What is a cover letter? A cover letter is a one-page professionally focused letter that is a part of a job or internship application. It provides additional information about you and your interest in the position for which you are applying. The most effective cover letters do not repeat the details from your resume; instead, the focus is to share more context or complementary information that cannot be easily integrated into a resume. A cover letter also demonstrates your writing ability as well as understanding of the job (or internship).

When do you need a cover letter? Unless the application specifically states, “Do NOT submit a cover letter.” – then you should take the time to write one. Some companies place more weight on a cover letter; others less so when evaluating applicants. However, as the applicant, you usually do not know which is which. Therefore, it is in your interest to take the time to write one customized for each application.

NOTE: A poorly written or organized cover letter can sink your application!

When addressing the letter:

- Write to a specific individual whenever possible.
- If you don’t know, direct the letter to someone with a specific job title, such as “Director of Human Resources” or “Hiring Manager” or to the position that supervises the position that is listed in the job description.
- Don’t forget the article (e.g., Mr. or Ms.) for the salutation (e.g., Dear Ms. ___). If the person’s sex is unknown from the name (e.g., Jamie or Taylor), try to ask someone or even call the company to confirm.
- Avoid using first names in the salutation, unless you have talked or emailed with the person and first names were used.
- NEVER address your letter “Dear Sir/Ma’am” or “To Whom It May Concern.”

1st paragraph:

- Tell the reader what position (or opportunity) you’re going after, including the exact name. If there is a job reference number, state that as well.
- Explain how you learned about the job (or opportunity).
- If someone suggested you apply for the position, provide your recommender’s name (with her/his permission!) and any connection s/he has with the organization (e.g., former intern).
- Discuss why you are interested in working in that position and/or for that organization.
- Do NOT begin your letter with, “Hi. My name is ________ and I am looking for ______.” (This may be appropriate for a networking letter, but not a standard cover or application letter.)

2nd paragraph:

- Explain your qualifications. Do not make the reader assume something about your background.
- Complement the content of your resume, NOT repeat it.
- Be selective about the strengths you discuss. Best to select 2-4 that are the most relevant to what you are pursuing. Do not create a master list of every positive personal quality.
- Use examples to highlight your strengths and transferable skills.
- Customize each letter for every application (whenever possible), showing how your strengths are applicable to the specific opportunity.
- Be objective when describing your strengths. Do not over- or understate your abilities.
- Depending upon what you are discussing, your qualifications paragraph may be organized into 2 shorter paragraphs rather than one longer one.

Concluding statement:

- Begin with “Thank you …”
- Be assertive, not aggressive -- Ask for an interview! (suggested wording: I look forward to an opportunity to interview …or… to further discuss my qualifications for __________).
• Let the employer know of your intent to make contact within a certain period of time (unless the application instructions tell you *not* to contact them).
• Remind the reader which opportunity you are pursuing.
• If the job or internship is elsewhere, and you will be in the area, this is a great place to mention that fact.
• Do not repeat your contact information; it should be at the top of your letter.

Format of the letter:
• Limit to ONE (1) page.
• Aim for each paragraph to be 4-7 sentences in length, depending on your writing style.
• Margins should be the same as used for your resume.
• Use the same “header” from your resume on the top of your cover letter.
• Font type and size should generally be the same as used on your resume.
• Block paragraphs, left aligned, no indentions, blank space between paragraphs.
• When printing a hard copy, use the same high-quality paper as for your resume.
• Don’t forget the date at the top of the letter.
• Include a space for signing your name.
• If sending or submitting electronically, do so as a PDF; it better ensures your format will remain intact.
• A sticky note should never be used as a cover letter.

About grammar and spelling:
• Do not overuse “I” at the start of sentences. If more than 50% of your sentences begin with “I” – you have too many!
• Use active verbs to write succinctly and with clarity.
• Avoid passive voice, which includes words like “would,” “should,” and “could.”
• Write confidently and share enough specific information to spark the interest of the reader to want to find out more about you on your resume.
• Watch your use of abbreviations. Spell out words that may be confused or unknown to the reader.
**Sample Cover Letter for a Job Search**

*** Use the same letterhead and contact information as on your resume! ***

**Date**

Mr./Ms. First & Last Name  
Job Title  
Company  
Street Address  
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name:

The first paragraph is your introduction and should be about three to four sentences in length. Name the position for which you are applying and indicate how you learned of the opportunity. Get the reader’s attention. State briefly why you are interested in the organization or the position. Mention the name of someone who you talked to about their organization and/or the opportunity, or refer to an article, event, or experience that led you to make this contact.

The body of your letter should be one or two paragraphs in length with a focus on why you are qualified for this specific opportunity. Outline your qualifications and skills as they relate to the opportunity. Do not repeat all the information on your resume; rather, elaborate on the details. Mention your most important experience or qualities as they relate to the targeted position. Customize your remarks to the reader’s point of view, and, if possible, give concise evidence of your skills and qualities. You can refer the reader to your resume if it makes sense to do so.

The final paragraph is your summary or closing statement. Thank the reader for taking time to read your letter and for thoughtful consideration of your application. Don’t forget to remind the reader about what opportunity you are pursuing! Do NOT leave this paragraph as a passive plea (such as, “you are welcome to contact me at your convenience”); be assertive and share that you look forward to talking with them further about your qualifications. End your letter on a confident, positive note.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

Your typewritten name

Enclosure: (if mailing)

Attachment: (if electronic submission)

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