

Cover Letter Development

Why are cover letters important?

Your **resume** details your education and experiences. The **cover letter** is your opportunity to make the connection between your experiences and *a specific position*. You are demonstrating that you are a great fit for the skills called for in the job description, that you can communicate clearly, and that you have researched the organization.

What is the purpose of a cover letter?

1. To **introduce** writer to the employer and clarifies: who the writer is; what position is being applied for; when, where, or how the writer learned about the position and/or the organization; and perhaps, why the writer is applying for the position.
2. To **highlight** the writer's strengths and qualifications for the position. This is not a repeat of the resume, but a select review of specific areas from the writer's background that are of interest to the employer for the particular position.
3. To **encourage** the next step in the application process: e.g. "I will telephone within ten working days." "I trust we can arrange for a mutual time to meet and discuss in detail my qualifications." "I can be reached at (773) 745-5555."

What should the overall structure be?

Paragraph One: tell who you are, how you learned about the position, why you have an interest in the position and the organization. Be sure the employer knows specifics about the position for which you are applying. (An employer may have several positions open at the same time.) Additionally, if you have networked and have a personal contact within the organization, this is the point at which that individual's name should be mentioned. Be sure to clear using the person's name prior to writing your letter. Do not assume that a conversation with a person gives you permission to use their name.

Paragraph Two: selling is the goal of this paragraph. Sell the employer on yourself by highlighting your strengths and qualifications as they specifically relate to this particular position. Use the job description to learn exactly what qualifications they seek, then describe how you are a good fit because you have many of those qualifications. Note: a third or fourth paragraph may be appropriate at this point. You are not limited to only one selling paragraph. However, your cover letter should never exceed one page.

This section can either be a paragraph, some text with a bulleted list, or a table (the "T" cover letter) that has the position requirements on the left, and your qualifications related to those requirements on the right. Simply insert a table into your Word document with two columns and make the borders white. See sample cover letters for more information.

Paragraph Three: "let's get together" is the goal of the final paragraph. Be sure to actively pursue the next, appropriate step; i.e. offer to telephone, leave your telephone number(s) and times or methods of reaching you, ask for an interview. Remember, the primary purpose of the resume and cover letter is to obtain an interview.

SPECIFICS (see sample cover letters for examples)

1. Use standard business letter format.
2. Address cover letter to a specific individual and use their title.
3. **Make your cover letter the body copy of your e-mail and attach your resume if submitting electronically;** use high quality paper if mailing.
4. Don't forget to sign your name if submitting a paper cover letter.

Remember to accomplish these three things in your cover letter:

1. **Demonstrate your interest** in *that particular organization*. Fit with the organization is among the most important criteria for many organizations.
2. **Highlight two or three strengths** *related to the position* that reflect your unique experiences.
3. **Express your enthusiasm** for the position!