



Cover Letter Guide

The purpose of a cover letter is to **convince a hiring manager to give you an interview** and, ultimately, a position with the company. A strong cover letter introduces your resume by drawing an employer's attention to specific aspects of your experience and background, offering evidence for why you are a good fit for the organization and specific position, and explaining your interest in the opportunity.

Cover Letter Essentials

- **State the position you seek** in the first 2 sentences.
- **Highlight only your most relevant experience and skills.** Do not cover your entire employment history.
- **Prove that you have researched the company** by mentioning something about the organization: an aspect of the company's culture that you admire, the way you fit with their mission, or why you would like to work there. Gather information by reviewing the company's website, viewing its LinkedIn company profile, or by doing an informational interview with an employee.
- **Provide examples of personal qualities that will be of benefit to the job** (i.e. organized, enthusiastic, flexible). However, be careful not to overuse "I," "me," or "my." Make sure the cover letter stays focused on the needs of the person to whom you are writing.
- **Prove your strong writing skills** (an important aspect for most jobs!) by writing a well-crafted cover letter; then **ask someone to proofread** it to confirm it is error-free.



CONSULT THE JOB DESCRIPTION

- Pay close attention to the **qualifications mentioned in the job description.** The company is telling you what they are looking for in a solid candidate.
- Then your job is to **prove** that you have the desired skills and experience by sharing concrete examples.

Add a Personal Touch



- Include an **enthusiastic narrative.** Share at least one **brief story** that highlights an experience or quality that makes you a strong candidate.
- Be specific about what **aspects of the position** most appeal to you.
- Address the cover letter to a **specific person**, even if this means that you have to do some online research or call the organization's main telephone number.
- Mention any **"inside" connections** in the first paragraph of the cover letter, especially if you have a trusted personal contact (in good standing) who works at the organization.



Never

You should never send a generic cover letter; always tailor it to your specific audience's needs

Cover Letter Formatting

- Make your cover letter **“match”** your resume: use the same header (with your contact info) and the same font (preferably 11 or 12 point).
- Limit your cover letter to **one page**.
- Use a **standard business, block style** format.
- Save your cover letter as a **Word** document, send it electronically as a **PDF** file, and include your **full name** in the file name (i.e. Mary_Smith – CoverLetter.doc). If you can only upload one document when applying online, copy and paste your resume as the second page after your cover letter and then save it as a PDF.

Cover Letter Outline

[Use the same heading as on your resume: Your Name, City/State, Phone, and Email]

Date

Recipient's Name

Title

Company Name

Address

City, State Zip

Dear Dr./Mr./Ms. LastName [or FirstName LastName]:

1 Opening (1 paragraph): Start by mentioning the position you are applying for and how you learned of it. If you have a personal contact at the company, mention it here. Address what specifically interests you about this company/position.

2 Middle (2-3 paragraphs): Highlight 2-3 specific experiences or skills you have that fit the position and could benefit the company. Use examples from an internship, paid or unpaid work, volunteer roles, or class projects to demonstrate that you exceed expectations. Do not repeat everything on your resume; instead, focus on the required skills the employer has identified in the job description. This section will be the longest portion of your cover letter. If you have not already done so, describe your interest in the company or organization. Subtly emphasize your knowledge about the employer (from the results of your research) and your familiarity with the industry as a whole. You should present yourself as eager to work for this employer.

3 Closing (1 paragraph): Indicate a desire for an interview so you can discuss your qualifications in further detail. Reference that you are attaching or enclosing your resume. Thank the employer in advance for consideration of your candidacy.

Sincerely,

4 Your Typed Full Name

1

- *Grab your reader's attention right away!*
- *Express excitement*
- *Use keywords*

2

Applying for an internship? Consider highlighting one or two skills you hope to learn or improve upon during the internship.

3

Important: If you write that you will follow up in a specific way (i.e. "I will follow up by telephone in two weeks,") then make sure you follow through!

4

If you would like to include your actual signature, the Compass Center can help you scan your signature and add it to your cover letter.

Before You Send It

After you create a draft of your cover letter, **make an appointment via Handshake with a staff member in the Compass Center.** We can help you think through what to include, identify any mistakes, and help you produce a polished cover letter you are proud to send!



Cover Letter Follow-Up

Many people assume that after they have submitted their cover letters and resumes, they must wait to hear back. Some job descriptions make it clear that applicants should not follow up regarding their application status, but this is typically only at large companies anticipating hundreds of applications for one position. Certainly give the hiring manager a couple weeks to review applications after the submission deadline; but if you have not heard back by then, contact the hiring manager by telephone or email.

Use your phone call or email to: introduce yourself in one sentence, reference the job title for which you applied, and inquire as to whether they need any additional information from you as they consider your application. Be sure to reiterate your interest in the position, and be prepared to explain briefly why you are an ideal candidate. Sometimes this simple act of following up makes you rise to the top of the applicant pool.

- 1 Give the hiring manager 2 weeks to review applicants before you follow up.
- 2 Follow-up by phone or email. Introduce yourself and reference the position.
- 3 Reiterate your interest in the position and share why you're an ideal candidate.

Nora Northwestern

nora.northwestern@nwciowa.edu | (123) 456-7890 | Orange City, IA | www.linkedin.com/in/noranorthwestern

April 16, 2020

Ms. Susan Smith
Director of Clinical Practice
Developmental Disability Center of Iowa
1234 Madison Avenue, Suite 12
Council Bluffs, IA 51503

Dear Ms. Smith:

I believe that I would be an excellent fit for the position of Coordinator of Services at the Developmental Disability Center of Iowa (DDCI). My experience working with adults with intellectual disabilities at L'Arche Chicago, combined with a strong background in team-building, has prepared me for a role in which I can provide instruction and support to a team of staff members at DDCI.

Working as a Live-in Assistant at L'Arche Chicago gave me firsthand experience assisting adults with intellectual disabilities. I was responsible for living alongside the residents in a community home while developing and implementing personalized care. I worked closely with a behavior therapist to create behavior therapy plans and motivate the residents in the achievement of their personal goals. The purpose of my work at L'Arche Chicago was to help the residents lead happy, fulfilling lives and to engage in mutually transforming relationships. I would bring this same motivation to my work at DDCI, gladly embodying your mission to offer support that leads to growth, independence, and ultimately the ability for residents to shape the direction of their own lives in community-based settings.

In addition to my experience working with adults with disabilities, I offer a strong background in coaching and team-building. I sharpened my leadership and problem-solving skills by coaching a team of young women in basketball. I learned how to motivate a team to achieve our mutual goals while employing strong communication skills with both athletes and parents. Also, in my organizational development internship at Interstates, I researched the latest practices in organizational development and team-building and designed an onboarding process to be used throughout the company. Furthermore, my coursework at Northwestern College has given me an academic background in organizational leadership, motivation, and human resource management.

Please find my resume attached. I welcome an opportunity to share more about my qualifications and experience in an interview. If I have not heard anything by May 1, I will call to follow up. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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