

Career Education Center

Cover Letter Quick Reference Guide

What is a Cover Letter?

A cover letter is most often a professional letter you send to a prospective employer. It may also take the form of an email or other written introductions you make for career or academic connections. A cover letter always accompanies your résumé. It is an opportunity to introduce yourself and market your most relevant skills and experience. Your cover letter enhances your résumé and explains who you are and why you are sending your materials.

You will need a cover letter for almost every job or internship you apply for; however, they should be written individually to target a particular position or organization. The content in your cover letter should be clear, concise, engaging and never more than one page. Do not just restate information from your résumé. This is a chance for you to explain more about who you are and the value you might bring as an intern or an employee.

Structure and Format

Include your name and contact information at the top (not in the header). Below and left justified should be the date and then the name and address of the employer (see examples).

Whenever possible, address the letter to an individual. Unless the individual specifically identifies how they would like to be addressed (e.g. Rev, Dr., Ms., Mr.) it is most professional to use their full name e.g. “Dear Jamie Sahar” If you do not have the name of an individual you can use a general salutation that may indicate the role at the company e.g. “Dear hiring manager”.

Your cover letter should be 3-5 paragraphs. It should include an introduction, a body, and a close:

- The introduction should be one paragraph and you should engage the reader. Indicate why you are interested and what position you are applying for.
- The body is 1-3 paragraphs and should convey what you have to offer the employer. Outline skills, past experiences and communicate what value you bring as a result.
- The close should emphasize your interest in the position. Write a call to action and thank them for their time.

Always finish your letter with “Sincerely” followed by your name. Avoid creative sign-offs like “Respectfully” or “Best Regards”. “Sincerely” is industry standard.

Another option for writing your letter is to bullet the body paragraphs into highlights and/or qualifications. This is a great way to create a document that can be scanned quickly and emphasizes your skills and experiences. There are examples on our webpage: www.smcvt.edu/career

Grammar

There is no excuse for grammar mistakes in your career documents. It could be the difference between receiving an interview and being put in the “no” pile. Your cover letter, like your résumé, is the first impression you will give. Make sure to have someone check your work!

Keep in mind that 35% of cover letters do not get read because they are too long. Be specific and avoid overused and general language. If a cover letter is optional, write one anyway! Never send an incomplete application. If you want help with this...come see us in the Career Education Center!