

quick tips Cover Letters

Step 1. Format Your Cover Letter

A cover letter accompanies your resume in a job or internship search and is a great marketing tool. A cover letter is typically a one page document or email that gives the reader a more detailed description of your skills, knowledge, and accomplishments— both direct and transferable—as well as an explanation of why you are interested in the position and the company.

Use consistent formatting

Use formatting consistent with your resume including the same header, font, and font size. This helps brand you as a candidate and emphasizes a clean, organized look.

Find the hiring manager's name

Personalize your letter by addressing it to the recruiter at the career fair, the name listed in the position description, or by searching LinkedIn for the hiring manager/supervisor for that position. If you can't find the correct name, address it to "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear 'position name' search committee" and avoid impersonal phrases such as "To whom it may concern" or "Dear Sir or Madam." If you know the specific name, be sure to use proper salutations, such as Dr./Mr./Ms.

Proofread

Avoid typos, misspelled words, or incorrect grammar. Always have someone proofread your cover letter before you submit it. The CPDC and the Global Communications Center are great places to get a second pair of eyes on your cover letter.

Mention any contacts you have at the company

Name drop—if you know someone who works there or a recruiter that referred you for the position, state his/her name in the first paragraph.

quick tips Cover Letters (cont.)

Step 2. Develop Your Content

Brainstorm experiences and skills that match the job description

Review the job description and pick out the most important skills the position requires, then choose three you'd like to highlight based upon similar experience you have. Support these skills by sharing specific examples for each. These skills and supporting examples will act as the body paragraphs of your letter. The more words from the job description that you can use in your cover letter, the better.

Don't underestimate the power of transferable skills

If you lack "direct" experience stated in the position description, supplement your resume with transferable experience. Transferable skills are skills learned through part-time jobs, class projects, or student organizations that can be transferred to the internship or job for which you're applying. Things such as: teamwork, leadership, communication skills, etc. Everyone possesses these types of skills.

Emphasize your interest in the company and/or position

Research the company to brainstorm why you want to work there or why you are most interested in the position. What is different about this company (products, clients, mission, etc.) that excites you? It's important to tell the reader why you want to work there as much as why you're qualified. Don't be afraid to get personal about why you love the company or its brand / mission!

Avoid these common mistakes

- Apologizing for skills you don't have—instead, focus most on what makes you most qualified
- Using a standard cover letter for all positions—one size does not fit all! Rather, personalize each cover letter you write.
- Regurgitating your resume—be sure to expand on ideas in your resume by giving specific, detailed examples
- Starting the first sentence with your name—the reader can see your name at the top of your resume
- Forgetting to state the company and position for which you're applying



Additional Help

Visit cmu.edu/career to access sample cover letters. Additionally, be sure to schedule an appointment with your career consultant, who can help you tell your story and guide you through the cover letter writing process.