

Cover Letters

Okay, let's just put it out on the table. No one likes to write cover letters.

So, now that is out of the way, let's focus on how to make writing your cover letter as painless as possible, powerfully effective, and compelling! Here are the keys:

First, your letter is a professional piece of correspondence that allows you to address specifics about the job to which you're applying, your knowledge about the company, and how your unique skills and experiences can benefit the organization. It should:

- Grab attention and encourage reading of the resume
- Show your personality/"Fit" with the position and organization
- Illustrate your research about the employer and the requirements for the job
- Demonstrate your ability to write effectively

What comes first?

Before you put fingers to the keyboard or pen to paper, the first step in writing an effective cover letter is conducting research as well as reading the job description carefully. Visit the company's website and social media accounts. Think of getting to know the company like getting to know a person. Are they Serious? Snarky? Fun? Refined? What do they take pride in? Who are their customers? This information will enable you to tailor your letter that reflects an understanding how work is done at that company and enables you to showcase how you might fit in. Yes, companies (i.e. the reader) know their story but they want to know that YOU know their story as well.

TIP: Don't EVER reuse the same cover letter

Formatting and Structure Guidelines:

Length:

A cover letter is typically one page with three to five paragraphs (four is ideal).

Format:

Use the same heading, font style, size and type of paper (if printed) as your resume

Personalized Greeting:

Address your cover letter to a specific person, if possible. If a name is unavailable, use a title (e.g. "Dear Hiring Manager", "Dear Recruiter"). Another option is to dispense with the title -- use Re: insert the name of the job opening (e.g. Re: Communication Specialist job opening).

TIP: NEVER, NEVER use "To Whom it May Concern!" It is very old school language.

Content Guidelines

Paragraph One:

Start off differently! Imagine you're a hiring manager or recruiting professional with a stack of cover letters and resumes in front of you and they all begin the same way "It is with great enthusiasm that I am applying for the job"..... OR... "My name is Jane Doe and I saw your job posting"... OR ..."Enclosed please find..." Pretty boring, right? Your job is to capture the attention of the reader and make them want to continue reading. Be creative, perhaps begin with an example from a previous job, something you learned in class, or some aspect of the company's business that you find fascinating. Hook your reader and don't forget to state why you are writing in the final sentence of your first paragraph – to apply for the position!

Middle Paragraph:

Demonstrate your knowledge of the employer and position. Remember all of that research? The details are evident here! Tailor your message to the needs of the posting, focusing on your transferrable skills or previous experience that match the qualifications of the job. This isn't just re-hashing facts from your resume. Flesh out your accomplishments by illustrating how you were able to achieve results. Perhaps you can provide more information on how you can deliver the benefits mentioned in your opening paragraph. In short, answer these questions—why you should hire me and why I would be a good fit for your team!!

Closing Paragraph:

End on a positive note. Visualize yourself as already being a member of the team. We believe that being bold is an asset! Ask for the interview or at minimum a phone screen interview. Provide a link to your website or LinkedIn profile and don't forget to indicate your contact information.

A word about creative, stylistic cover letters

Let the organization that you're applying to be your guide whether to employ a more creative or stylistic design to your letter. If the company's website or their employee profiles are fun, snarky or stylistic, then by all means follow that tone in your cover letter. On the other hand, if the tone of the website and/or reputation of the company is more formal then use that as a guide.

Avoid using standard Word templates. There are many creative cover letter templates to provide food for thought! Use your imagination—it is a skill that is highly sought in creative, marketing and advertising industries.

Whether staid or humorous, colorful or mundane, make sure that your letter conveys substance and answers the question – “Why you?”

Summary of Do's & Don'ts

Do...

- Address your letter to an individual, if possible.
- Send EACH employer a specific, tailored letter.
- Use simple language and sentence structure. Be a ruthless copy-editor!
- Mirror, if appropriate, the style and tone of the organization in your letter.
- Keep your letter brief, not more than one page.
- Try to answer the reader’s question: “Why should I hire YOU?”
- Focus on the company, not you – count the “I’s” in your cover letter! More than 15 uses of the pronoun
- “I” is too many! Revise accordingly.
- Match your skills, education and experiences to the job duties and qualifications.
- Properly use articles, such as “a”, “an” and “the”

Don't...

- Use a generic letter or a template! Customize your letter for every job.
- Waste the first paragraph with a boring introduction: grab the reader’s attention!
- Use trite phrases like, “Enclosed please find my resume” –they waste precious space.
- Be afraid to interject a bit of your personality in your letter!
- Send the letter without checking for typos, incorrect grammar, punctuation, etc.
- Rehash your resume; be original!
- Use contractions (including “don’t”)!

Formatting & Structure Guidelines:

- Block format is typically used for business letters. In block format, the entire text is left aligned and single spaced.
- The exception to the single spacing is a double space between paragraphs instead of indents for paragraphs.
- Proper punctuation after the salutation or greeting is a COLON not a comma.
- Use courtesy titles if appropriate, Mr., Ms. If a person’s name is gender neutral, then use their entire name. For example, Dear Chris Jones:
- If sending a cover letter via email, include their mailing address and email address with the notation: Via email to email address

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Benefit Cosmetics LLC
Director of Human Resources
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Dear Hiring Manager,

A passionate dancer since the age of eight, I have experimented with my fair share of false eyelashes and red lipsticks. Before every stage appearance, I always make sure to apply what I consider to be my ‘secret performance ingredient:’ Benefit’s ‘High Beam.’ I discovered this magical highlighter when I visited my local Benefit boutique for the first time. After dabbing a couple of drops onto my face, I felt my cheekbones and confidence brought to life. While only ‘High Beam’ can elicit my inner Shirley Temple, I experience a similar rush of exhilaration when brainstorming creative marketing strategies and designing promotional materials. Passionate about everything related to beauty and communications, I am eager to combine my greatest interests through Benefit Cosmetic’s Brand and Digital Marketing Internship.

I am a sophomore at Northwestern University pursuing a degree in Economics and Dance. I first discovered my interest for marketing while serving as the Officer of Public Relations for Silicon Valley DECA. Unversed in social media before assuming the role, I eagerly taught myself everything related to Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr and spent hours creating a new website for the organization. Through trial and error, I learned how to harness social media to most effectively engage and connect with our organization’s members.

In my subsequent role as Silicon Valley DECA President, I enhanced my communications skills working with 12 student officers to arrange and promote our organization’s first Leadership and Career Development Conference. After surveying members to determine their professional goals and desired skills, we recruited guest speakers such as Charles Huang, co-founder of Guitar Hero, to present conference workshops on key career-preparation topics. By expressing the value of these workshops in creative social media campaigns, we attracted over 1,000 members to our conference. During the event planning process, I learned how to mass-market a large-scale event and I realized the importance of leveraging community support and awareness when promoting a service or product.

As an intern for iCadenza, I gained experience creating strategic social media and product expansion plans. After analyzing the demographics and social media tendencies of the company’s customer base, I created Facebook and YouTube customer contests to increase market awareness and the company’s online presence. In addition, after conducting multiple market, competitive, and financial analyses, I discovered opportunities for the company to receive an additional profit of \$10,000 over 3 years by expanding their services to aspiring professional dancers.

I would love to expand my knowledge of the industry by working at Benefit, which presents a uniquely inspiring and empowering ethos through its product branding. As an intern, I would help Benefit expand its presence among college students by organizing campus brand events and social media campaigns that would increase customer interaction. I would value the opportunity to further discuss my qualifications with you. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Leah Daniels