School of Computer Science
Cover Letter Guide

A cover letter is a one page overview of your relevant skills, experiences, and education to support your candidacy for a specific position. In some instances a cover letter will be a job application requirement, while in others, it will be optional. This guide provides information on developing cover letter content and formatting and includes a self-review checklist and sample cover letter to assist you in writing your cover letter.

Focus your Cover Letter on:

1. Connecting your past, present and future:
Your cover letter should show how your past experiences (education, internships, research, etc.) make you a unique candidate in the present, and how the qualifications gained from these experiences will be an asset when you apply them to projects at your target company in the future. In particular, you should explain the advantages of your experiences: the unique approach of CMU's programs and the qualifications and training the degree and/or your research has equipped you with and the qualifications you have gained from additional experiences (internships, leadership, work experience, etc.).

2. Highlighting the qualifications that your experience gave you – not the experience itself:
Your cover letter should NOT simply restate your résumé but should elaborate on the qualifications that your abilities, accomplishments, and experiences gave you as they relate to the specific position and company to which you are applying. You should carefully review the job description and ensure the skills and qualifications that you have included in your cover letter align with what the company is asking for in the job posting.

For Example:
BEFORE: I graduated with a Masters in Computational Data Science from Carnegie Mellon University. This past year, I was a research assistant with Dr. XXX and I collaborated with a PhD student to ensure we completed our project by the deadline.
> ***What's wrong with this?*** It doesn't state what the applicant gained from the experience

AFTER: My research in the Language Technologies Institute at Carnegie Mellon University has been focused on Visual Question Answering (VQA), a subdomain of Natural Language Processing and Computer Vision. As a research assistant with Dr. XXX, I developed a specialized Question Answering system to extract information from images based on questions presented in natural human language. Through my research assistantship I have gained expertise in natural language processing and computer vision which I am eager to apply to complex problems at N.
> ***Why is this better?*** It states the qualifications gained from experiences AND links those qualifications to the future/position.

Tailor your information:

1. Be as specific as possible when introducing your abilities and qualifications; explain why:
You do not want the ideas in your cover letter to be general or vague. Try to eliminate sentences that could be written by anybody with a graduate degree in your field. Specific details make you look qualified, interested, and well-informed.

2. Unify each body paragraph of your cover letter around one qualification, including the experiences that have given you this qualification:
In particular, the first or second sentence of the paragraph should emphasize one or two specific qualifications afforded by the unique training of your degree and/or work and internship experience. The rest of the paragraph should provide specific details that support this main idea. These details should distinguish you from other applicants who also have a Master's degree in your field.

Firstname M. Lastname

xxx1234@andrew.cmu.edu ♦ (412) 555-5555 ♦ www.linkedin.com/firstlast

Date

Company Name
Company Address

Salutation: *(such as: Dear Recruitment Team, Dear Hiring Manager)*

Introductory Paragraph:
- Introduce who you are and the position to which you've applied
- Introduce how you heard of position, if through networking, faculty contact, or at a job fair
- State your degree, major, college affiliation and graduation date
- In the closing sentence, make a strong claim about your candidacy that states 1-3 qualifications you will discuss and provide evidence of in the body paragraphs of your letter- Ensure the qualifications listed directly correlate to the job description for the position to which you have written the letter

Body Paragraphs:
- Write two to three body paragraphs. Each paragraph should focus on a specific qualification mentioned in the closing sentence of your introductory paragraph.
  - Demonstrate how your past experience, current skills, and education make you a fit for the opportunity.
  - Highlight your CMU experience and specialized training and skills you're developing in your program and/or through your research.
  - Elaborate on the most relevant skills and experiences (education, research, and professional work/intern experience) found in your resume and connect them to the job qualifications versus simply restating your resume.
  - Present information specific to you versus using general language that could have been written by any candidate in your program.

Concluding Paragraph:
- Reiterate why you're a strong candidate for the position.
- Reference any documents you've attached or enclosed (if sent via email).
- State your interest in interviewing or moving forward in the hiring process.
- Thank your reader

Closing salutation, (*such as: Thank you, Sincerely)*
Your Name

Note: The design/template of your cover letter can be customized, you may want to match the formatting to your resume for consistent branding.

COVER LETTER SELF-REVIEW

GENERAL

- ☐ Entire document uses consistent margins that are no larger than one inch and no smaller than .05
- ☐ The top of the page includes your contact information, followed by the date, and employer's name and address
- ☐ Salutation is formal: Using the hiring manager's name if known OR a general salutation such as Dear Hiring Manager or Dear Recruitment Team
- ☐ Total document is one page or less
- ☐ Paragraphs are short, concise and direct
- ☐ Cover Letter is free of grammatical and spelling errors

INTRODUCTION

- ☐ Names the position for which you are applying
- ☐ States your degree, major, college affiliation and graduation date
- ☐ Last sentence makes a strong claim about your candidacy that previews 1-3 qualifications you discuss in the body paragraphs
- ☐ Qualifications listed directly correlate to the job description for the position to which you have written the letter

BODY PARAGRAPHS

- ☐ The 1-3 qualifications highlighted in the introduction align to the body paragraphs topics, with themes clearly identifiable in the paragraphs
- ☐ Qualifications or skills gained from experiences are presented, not just the experiences themselves
- ☐ Paragraphs focus on connecting your past and present skills, qualifications and education to the company and/or position (i.e. your future)
- ☐ Specifics details and/or examples are provided and generalities are avoided
- ☐ Does not simply restate or summarize the resume
- ☐ Strong action verbs and direct language are used

CONCLUSION

- ☐ Reminds the reader why you are a strong match for the position and references the key qualifications you highlight in the introduction and body paragraphs
- ☐ Includes a call to action—requests an interview, refers to future contact, etc.
- ☐ Mentions the other document(s) you are enclosing and/or the document(s) you are submitting as part of your application (as appropriate)
- ☐ Thanks the reader

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(412)-555-1234

September 30, 2018

Awesome Engineering Co,
5678 Main Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Dear Recruiting Manager,

I am writing to apply for the Computer Vision Engineer position, which I learned about from Bob Smith at the Technical Opportunities Conference 2018 at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU). Currently, I am pursuing a Master's degree in Robotics at CMU with an expected completion date of May 2020. I believe that my professional experience in the field of Computer Vision, coupled with the research I am currently conducting at CMU have provided me with the technical expertise and collaboration skills needed to solve advanced problems related to vehicle autonomy.

Prior to CMU, I spent two years working on computer vision projects at Robotics Inc, Inc., where I contributed to the area of sensor processing and collaborated with a team of experts in the field of Deep Learning. As part of the research team, I designed and developed high precision mapping for a manufacturing robot. I also took the lead on analyzing large datasets and working with raw sensor data. I collaborated cross-functionally with other engineering teams to communicate our work to colleagues and management. This practical experience in sensor processing as well as working with a collaborative team, has given me the skills needed to excel in this role.

My past professional experience and master's research project are similar to the position you are offering: each involves finding the root cause of a problem, mapping a plan to tackle the problem and designing the mechanisms that can solve it in a cost effective and efficient manner. My master's research project at CMU is focused on Multi-Object Tracking & Multi-Sensor Fusion, where I am leading the project to create a perception system for a moped. I have a proven track record in the field of computer vision and I believe I can make a positive impact in solving complex engineering problems as well as driving innovative results.

I have always enjoyed research and creative problem solving and I believe that my experience will be of value in this role. If given the opportunity, I know I will be a strong asset to your company. Thank you for your time and consideration and I hope to hear from you soon.

Best Regards,
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