

Cover Letter Writing Guide

What is a cover letter?

A cover letter is a one-page document used to introduce yourself and persuasively explain why the reader should review your materials (resume, application, etc.) and, if you are applying for a position, select you for an interview. It should be clear, succinct and informative. After reading the cover letter, your reader should understand why you are enthusiastic about the position and what knowledge, skills and personality traits you would bring to it. It also serves as a writing sample so proper formatting, grammar, spelling and punctuation are critical.

Is a cover letter required?

The only time you should not include a cover letter is when a job or internship posting specifically states not to include one, which is rare. Even if the posting does not state that one is required, you should take the time to write a cover letter since it is great way to distinguish yourself from the many other people looking for positions. The cover letter is your opportunity to share your story and to mention your top “selling points” that relate to a potential employer’s needs. Any time you send a resume – to ask for an informational interview, apply for a position or internship or follow up after an introduction – you need to include a cover letter.

It is imperative that you tailor each cover letter to the situation or to the position you are seeking. Show that you have researched the company or organization and have thoroughly read the position description and requirements. You indicate your respect for the position, the organization and the reader’s time by doing so, and the reader will notice.

Preparing to write a cover letter

- **Research the organization:** visit their website, note their mission, client/product base, locations, recent news and how the department you are applying for fits into the organization; if it is a publically-traded company, read the CEO’s letter in the annual report; view the organization’s LinkedIn page and other social media.
- **Thoroughly understand the position description**, including what experiences, skills and qualities the organization is seeking. Take note of key terms and phrases to use in your cover letter and resume.
- **Determine to whom to address the letter** if the information isn’t provided. Use your investigative skills – if the job posting says “send resumes to tdavis@abccompany” or “apply to “HR Director”, visit the organization’s website to find “tdavis” or the “Director of HR” name so you can address the letter accordingly – “Dear Dr. Davis, Mr. Davis, or Ms. Davis:”. Or, call the company and inquire.
- **Consider the reader:** given your research and the position description, what will be important to them to know about you?

Cover letter basics

A cover letter is professional correspondence and needs to conform to an appropriate block style format – left justified and single spaced except for a double space between paragraphs. Ensure there are no typos, grammar mistakes, exclamation marks, humor, hyperbole, abbreviations or smiley faces. Margins should be no smaller than .8 inches.

As with your resume, the cover letter should be neat and easy for the eye to read. Use a font that is the same as or similar to the one used in your resume - an easy-to-read font like Arial, Arial Narrow, Garamond, Georgia, or Trebuchet MS in 11 or 12 point. If you will be submitting a hard copy, use the same high quality, white or ivory paper for both your cover letter and your resume.

Your writing should be in a pleasant, confident tone and provide clear, concise examples. Also, make sure to vary your sentence structure so each sentence doesn't begin with "I." Don't mention or apologize for any experience you feel you are lacking. Avoid using trite phrases like "contact me at your earliest convenience" or "I desire to be a member of your team". Instead, use your own professional voice.

Additional thoughts

- **Use accurate contact information.** Recipients will use the contact information you provide so use only an email address and phone that you check and use regularly. Make sure you have a formal and professional email address and greeting on your voicemail and that you answer your phone professionally during your job search.
- **Pay particular attention to key points highlighted in bold on page 3.** These are critical to a strong cover letter.
- **Proof, proof, and proof again.** Spell check and grammar check. Read it out loud, slowly. Then ask another person (or two) to read it line by line, even if you are pressed for time. You don't want the reader to think you are careless in your work so proofreading will keep you from being derailed by uncaught, simple mistakes.
- **Always PDF your cover letter before emailing.** If you send a Word document, the formatting may change when the reader opens it on his or her computer. So review and save your document as a PDF before sending electronically.
- **Always include a cover letter with your resume.** When emailing, you can attach it separately or use it as the email's content when attaching your resume (cut and paste it into the email body).
- ***For cover letter help, see attached cover letter outline. Also, you may visit the Office of Internship and Career Development or the Center for Writing and Speaking. Email your cover letter to hireascottie@agnesscott.edu for review by Career Development.***

Student's First & Last Name

ssenior@agnesscott.edu (111) – 111-1111

141 East College Avenue, Decatur, GA 30030

Date

Dr./Mr./Ms. First and Last Name

Title

Company/Organization Name

Organization Street Address

City, ST Zip Code

Dear Dr./Mr./Ms. Last name,

Indicate **which position** you are applying for and how you learned of it (on their website, advertised on LinkedIn, through Agnes Scott College's Office of Internship and Career Development, from XY person who is known to the letter recipient, etc.) Express **why you are interested** in this position. Provide a brief statement of the **top 2-3 reasons you are a good fit** for the position. Think of it as the topic sentence for the letter. Limit this first paragraph to 3 sentences in most situations.

In the next paragraph (5 or so sentences), **support your topic sentence by highlighting 2-3 of your best examples of academic, campus/service or internship/work experience related to the position to which you are applying**. These examples should provide more detail than just repeating your resume. You should try to connect the dots of your experience to support your topic sentence and overall strengths. State examples of skills or knowledge you gained that this employer needs and this position requires.

In your closing paragraph, **restate your interest in the position** and **indicate that your resume is attached for their review** (and any other materials they require.) Encourage them to reach out to you with questions or to arrange an interview. **Indicate that you hope to hear from them soon. Thank him or her** for their time and consideration of your application.

Sincerely,

Your First and Last Name (or insert a scan of your signature with your name printed directly underneath)

Your email address

Your cell phone number

