usages of the database. This consisted of features such as updating profiles, extracting web page statistics for admins and additionally designing the UI/UX for the team to work towards. The project provided my first exposure to web development and PHP. I am glad that I decided to step beyond my comfort levels as I was quickly able to pick up many new skills along the way.

# 3. Soft Skills Paragraph

## PURPOSE: HOW ARE YOUR TRANSFERABLE SKILLS APPLICABLE?

- Draw examples from work/volunteer experience or extra-curricular activities from your resume
- Typical soft skills companies ask for:
  - Communication (written and verbal)
  - Team work
  - Initiative
  - Problem solving
  - Analytical
  - Organizational
  - Leadership and motivation
- Typical character traits that certain types of companies look for:
  - Startup: “can do” attitude
  - Small company: self-motivated, self-learner
  - Big company: team work



# Soft Skills Paragraph Example (1)

## **Resume**

### **Sales Assistant, Best Buy**

- Assisted customers with finding products
- Maintained current knowledge of new technological trends for computers and laptops
- Answered any questions customers may have about potential purchases

## **Cover Letter**

As a Sales Assistant at Best Buy, I collaborated closely with the sales team and interacted extensively with the customers about in-store products. Moreover, while working on my To-Do List project last semester, I collaborated in a team of two where I organized regular meetings, delegated tasks, communicated expectations, assigned action plans, followed up with team makes and ensured a smooth running of each phase of the project.

# Soft Skills Paragraph Example (2)

## Resume

### **Undergraduate Teaching Assistant, UBC Department of Computer Science**

- Assisted with the CPSC 121: Models of computation—UBC’s introductory course on discrete mathematics and circuit logic and worked with a team of 10 other Teaching Assistants
- Guided over 20 students each during weekly laboratory meetings involving hands-on learning with circuits on breadboards
- Explained concepts patiently and attempted explanations from different approaches until the student reached comprehension

## Cover Letter

As a Teaching Assistant with the UBC Department of Computer Science, I worked effectively with a team of 10 Teaching Assistants for the first year Models of Computation course. We shared best practices on how to support over 150 students learn concepts, coordinated lab meetings and marked exams. The role was extremely fulfilling because we worked seamlessly together and I got to see the “lightbulb moments” in students’ brains throughout the term.

# 4. Closing Paragraph

## PURPOSE: CALL TO ACTION. ASK FOR AN INTERVIEW

- **Connect with you:** include Co-op's and your contact method
- **Typical closing:** “Best regards,” “Sincerely,” or “Kind regards,”
- **Signature?** Type out your name or insert an image of your signature, if you would like
- Do not include new facts about your qualifications

*Tip: If you mention the company name in last paragraph, remember to update it when you reuse the paragraph*

# Writing and Editing Tips

You still need the human eyes and brain



# Be Specific

- **Vague:** I don't know much about HTML except making a personal website

**Revised:** *In two weeks, I learned HTML and CSS on my own and created a 20-page responsive personal website.*

- **Vague:** I worked with TELUS this summer and they were quite impressed with me

**Revised:** *While working for TELUS this past summer, I successfully completed a component of a database inventory system which is now being used by customer service representatives.*

- **Vague:** I've both worked in teams and on my own, and prefer to work on my own

**Revised:** *I work well in teams and independently. While working at Subway, I worked closely in a team of four people in a fast-paced environment with demanding customers. I have developed better communication skills with customers and co-workers through this experience.*

# Be Unique

- **Customize** and be **relevant** to the job posting is the key
- Highlight 2-3 key technical skills **applicable** to the position
  - Avoid chronological description of the entire project – focus on the aspects of your project relevant to this job
  - Potential key things: design, bugs, extra miles
- Show your personality – through your writing style and presentation of the content

# Where To Begin?

**Try this method:**

Type of Skill + Concrete example + Supporting information = **Sentence**

Jot down the information and then write your sentences!



# How To Write Cover Letters Faster?

- Prepare a short paragraph of 3-5 sentences on the typical technical skills such as:
  - Java
  - C/C++
  - Python
  - Web development: Android, iOS
  - Database (SQL)
  - Testing
- Put these short paragraphs together according the specific requirements of the job description. Make sure they flow smoothly.


# GenAI & Cover Letter Writing


## GenAI Strengths:

- Can create a good *starting point*
- It does well with adding persuasive elements and transition words and phrases

## GenAI Weaknesses:

- Can mention unnecessary details (dates)
- Too repetitive of resume content; cover letters should not just say all the same points but in more words
- Can be wordy and rely too heavily on overuse of adjectives (e.g. “robust”)
- Not unique; offers the same or similar sentences for all users, which recruiters may notice

 **You**  
Write a cover letter paragraph of this project:  
Java Music Player App Jan 2023 – May 2023  
Developed a desktop music application using Java  
Created a GUI with Swing  
Integrated data persistence (JSON), allowing for saving and loading previous versions  
Designed test suite using JUnit testing framework

 **ChatGPT**  
During the course of my academic journey, I undertook a significant project that not only honed my Java development skills but also showcased my commitment to delivering high-quality software solutions. From January to May 2023, I led the development of a desktop music application where I meticulously crafted a user-friendly Graphical User Interface (GUI) using Swing. Beyond mere aesthetics, I integrated robust data persistence mechanisms using JSON, enabling users to seamlessly save and load previous versions of their music preferences. Moreover, I ensured the reliability of the application through a well-designed test suite, leveraging the JUnit testing framework. This experience has not only deepened my technical expertise but has instilled in me the importance of creating applications that are both functional and user-centric. I am excited about the prospect of applying these skills and experiences to contribute to [Company]'s innovative projects.

# “Do...”



- Be concise and to the point; keep to 1-page maximum
- Use “key words” from the job posting
- Always use concrete examples to demonstrate your skills
- Include 4 paragraphs MAXIMUM
  - May include two technical paragraphs (only if needed)
- Use 11+ font size and same font/formatting as your resume
- Be consistent throughout
  - “fast-paced” vs “fast paced”; “front end” vs “frontend” vs “front-end”
  - Spell out numbers one through nine and use numerals for numbers 10 and greater.

Proofread and check for grammar and spelling!!

# “Do Not...”



- Copy what is exactly on your resume
- Start a sentence with
  - “I don’t have this but” or
  - “I only have ...”
- Include negative information
- Overuse “I think, ” “I believe,” “I had to”
- Start each sentence with “I”
- Rely fully on AI to write your document

# Editing

- Your spell checker doesn't catch everything (underlined is the correct one):
  - JSON vs JASON
  - jUnit vs Junit vs JUnit (teach your spell checker NOT to auto-correct)
  - Typescript vs TypeScript
  - Javascript vs JavaScript
  - MatLab vs Mathlab
  - Perl vs Pearl
  - Quite vs quit/quiet
  - Fourth vs Forth Year
  - University of British Columbia vs Colombia
- Always triple check or have someone else check it for you!



# What's Next?

Bring your questions to the live Zoom session for discussion!