

COVER LETTER GUIDE

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Why You Should Send a Cover Letter?

A well-crafted cover letter is an important accompaniment to your résumé. It highlights the key qualifications you possess that are most relevant to the position at hand, and is an excellent means of demonstrating your written communication skills. In addition, a cover letter is the only method you have to convey your motivation and excitement for the organization and the position prior to obtaining an interview.

Your letter should be tailored to each position and organization. If you send out the same form letter to every organization, it could be worse than sending nothing at all because the organization will realize you sent out a form letter.

Be careful when editing an existing letter for a different position – it's very easy to leave a reference to the former organization, which would automatically be a deal-breaker in most situations.

Preparing to Write A Cover Letter

The first step to writing a cover letter is to carefully evaluate the job description and research the organization.

- Make sure to highlight the main skills, qualifications, and duties requested in the job description.
- You may not have all of desired skills, that's okay no one does, just focus on the skills you do have for the position.
- Be sure to highlight those areas in which you have the greatest strengths and experience.
- Think through all of your relevant experience from volunteer and internships to academic opportunities.

Researching a company is key before sending a cover letter and résumé, and even more so prior to an interview. Your first line of research, and the easiest, is to examine the company's website. This should be sufficient for ensuring that your cover letter is tailored. Once you line up an interview you may want to do further research by examining annual reports or publications, and through networking.

Sections Of A Cover Letter

Part I – The Introduction

The first section of your cover letter should address why you are writing and it may also address who you are, including why you are good candidate for the position.

If a contact name is provided in the job description, use it in your introduction. If you would like to do some research on the organization and you can find the name of a contact who is the head of the department in which the position is located, use that name. Whenever possible, always address the person formally by their last name (i.e. “Dear Dr. Jones” or “Dear Mr. Jennings”). If a name cannot be obtained, then “Dear Recruiter” or “Dear Hiring Manager” is acceptable.

Be sure to identify exactly what position you are applying for, as there may be several available within an organization, using a requisition or job number when one exists. It’s also a good idea to state where you learned about the position, such as a website or listserv.

If you were referred by someone you know within the organization or who knows the individual to whom you are writing, this is a strong addition to your cover letter and should come in the first sentence (i.e. “I was referred to you by John Smith regarding the Project Coordinator position”). Current employees are among the best sources of referrals. Many firms report that 40-50% of their openings are filled by candidates referred to by staff members. Moreover, companies view such candidates more favorably than those brought in through other methods, because they already know something about the organization and have a personal connection with it.

In your opening paragraph, give a brief synopsis of your background (i.e. degree and area(s) of experience).

Summary Recommendations for your Opening Paragraph

- ✓ Use an appropriate greeting in the salutation, such as “Dear,” and use contact name if provided or if you can obtain it.
- ✓ Use the professional title (Mr., Ms., or Dr... never Mrs.) followed by last name – do not include the first name here.
- ✓ If no name is provided, you can use (Dear Hiring Director)
- ✓ Use professional language, you are being judged on your writing abilities as well.
- ✓ Be specific – name the position and organization
- ✓ Reference position number (if provided) and on what site you found the job posting.
- ✓ Provide brief description of who you and state why you are a good candidate for position.

Good Example

Dear Ms. Smith,

I am writing to express my strong interest in the Research Assistant position (Requisition #10209) currently open in the Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advertised through LinkedIn. My previous research experience in obesity and nutrition coupled with my current Master of Public Health degree in Epidemiology make me an ideal candidate for the position.

Part 2 – Demonstrating your qualifications

The majority of your letter should consist of a demonstration of your skills and experience relevant to the position based specifically on each job description. You should not summarize your work history or your general skills, only the ones highlighted in the job description

You should demonstrate how you have developed the skills needed, instead of providing soft statements without any backup. Your primary purpose is to validate your competencies through relevant work experiences.

While you should use your own words in the letter, you should also include some of the key words from the position description, such as those you highlighted when evaluating the description. This is especially important because if your materials are being sent through Human Resources first instead of the hiring manager, HR may not be familiar with the field and/or use scanning software to look for key words and phrases in your cover letter and résumé.

Don't assume the reader understands the nature of your work, so refrain from using too many acronyms or highly technical terminology specific to your realm.

Here are some tips for the part of your letter demonstrating your qualifications:

- ✓ Highlight only those key skills and experiences that are relevant to the position requirements.
- ✓ Do not regurgitate a list of all your skills from your résumé or try to write your entire history of work.
- ✓ Choose several of your most significant experiences to write about based on each position.
- ✓ Use relevant terms, key words and phrases from the description in order to address position requirements.
- ✓ Remember you must keep the letter to 1 page, organizations will not take the time to read more than 1 page.
- ✓ Don't discount your volunteer and academic experiences related to the position.

POOR EXAMPLE

I have excellent evaluation skills gained through various experiences and internships that are a match for your position.

The “poor example” above is very common in cover letters and is completely ineffective because it lacks detail about the candidate’s skills and experiences.

The “good example” below provides details and context to validate the candidate’s skills and utilizes key words from the position description.

GOOD EXAMPLE

I refined my evaluation and analytical skills while serving as a graduate assistant at the Tobacco Technical Assistance Consortium, where I conducted phone interviews and analyzed qualitative data utilizing SAS as part of a system wide evaluation for a tobacco reduction program.

Part 3 – The closing

In the final paragraph of your letter, you should sound excited about the position, telling them why you're eager to come work for them. This is where your research on the company and its mission can come in. You may wish to start with a statement expressing your eagerness, see example below.

You can also provide a brief summary statement about what you believe are your most valuable skills you have to offer the organization as a last pitch. In your final sentences, you should thank the individual for their time and let them know how they can reach you.

Here are some tips for your closing paragraph:

- ✓ Relay your motivation – sound excited and tell them why you want to work for their organization.
- ✓ Keep the focus on what you can do for them, unless you are applying for a training or fellowship program, where it is understood that you will receive training and mentorship, then you can also include what you hope to gain.
- ✓ Provide your best contact information: one email and one phone number.
- ✓ Thank them for their consideration and time.

Good Example

I am excited about the opportunity to contribute my research and quantitative skills to your work in maternal health. I strongly believe in CDC's mission of advancing the ability of women to access affordable reproductive health care.

I am eager to be a part of your team and am confident that my enthusiasm and flexibility will be a valuable asset to your organization. Can be reached at (404) 555-5555 or via e-mail at astudent@sph.emory.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Any Student

Formatting Your Letter

Be sure to use the same header (name, contact info) and the same font as on your résumé for a nice match. Your letter should be one page maximum. On page 9 of this guide is an example letter to look all of the formatting details. When sending your letter, it is a good idea to include it as the first page in the same document with your résumé, so that the receiver need only open one document. If you have a the ability to send your application by email, use the cover letter as your email paragraph, and attach your resume and cover letter to the email message.

Important Considerations

- ✓ Double check your letter for spelling or typo errors. A sloppy letter will automatically take you out of the running.
- ✓ Use the same language from the job description to describe your qualifications and experiences.
- ✓ Think about the message you want to convey - organize your thoughts to create a first draft, then refine your letter.
- ✓ Avoid empty lofty language and back up your statements with context and evidence of how and where you gained your skills and experience.

See pages 8 & 9 for an Example Job Description & Cover Letter

Example Job Description

Centers for Disease Control Division of Global Safe Water

Position: Global Safe Water Intern

Internship Description:

Intern needed to support CDC's Global Safe Water Initiatives and assist a team of public health specialists focused on providing access to healthy water to low and middle-income water-stressed countries. Candidates need excellent verbal and written communication skills, ability to interpret and work with data analysis, strong collaboration skills, and currently enrolled in a MPH degree seeking program.

Preferred/Desired Qualifications

Prior Research experience
Excel
Experience working with large data sets
Cleaning and analyzing data
Experience creating and implementing educational program objectives
Measuring program objectives
International exposure/experience

Recommendations:

- Review the job description closely so you can expand upon the skills and experiences in your cover letter based on the specific details of the job description.
- Do not send the same generic cover letter of skills to every employer, they are looking to see if you provide specific context regarding your experiences and skills and why you are a good fit for the job.
- The cover letter is your opportunity to provide supporting context beyond your resume to expand upon your motivation, skills and experiences related to the position and the organization.

Example Cover Letter

First, Last Name

1213 Main Street, Atlanta, GA 30383

Email: Student@emory.edu Phone: 404.555.5555

Date: Monty/Day/Year
Attn: Hiring Director
Centers for Disease Control
Division of Global Safe Water
1600 Clifton Rd, Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Hiring Director,

I am writing to express my strong interest in the Research Graduate position (reference #10209) in The Centers for Disease Control Division of Global Safe Water. I am currently a first-year student at the Rollins School of Public Health in the Global Health Department. The combination of my course of study, work experience, and passion for safe water for all populations are an ideal match for this position within your Global Safe Water team.

I am currently enrolled in a water sanitation and hygiene course at Rollins, which will provide me additional training and knowledge in this subject matter. My two semesters of undergraduate research experiences have also provided me a diversity of valuable skills including utilizing Excel in working with large data sets required for cleaning and analyzing data as requested in your position description. My undergraduate international internship with the American Red Cross provided me with experience in collaborating with teams and creating and monitoring educational program objectives in developing countries. I believe my understanding of the critical skill of monitoring and measuring program objectives will prove very valuable in supporting your safe water and sanitation program objectives at an international level.

I am excited to assist the Global Safe Water team with your objective to provide access to healthy water to low and middle-income water stressed countries by contributing my research skills and passion for this realm. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if there is any additional information I can provide. I look forward to meeting you in the near future to further discuss my experiences and qualifications and I can be reached at your convenience by email at student@emory.edu or by phone at 404.555.5555.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

First, Last Name

Note:

In your actual letter, you will **NOT** highlight these areas in yellow.

The highlighted yellow sections above are to give you an *example* of matching skills and experiences in your cover letter based on the specific details of a job description.