

Cover letters:

[Sample cover letter \(download\)](#)

At a minimum, cover letters are professional documents that introduce your resume. Ultimately, you have one page to convince someone to read on. But cover letters are so much more than resume introductions! A strategic cover letter is personalized and proves a match with the position, the company's goals, and the company culture.

Writing cover letters for each and every job can be maddening, but there are easy ways to make them more effective.

Analyze the job description: Make sure you understand what the company is looking for. Highlight any required skills and anything you can prove by example.

Do your research [\(link to research info\)](#): Investigate the company and the department. What do they do? Who do they work with? Do you have a basic fit with the company? Find things that interest you, gain a basic understanding of the company, and come up with some questions. And make sure find the name of the hiring manager.

Target: Focus only on relevant qualifications. Indicate an interest in unique features of the company. The most effective cover letter will be so specific to that position that it'll be unusable for other applications—don't just change the position title and company name.

Be clear: Write in clear, concise, full sentences. Use full words instead of acronyms or abbreviations. Don't be vague or open-ended—elaborate and be concrete when talking about your skills and interest in the company.

Be direct: Write in an active, engaged professional style. Don't be stuffy—mirror how you would speak in a professional setting. Use the active voice and strong action verbs [\(link to action verbs page\)](#).

Keep it short: Write tight, and keep it under a page. You have a page max, but aim for 350 words or fewer. The goal is to astound with brevity, not crush with verbosity.

Tell a story: Leave the lists of accomplishments at home (or, really, to your resume). Narrate your achievements—use anecdotes or examples to show relevant skills and how you implemented them. Tell (a brief, relevant, professional version of) the story of you. Show what makes you the best match for this position.

Be interesting: You have about 30 seconds to prove your relevance, worth, and interest to a hiring manager. Enthusiasm for their work will help you stand out in a positive way. Don't repeat the job description or your resume—they'll fall asleep faster than your application can get to the trash can. Instead describe your skills in distinctive, engaging terms.

Complement (though a compliment or two won't hurt either): Cover letters are part of a whole—make your application a cohesive package. Write with the idea that both documents will be read, but don't use either document as a prerequisite for understanding the other—the hiring manager should get a clear impression of your skills and qualifications from either document and get a greater understanding of your fit, interests, and skills from the application as a whole.

Structure & Format of a cover letter:

HEADER: Your name and contact info (should match your resume's header)

DATE: Date you're (e)mailing the application.

RECIPIENT: Recipient's name, title, mailing address (even if you're emailing).

SALUTATION: Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Or, if you don't know their gender, Dear Full Name. If you can't find a name, address it to the person's job title. "Dear sir or madam" or "To whom it may concern" are antiquated and lazy.

INTRO: Introduce yourself—who are you in a professional context? Why should they care? State the name of the position you're applying for. Give an overview of your background, show what interests you in the company, position.

Answer for your audience: WHO you are, WHAT you're applying for, and WHY they should care.

BODY: Prove some of your skills and qualifications for this position. Show by example, anecdote, or short narrative that you have the skills necessary for the job. Think about results and accomplishments over tasks. Think of a situation you encountered, what task you performed, how you acted (or reacted), and the result. Highlight what you took away from the experience.

Tie your background to the company's needs. Prove the connection between your skills and the position requirements.

Answer for your audience: HOW you are qualified for the position. WHAT makes you unique as an applicant?

CLOSING: Indicate a desire to move forward. Thank them for their time and consideration. End on a polite note.

Answer for your audience: WHAT your next step is, WHEN you plan to follow through, and HOW you will connect with them.

SIGNING OFF: Sincerely, and your full name. Sign in blue or black ink if you're snail mailing it.