

Cover Letter Guide

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Cover Letters

What is a cover letter?

A cover letter is a single-page letter written to the person or organization listing the job you are applying for. **A well-written cover letter should not only introduce you as a job candidate, but also provide additional context beyond your resume.** Taking the time to craft a cover letter for each job you apply to allows you to express your interest in both the role and company, but tailored to demonstrate the skills and experiences you will contribute to the organization.

When should I write a cover letter?

You should write a cover letter for every job or internship you apply to, even if the employer does not specifically ask for one. Taking the initiative to craft a personalized letter demonstrates a higher level of interest and attention to detail that may elevate you above other candidates. A strong cover letter serves as your personal pitch for the role.

Who should I address a cover letter to?

Whenever possible, **address your letter to a specific individual within the organization who is responsible for the hiring decision.** While you can typically find a name listed within the job listing; if a name is not listed, check the organization's website for the appropriate person or use LinkedIn as a research tool. If you cannot find a specific name, address the letter as "Dear Recruiting Coordinator," or "Dear Hiring Manager,".

Where should I send a digital cover letter?

When applying for a position, most listings will either have their own portal to which you can upload your cover letter or request that you email your document to a specific address. **Always upload your cover letter and resume as a PDF unless directed otherwise by the application.** When saving your cover letter, use an appropriate and informative file name. For example, use "JaneDoe_CoverLetter" rather than "UpdatedCoverLetter" or "CLVersion3". Keeping a file name clean and to the point may be helpful to the recruiter or hiring manager.

How do I write a cover letter?

While you should write a unique cover letter for each job you apply to, you don't have to start from scratch each time. **Check out our general format below** and follow our tips and tricks so you can craft a successful cover letter.



Cover Letter Structure

Header

The header of your cover letter includes your contact information, by which the employer can get a hold of you.

Be sure to include your name, address, both current and permanent if applicable, such your phone number, and email address. If you have a header atop your resume, it's a good idea to also use that as the header of your cover letter as well.

If you are submitting a digital cover letter, there is no need to include the employer's address information. Simply begin the letter with an appropriate greeting, such as 'Dear' and the hiring manager's name, following the 'Who should I address a cover letter to' section above.

Ascend Tip

A successful cover letter should contain these following components:

Header, Introduction, Body, and Conclusion

Introduction

Introduce yourself as a job candidate! You might want to include:

- The purpose of your letter (what position you're applying for)
- How you heard about the position, especially if it's through a personal connection
- Your education or any exceptional work experiences relevant to the position
- Personal mission statement and how this statement relates to the job/internship

Body

Some job and internship listings will ask the candidate to use the cover letter as an opportunity to answer specific questions detailed in the posting. However, if the company asks for a general cover letter, use the body of your letter to dive into the experiences you list in your resume and provide additional context. Prioritize highlighting specific jobs and projects or tasks you completed, including what you accomplished and detailed outcomes.

If you're short on experience, or having a difficult time beginning the body of your cover letter, consider asking yourself these questions to get going in the right direction.

What are my professional accomplishments?

- University experience
- Work or internship experience
- Volunteer experience

What are my professional goals?

- What industry do I want to work in and what drives me to want to work there?
- What type of daily work do I want to do?
- What type of workplace do I see myself excelling in?

What are my personal goals?

- Does the job or internship I'm applying to help me pursue short-term or long-term goals?
- Could this job or internship provide me with an opportunity to move up in the workplace or provide me with skills to pursue a more intensive role?

What is the intersection of my personal values or passions and professional goals?

- What is my personal or professional mission statement?
- How can I align my personal values or passions into my daily work?
- Does this job or internship allow me to live with integrity to my personal or professional mission?

Once you've answered these questions, consider highlighting your...

Education

- Describe your degree, school, and university, as relevant
- Highlight any relevant links from your university to the role you're applying to
- Relevant coursework or academic experiences, including but not limited to classes/research experience

Professional Achievements

- Elaborate on the work experiences listed in your resume
- Make those experiences relevant to the reader by linking them to the job you're applying for

Personal Touch

- Share any relevant societies, clubs, or volunteer experiences
- Draw parallels between your non-work experiences and the responsibilities and duties of the job

Conclusion

Wrap-up your cover letter and leave a lasting impression with the hiring manager. It's a good idea to include:

- A variation of your mission statement, to mirror your introductory paragraph
- The role you're applying for
- A personal "Thank You" and an appropriate sign-off



Formatting Tips + Tricks

There are two things to keep in mind when formatting your cover letter:

- 1 Always include your name and contact information at the top of your cover letter. **Re-using the same format as your resume is helpful to maintain uniformity.** Formatting this information so it fits into the header is not only a good way to save time adjusting the rest of your letter, but also saves valuable space.
- 2 While a cover letter should never exceed a single page, playing with font size and margins can help create space after you've exhausted the editing process. **Use a size 11 font or reduce the margins from the standard 1" to get some extra space.** Just be sure to print out your letter to make sure it's still easy to read. Save as a PDF to maintain the formatting!



Final Thoughts

Remember that just as every cover letter you write is unique, you as a job candidate bring something unique to the table. Own your experiences, showcase your skills, and don't apologize for something you think you might be missing.

Writing a cover letter can seem like a daunting task, but you will improve with practice. Proofread profusely, and if given the opportunity, have extra eyes look at your cover letter and provide feedback.

Advice From Our Managers

Many of our Managers of Recruitment see cover letters daily. Here is some advice they have for you when preparing to write a cover letter!



Manager of Recruitment, Alex Nagy says,

“When concluding a cover letter, **I recommend including a line about why you’re specifically interested in this organization** and emphasize any expected next steps. For example, you could say, *Working for a company whose values so closely align with my own is an exciting prospect. I hope to continue learning more about this company and share more of my experience through an interview.* Not only does this bring the letter to a nice conclusion, but it also sets clear expectations for how you’d like to move forward.”



Manager of Strategy + Operations, Zach Bellavia says,

“**Be prepared to answer a fundamental question: why do you want to work for this employer?** Your cover letter should serve not only as evidence of your experience, but also share your interest in working for the employer.”



Manager of Recruitment, Lauren Riley says,

“**There is no such thing as too much proofreading!** Multiple revisions and extra eyes can save a strong cover letter from silly errors. I’ve had candidates in the past address the cover letter to the wrong employer or even include the wrong position title.”

Jane Doe

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Apt. A 123 W. Main St | Anywhere, IN 47404
789 E. Maple Ave. | Nowheresville, IN 46204

Dear Ms. Jones,

I am writing to apply to the position of Community Outreach Intern for Nowheresville County Parks Department, as advertised on the Ascend Indiana Network. I was introduced to this position after a conversation with my recruiter, Alex Smith, and wanted to express my interest with you. I am a current student at the State University School of Public Affairs who firmly believes in and actively tries to embody the school's motto, *Engage the Good, Be the Change*, and I am confident that working with the department would be a unique opportunity to align my experience, passions, and mission and allow me to engage with my county and work to bring about meaningful change.

As a working student, I have had experience in a range of industries, but all serving towards the same goal: outreach and engagement. From my time working as an ambassador in the School of Public Affairs' Undergraduate Office to serving as an outreach intern for Volunteers in Medicine of Anywhere County to summer experiences as a cashier at a local grocer; my work has always placed a heavy emphasis on teamwork and stakeholder engagement to achieve a common goal.

I am confident in writing that working as an outreach intern for Volunteers in Medicine of Anywhere County has been a great preparation for the work I would do with the Nowheresville County Parks Department. As an outreach intern, it was not only my job to inform the community of the free medical services the clinic offered to those who did not have or could not afford medical insurance, but also to build community partnerships to increase volunteerism and fundraising. During my 9-month internship, I worked with the community to forge partnerships between the clinic and local business and campus groups. My work resulted in the long-term partnership between Volunteers in Medicine of Anywhere County and the State University's Volunteer Club, which still stands strong today. The first year of this partnership developed the now annual VIM Fun Run 5k, which, in its first year, raised over \$2,500 for medical services. I'm proud of this work because I had to be self-motivated to achieve these goals and it confirmed my love for community outreach and fundraising.

I'm inspired to work with your department because of not only my personal connection to the Nowheresville County, as a born and raised resident, but also because I'm excited to put my education into practice. After taking courses like *Nonprofit Management and Leadership and Human Resource Management*, I'm eager to put these concepts from these classes, like strategic stakeholder engagement and program evaluation and outcome assessments, to the test and engage the Nowheresville County community with events and opportunities the department undertakes.

I submit my application to you, Ms. Jones, excited in knowing that this Community Outreach Internship for Nowheresville County Parks Department, is a unique summer opportunity for me to continue the community outreach work I am passionate about. I welcome the opportunity to engage the good and to be the change within our community and look forward to discussing with you more about this internship and what I may look like as a team member of the Nowheresville County Parks Department.

Sincerely,



Jane Doe

Using the same header as your resume is not only a good way to maintain uniformity among your documents, but it's also a great space saver!

Begin your letter with a clear purpose. Be sure to include the full name of the role you're applying for.

Share how you heard about the position. Including a mutual connection can help bridge the gap between you and the hiring manager.

Including a personal mission statement or credo can help drive your letter.

Relate your mission statement back to the role you're applying to.

Include a transitional paragraph to introduce you as a candidate, highlighting your relevant education, work, or personal experiences.

Try to include responsibilities in your cover letter that are listed in the job description.

Be prepared to include why you want to work for the employer.

If you include academic experience, don't just list the names of courses. Pull out key elements from the classes that would be relevant to the job.

Don't forget to include the full job or internship title in your conclusion.

Return to your personal mission statement.

Encourage and invite the hiring manager to take the next step.

Include an appropriate sign-off and add a handwritten signature for a personal touch.