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## THE COVER LETTER

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A cover letter should answer the question – “Why should I hire you?”

To do so, your cover letter (1) states your intent to apply to a position or organization; (2) highlights why you are interested in the position/organization; and (3) explains why you feel you are qualified based on your experience.

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## STEPS TO WRITING A SUCCESSFUL COVER LETTER

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### 1. Research the organization

- Use the Company website/materials, journals, newspapers, google the organization and talk with faculty members or others who are familiar with the organizations.

### 2. Understand the position to which you are applying

- Read the job description.
- Try to decipher how the position you are applying to supports the organization.
- If there is no job description or it is vague, talk with your career advisor or faculty member to gain clarity.

### 3. Map out your cover letter

- a. In bullet format, write down the skills, qualifications, and responsibilities of the position.
- b. Look at your résumé, experience, classes, etc. and write down your best example of the stated skills, qualifications, or responsibilities. Remember your best examples may be through classes, volunteer, or leadership activities, and not just work where you have received a paycheck!
- c. Write down the three reasons why you are interested in the position. In addition to stating why you are qualified, your interest and excitement about working at the organization is important. Now these may have been stated previously when you mapped out your best examples – and that is okay.

### 4. Address your cover letter to a person by name. Try not to use “To Whom It May Concern:”

- If the name is not listed in the job description, search the organization website, or make a phone call to obtain the information. This shows that you went the extra mile to pay attention to detail.

### 5. Use business letter format

- It is a nice touch to use the same heading that you used with your résumé. It shows consistency between your documents and keeps your contact information on every page. Use résumé paper with a matching envelope. In most cases, your cover letter will be one page.

### 6. Tell a story...

- When you sit down to write a cover letter, don't say, “I have this experience, and I did this,” tell your story to the employer, make your cover letter flow, and be specific. Employers won't necessarily be able to read between the lines.

### 7. Proofread your letter! One time isn't enough! Review it multiple times. Have other people read it as well. **Helpful tip:** Count how many times you use the word “I”. Make sure you vary your sentence structure. Your cover letter is a sample of your writing style and ability.

### 8. Follow up! Either by e-mail or a phone call

- Unless the organization specifically states “No calls, please.” By doing this you will know what the status of your application is.

### 9. Track your applications! Know who and when you applied and to what position!

- A simple spreadsheet or a page in your daily planner will help you know when you sent applications or made phone calls. Save a copy of the job description, not just the link. Links can disappear!

## INFORMATION TO INCLUDE IN YOUR COVER LETTER

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Use the same heading as your résumé

Date

Address of person/organization to whom/which you are applying

Dear Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_: (you should always try to address your letter to a specific person rather than “To Whom It May Concern:”)

*FIRST PARAGRAPH:* The first paragraph states why you are writing and to which position you are applying. In this first paragraph, you should also include a general statement of why you are interested in the position. This statement can range from past experience in the field, a desire to gain experience, or how you feel your education or past experience will benefit the organization. The goal is to quickly catch the reader’s attention and make him or her interested enough to continue reading. Although many cover letters you see will begin with phrases like, “I am extremely interested...” or “I am writing to express interest in...” that is oftentimes not the best approach. Instead, try to be creative and think of another way to start your cover letter. Remember, your introduction needs to entice the employer to read further!

*SECOND/THIRD PARAGRAPH:* The second and third paragraphs outline why you feel you are qualified for the position by highlighting specific accomplishments and experiences and then showing how those accomplishments/experiences are relevant to the position. In other words, you are not simply restating the information you have listed on your résumé. Instead, you are showing the employer *how* you are the ideal candidate for the position by citing specific, relevant examples from your background. Remember, these examples can be drawn from classes, community service, activities, and interests, along with your work experience.

Suggestions before you begin writing this part of your cover letter:

- Read through the job description and create a list of the specific skills or characteristics the employer emphasizes. The employer may be looking for an applicant with strong computer skills, research ability, analytical skills, leadership, initiative, dedication, or specific experiences. Take the time to write down those skills so you have them in front of you as you begin to write.
- Next, look at your résumé and write down 1-3 examples from your background that highlight those skills you’ve just listed. These examples may be from your work/intern experience but can also include coursework, honors/achievements or extracurricular or community service activities.
- By doing this small task before you begin writing, you ensure two things: one, that you highlight those skills for which the employer is looking; and two, that you use the best examples possible to illustrate how you are the ideal candidate for this position.

*FINAL PARAGRAPH:* The last paragraph basically states: Enclosed is my résumé (and any other requested information); I look forward to meeting with you to discuss the position; Please contact me if you require further information; and Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Your Name