

COVER LETTER GUIDELINES

Guidelines:

- Find out the name and title of the person to whom you are writing and be sure you have the correct spelling
- Use your own style
- Be concise, one page is maximum
- Use simple language, no flowery phrases
- Show your distinctiveness and fit for the job/organization
- Triple check all grammar, punctuation, and spelling
- Use active voice only
- Use the same paper and font for your cover letter as you did for your resume
- Be sure to sign your cover letter
- Put “Enclosed: resume” at the very end of your cover letter

Questions to answer:

PARAGRAPH 1: Why are you writing? How did you get the employer’s name? Where did you find their job listing? Who referred you? What position are you applying for?

[This is a critical introductory paragraph. Do not tell the reader too much at first, just the essential reasons why you are writing. TIP: Try to grab their attention in a positive way and set an upbeat tone.]

PARAGRAPH 2: Why are you qualified for the position you are applying for? What have you done that applies to this job/position? Why should the reader look at your enclosed resume?

[This paragraph is essentially a brief distillation of the most salient parts of your resume relative to the requirements of this position. TIP: Highlight those critical parts of your background, as evidence on your resume that address the core parts of the job description.]

PARAGRAPH 3: Why are you further interested in this position or motivated for this position? Why are you interested in this particular job? Why do you want to work in this organization? What is special about you that should be considered for this position? What sort of fit is there between your experience and this job/organization?

[Continue to highlight selective and appropriate parts of your resume or mention your reasons and motivations for applying. TIP: Use this paragraph to validate additional core skills of your background and experience and why this position excites you.]

PARAGRAPH 4: Restate your interest in the opportunity and an interview. Thank the employer for their time and consideration.

[TIP: Always end your letter positively and pro-actively. Remember: the cover letter exists as a means to entice your reader to review your resume; your resume exists as a means to entice your reader to meet with you during an interview.]

Special Technique:

Try this easy technique: Just put the job description your desk on one side and your resume on the other. Envision the cover letter as a bridge between the two documents. When you review the job description underline or highlight the critical parts of it reflected in your resume. Then when you write the cover letter, relate and filter one to the other through the four paragraphs as described above.

COVER LETTER FORMAT

Date

Name

Title

Organization

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name:

I'm writing to apply for your Corporate and Events Planning Director position at Big Top Bash, Inc. I have spent the past six years working exclusively in the event planning industry and bring with me both extensive experience as an event planner and an organized and detail-oriented work ethic to the position.

As an event planner, I have organized and executed hundreds of corporate events. Group sizes have ranged from small intimate gatherings to large-scale galas. My clients not only include corporations, but also include politicians interested in organizing fundraising and networking opportunities, weddings, retreats, anniversaries, and everything in between, including international events. I am also skilled in finding the appropriate venues, entertainment, security, transportation, vendors, and promoters.

I am also an experienced contract negotiator and am proud of my ability to secure economical solutions to fit the needs of my clients without compromising quality. I am skilled in working with budgets and guest lists of any size and am proud of my ability to deliver high quality results both on time and on budget. I am creative in my approach to problem solving and cool under pressure. I am confident in my crisis management skills and my ability to anticipate and proud of my long list of satisfied clientele.

I have enclosed my resume and will call within the week to see if we can arrange a time to speak. ^{SEP}_{SEP} Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Signature

First Name Last Name

Best Cover Letter Fonts, Margins & Paper

A large, bold, black serif font sample showing the uppercase 'A' and lowercase 'a'.

***What Font should
I use??***

When writing your cover letter, you should follow the same rules you use when formatting any professional letter.

Let's start with fonts.

FONTS

Open your word processing program and take just a second to scroll through your font choices. If you're like me, it seems as though there are a hundred different styles to choose from...so which one is the right one?

Yes, you want to stand out in a sea of other applicants, but remember, before you go selecting that font with all the swirls and loops that rule number one when typing up your cover letter is: legibility.

Making sure your cover letter is readable is step number one.

You want to make sure that a potential employer can easily read it regardless of if it's printed out or on a computer screen. Speaking of computer screens, not everyone is on the same operating system which means a unique or quirky font on your screen might show up as code or nonsense on someone else's.

Your cover letter, just like all documents you send to a potential employer, is a professional representation of who you are, and as such, should look professional.

Try to avoid any font or typefaces listed as a Serif. Yes, they look nice and they're certainly legible, but Serif fonts are fonts with added embellishments and stylizations which, when run through a scanning program or software, can result in the program rejecting it.

Remember, many companies these days use an automated applicant tracking software to first pre-qualify candidates and the last thing you want to do is you're your application rejected because the computer program didn't recognize your font or had difficulty reading it.

So what fonts should you use?

Sans Serifs fonts are fonts which are clean, crisp, sleek, and most importantly, scanner-friendly! They're also "eyeball-friendly" which means a hiring manager reading it won't have any issues trying to figure out what they're looking at or run into eye-strain.

Stick to classic fonts like **Arial, Verdana, Trebuchet MS, Century Gothic, Gill Sans MT** (but NEVER Comic Sans), **Lucida Sans** and **Tahoma** as well as our personal favorite, Helvetica. It's a flawless blend of style and clarity.

Another thing to keep in mind with fonts is the size you're using. Shrinking everything down to the size of an ant just so you can fit it all onto a single page won't win you any points. Again, you want to ensure that your cover letter is readable.

Try to stay between 10.5 and 12 points. Any smaller and it's hard to read.

MARGINS AND SPACING

When you format your cover letter you want to make sure that you leave enough margin space to allow for printing.

Try to resist the temptation to adjust your margins, even if you're trying to fit more into your page. Just because it prints out on your printer doesn't mean it will all print out exactly the same on an employer's printer. Adjust your margins too much and you run the risk of critical information being cut off if an employer prints it out.

Inversely, making your margins too large will leave your cover letter looking boxed in and squished.

The general rule is to set your margins at one inch on all sides.

PAPER

When you turn a cover letter into a potential employer, you want to make sure you're using paper that helps convey the message that you're a professional.

Of course, if you're using an online submission system, you don't get to choose what sort of paper an employer might potentially print your cover letter out on, but in the instances when you're physically turning something in, it's a good idea to put some extra time, thought, and a little bit of money into the paper you're using.

Yes, it's a little more expensive to pick up a package of high quality paper, but think of it as an investment – in you!

Look for paper rated at around 24lb weight. Anything lighter is intended for bulk copying and will come across as cheap and flimsy. If you're using paper with a watermark, make sure it's facing the correct way relative to your cover letter.

When selecting the color of paper you're using, it's always a safe bet to stick to white or neutrals. Off-white, cream, ivory and light gray are acceptable for most professional jobs.

Finally, make sure you're always using 8 ½ x 11 paper.

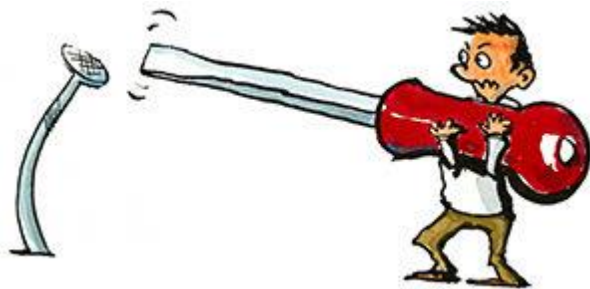
LENGTH AND SPACING

As we mentioned earlier, no matter which of the three formats you decide to go with, your cover letter should fit neatly onto one single sided page without crowding.

Of course, there are always exceptions to the rule, and in some (rare) cases (career changes, highly advanced technical fields, or individuals at the senior/executive level), a slightly longer cover letter is acceptable.

Keep in mind this isn't your autobiography!

In terms of the spacing, keep your cover letter to single-spaced with a blank line between each section of your content.



5 Common Cover Letter Format Mistakes to Avoid

1. Spelling and Grammar Mistakes (and Typos)

THIS IS A PROFESSIONAL DOCUMENT...which means, ALWAYS proofread your cover letter before you send it out! This includes double checking your contact information.

It won't do you any good if you have the perfect cover letter and employers who want to hire you if they keep calling the wrong number or emailing the wrong email. Double check! Then...check again!

2. Not Tailoring Your Cover Letter

Stop me if you've heard us mention "tailoring before". By now, you should have. After all, it's the backbone to our whole job-getting strategy!

MIKE'S TIP:

Not familiar with "tailoring?" That's okay... it's quite simple. Think of it like "customizing". We now know that your company has a specific type of person in mind for the role that they are interviewing for. They have a specific set of knowledge, skills and abilities that this person **MUST HAVE** in order to get the job. So what do you need to do? You need to customize, or "tailor" your entire interview (including your cover letter!) to the needs of the company.

Blanketing the job market with a one-cover letter-fits-all approach not only makes you look lazy, but it shows an employer that you're comfortable doing the bare minimum rather than going the extra step to make sure your cover letter is tailored to the job you're specifically seeking.

Do your research beforehand and make sure the letter you're sending out not only highlights your skills and experiences, but shows an employer that you're the Perfect Candidate for not only the job but the company you're applying to!

NOTE: This includes the greeting/salutation of your letter. It should be "addressed" to the hiring manager (full name if possible). Be sure to read our ["how to address a cover letter" article for step-by-step instructions.](#)

3. Rambling

Keep in mind your first impression rule. Submitting a cover letter that's long, rambling, confusing or poorly organized isn't going to get you anything except dumped.

This includes padding your cover letter with unnecessary information. Keep your cover letter tailored, clear, concise, and clean. A short letter that's straight to the point and laser focused is far more powerful than a long letter filled with big words and confusing sentences.

4. Personal Information

Religious affiliations, social security numbers, personal social media contact, birthday (or age), marital status, or anything else that's personal has no place on your cover letter.

This also includes photos or headshots. All a potential employer needs to know is what your name is, how to contact you, and why you're the perfect candidate based off of your skills, experience, and qualifications.

5. Salary Information

Save that for a personal discussion with the hiring manager a little further down the road. Putting your salary requirements on your cover letter is never a good idea. Check out the article we wrote on [“How to Negotiate Salary During the Job Interview Process”](#) here.

Top 5 Cover Letter Formatting Tips

- 1. Keep your format simple:** Remember, you only get one chance to make a good first impression. Presenting a hiring manager with a cover letter that’s overly crowded, hard to read, confusing or just plain messy isn’t going to get you the job...it’s going to get you thrown out.
- 2. Keep it professional:** Avoid cute fonts, gimmicks, scented paper, glitter, odd shapes, or anything that could potentially make an employer look at your cover letter and question your sanity. Don’t print on cheap paper. Show an employer you’re serious about the job. Save the stickers and smiley faces for your holiday letters you send home to family.
- 3. Focus on the job description and how you satisfy what the hiring manager is looking for.** Read the job description and then read it again. What does the hiring manager need? How do your [skills](#) and experiences fill that need? Make sure when you’re writing your cover letter that you’re using words specifically used in the job posting and relating your skills directly to those that the hiring manager is looking for.
- 4. Make sure you’re selecting the cover letter format that best reflects who you are, your work history, and the job you’re applying for.** Remember a cover letter is a great way to introduce yourself to an employer and explain away any questions they might have about you based on your [resume information](#). Make sure you’re selecting the right format cover letter (paragraph, employer needs, shopping list) and that the information you include is relevant to the position you’re applying for.
- 5. Be honest:** I know we’ve said this again and again in multiple articles on this site, but it’s a sentiment that bears repeating. Be honest. Don’t pad your cover letter with jobs or duties you’ve never held or exaggerate ones you have just to impress an employer. The last thing you want to do is get a job you can’t do. Not only will you look bad, but it’ll haunt you down the line with other future potential employers. Be honest!

Putting It All Together

We promised you a much deeper look into cover letter format and I think we’ve managed to deliver just that!

A cover letter is intended to introduce you to your potential future employer and show them who you are in the best possible way...and now, thanks to this article, you shouldn’t have any problems! Who needs a second chance at a first impression if you do it right the first time?

Of course, reading about it is one thing, but seeing how these cover letters look is another. If you're interested in seeing examples of how these cover letters look in person, head on over to our [12 Great Cover Letter Examples](#) article.

Just make sure, no matter which format you choose, that you're tailoring it to the job you're applying for, making sure to include relevant information, and that you're using specific key words from the job posting and relating your skills directly to the needs of the employer.

And as always...good luck!