

# COVER LETTER GUIDE

## THE PURPOSE OF A COVER LETTER

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The purpose of a cover letter is to introduce yourself as a viable candidate to a potential employer. For this reason, it should always accompany your résumé, even if not specifically requested. A cover letter isn't meant to repeat what is on your résumé. Rather it's an opportunity to creatively highlight your unique experiences while demonstrating your ability to think strategically and write convincingly. A cover letter should skillfully exhibit that you have considered your audience and can adeptly showcase your relevant background, knowledge, attributes, and skills. This will give employers reason to take notice.

## WHERE TO BEGIN

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A cover letter should be personalized for each opportunity. This requires: taking the time to analyze what the employer is likely looking for in a candidate; what the culture of the organization might be; and how you can offer your skills and enthusiasm to advance the department's and/or organization's work. Cover letters take time to write. It may be tempting to throw together something generic and cut-and-paste in the organization's name and position title so that you can get more applications sent off more quickly. However, this approach is unlikely to get you noticed, and in the long run it will extend your job search. Drafting a strong cover letter may take you a few hours to complete. Taking this time to write a powerful and tailored cover letter will greatly increase your chances of being seriously considered as a candidate, and it will even better prepare you for an interview with the organization.

**Analyze job requirements:** Similar to the process of curating a résumé, begin by reviewing the job ad and a more detailed position description if one is provided. Highlight any reference to the required or preferred background and skills being sought. Identify what you imagine are the top three requirements of the position. Start to note what experiences you have that demonstrate these qualifications. Use the same keywords from the job posting when appropriate. Show why you are a good fit for the position and organization by providing specific examples and detailing results. It's alright if you haven't had direct experience or a considerable amount of paid employment. You can emphasize how your volunteer, academic, and leadership experiences have prepared you for the tasks ahead. For example, instead of saying, "I haven't worked in public relations but am willing to jump in." instead consider, "Conducting interviews, performing research, and writing informative, concise articles under strict deadlines have provided me with solid experience that I believe will prove valuable in the public relations field."

**Research the company and industry:** Whether the company is a for-profit, nonprofit, or government organization, take time to review their website. Find their mission statement. Read about any new initiatives they have launched that sound particularly relevant to the position. See if the department you would be working for has a webpage. Jot down any reflections on the kind of aspiration values, company outcomes, and/or societal impact that is driving their work. Also, what do you notice about the language they use? Does it suggest a more informal and playful culture or a more disciplined and traditional one? Google the company to see if anything about their work recently made the news. Do the same for the industry to understand what the current hot topics are. All of the above insights will give you clues for certain items to highlight and what tone to strike in your cover letter. Finding ways to organically weave into a cover letter a line or two about what you've discovered about the company's initiatives, goals, or approach, or something about industry trends, will indicate that you've done your research.

**Reflect:** Why are you interested in the position? What is it about the company that you find compelling? Why have you decided to look for a position in this industry or market? It's understandable if your first answers to these questions tend to be self-serving, like a stepping stone for future opportunities, salary range, company prestige, or desired location, but you'll want to drill a bit deeper. These responses are good for you to know, but not what a company is interested in hearing from you. Although it's okay to share what you hope to learn from the opportunity, companies are generally more interested in what you wish to contribute or why you are interested in advancing their goals. Being able to articulate a genuine interest in the work signals to the employer that you've given the opportunity thoughtful consideration.

## COVER LETTER WRITING TIPS

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### Formatting

- Write your letter in proper business format and don't exceed one page
- Align all text to the left, do not indent paragraphs, and leave only one line between paragraphs
- Address the letter to an individual. If one isn't listed, research the head of the department or Human Resource Director. Or, call the company and ask to whom you should address your application. Be sure to confirm proper spelling. If this doesn't surface a name, address it to "Dear Search Committee:" or "Dear Director of Human Resources:" **Do not** write "To Whom it May Concern:"
- Use the same header and font from your résumé
- Reflect your voice as a writer; remember, you're crafting a professional narrative specific to you
- Back up your skills with brief detailed examples
- Proofread for spelling and grammar errors and have someone else read it. Typos can cost you the job
- Insert a blue-ink scanned signature (or annotated signature on Macs). Don't use a script font here

### Submitting the Application

#### By Email or Online Platforms:

- Include a short message in the body of your email referring to your attached cover letter and résumé
- In the subject line, list the position and your name (e.g. Financial Analyst Application – Benjamin Brown)
- Send as a PDF to ensure everything looks the way you intend. Never trust that the recruiter has the same font or version of Word. (If you've included hyperlinks, make sure they're still embedded once you convert to PDF)
- Include your name in the file name with the appropriate descriptor. (E.g." Benjamin Brown\_Cover Letter\_ABC Investment Partners)
- Always double-check your attachments before sending to ensure you've included the final draft
- An online system will generally prompt you for the required documents, which you'll upload. Some systems will not allow you to submit any supporting documentation other than what they request

#### By Mail:

- Use 8 1/2 x 11-inch résumé paper in neutral colors like white, beige, or ivory
- Use the same type and color paper for all of your submitted materials. (Exceptions include letters of recommendations, transcripts, or anything that was not generated by you)
- Use typed mailing labels for the addressee and your return address, placed on a legal-sized or flat envelope

## Cover Letter Template

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YOUR NAME

Street Address, City, ST Zip Code | Telephone Number; Email Address

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Month Date, Year

Addressee, Title of Addressee

Organization's Name

Business Address

City, ST (or country/territory) Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Last name of Addressee:

### **Introductory Paragraph—Set the Stage**

State the position you are applying for, how you learned of it, what you respect about the organization, and share your enthusiasm for the opportunity to be considered. Mention the name of any referral in the first few sentences. Express your interest in both the company and the position and include something unique about the organization that prompted you to apply. Be careful about disclosing interests that might appear too self-serving; instead, use insights from your research. Succinctly summarize why you believe you're a strong candidate.

### **Middle Paragraphs—Highlight Your Qualifications**

In one or two paragraphs, establish the connection between the organization's needs and your background and skills. Instead of simply restating your achievements from your résumé, develop a professional narrative about the breadth of your skills and potential contribution. Primarily emphasize what you have to offer, not what you hope to gain. Limit your focus to one or two of your experiences and provide specific results. To show that you've done your homework, you should reference their mission statement, a new initiative, a recent positive media mention, or an industry trend or report. Then find a way to tie it into why you find the position and company of interest.

### **Last Paragraph-Conclude with Confidence**

Restate your interest in the organization and position. Mention all enclosures, like a résumé, references, writing sample or anything else that was required for the application, if you haven't already. Indicate your interest in meeting with them to further learn about the position and share about your background. Let the employer know when you'll call (preferably) within the next week or two to inquire about the status of your application (and do so). If the employer requests "no phone calls" in the job listing, then follow up via email. Finally, thank the reader for their time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Your Signature

Type Your Name

## Cover Letter Sample

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Ken Yon

College Address  
PO Box 1492  
Gambier, OH 43022

KenYon@gmail.com  
(740) 123-4567

Permanent Address  
23 Newton Street  
Old Westbury, NY 11568

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September 28, 2018

Katherine Brooks, Vice President  
ABC Investment Partners  
One Wall Street  
New York, NY 10005

Dear Ms. Brooks:

The opportunity to help global clients make smart investment decisions as an entry-level Financial Analyst compelled me to submit my credentials for your review. As someone who has completed extensive research on sustainable and impact investing solutions, I was notified of this opportunity by Kenyon College's Career Development Office. I'm eager to apply my economics coursework, professional experience, and analytical skills to your recently restructured Socially Responsible Investment division.

I'm focused on finding trends to solve problems, something I was happy to read is core to this position. Within one month of assuming the co-presidency of Eats & Treats—a student-run, late-night servery where I manage a \$25,000 budget—I analyzed consumer habits and reduced staff at non-peak hours. This saved the company over \$1,000 per term. During my internship this summer at Westbury Financial, I utilized the Bloomberg Terminal to monitor and analyze real-time financial market data. This allowed me to work alongside the full-time analysts in providing recommendations to clients based on trends, news and research. I even analyzed my six housemates' sleeping patterns to alleviate the morning bathroom bottleneck. It worked!

My love for finding patterns is matched by my fascination with responsible investing. With ESG factors becoming more nuanced and Millennials, Gen Y, and Gen Z influencing markets at unprecedented rates, I've been enthralled with this area of research. According to The Forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investment's 2016 *Report on US Sustainable, Responsible, and Impact Investing Trends*, the US market size alone in this area was \$8.72 trillion, a growth rate of 33% from 2014. Following this field requires a keen eye for detail, and the ability to forecast needs. As my enclosed résumé highlights, I possess these skills.

I will graduate from Kenyon College in May 2019 and I'm eager to apply my commitment and competencies toward the needs of this position. I welcome the chance to speak with you further about my qualifications and to learn more about this opportunity. I will follow up with you in two weeks if I don't hear from you before. It is thrilling to consider a future with ABC Investment Partners. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Ken Yon

**Career Development Office**  
Kenyon