

Developing a Compelling Cover Letter

It is always recommended you include a cover letter with your resume as part of your application package – even if it is not formally requested. Your cover letter is your first chance to make a real “connection” with a prospective employer. It allows you to highlight the “so what” of your resume (i.e. what you are really attempting to tell or “sell” to the reader when they review the info & detail on your resume) while also demonstrating critical thought and an appreciation of the organization’s needs. In contrast to the resume, the cover letter is about highlighting why the opportunity is a match with who you are (your personal fit) AND showing you have the skills & abilities to meet or exceed what is required for the role (your professional fit), providing a strong sense of your match with the position to which you're applying.

Your cover letter serves as a “teaser” to your resume and other potential application materials. Think of it as a social media reel, the short commercial on television or in a magazine that, if effective, causes the viewer to look into the product or service being promoted (in this case YOU) more carefully. Like an executive summary for a business proposal or report, a well written cover letter clearly highlights key insights & entices the reader to read on.

To truly ‘speak’ to your reader, each cover letter you compose needs to be customized and not a generic piece of marketing material. Tailoring each cover letter you write takes extra time, but it shows the organization you are writing to that you have considered their needs as well as their values, culture and/or environment, and that you have uniquely considered them as an employer in the same way that you would like them to uniquely consider you as an applicant.

Elements of a compelling cover letter include:

Introductory paragraph: Focus on Interest & “Personal Fit”

Introduce your ‘personal fit’ for the position you are applying to – there are two primary ways this can be accomplished:

1. Referring to specific information about the organization that goes beyond common knowledge:
 - Often one's level of genuine interest or ‘passion’ for a topic is judged by the degree of information or knowledge they possess in respect to the topic/issue; referencing specific information beyond what the average person would know from watching news/seeing info on the internet/social media, etc., allows you to reinforce your true interest in the opportunity to which you are applying. You can comment on any formal events or activities you have engaged in which relate to the firm; note what you learned and/or mention company employees you spoke with.
2. Showing an alignment between your values and the values of the organization:
 - If seeking to make a match between your values and the values of the organization, identify the shared value(s) that you possess and give one concrete example of how you have demonstrated this value in your experience

Middle paragraph(s): Specific “Mini-stories” to highlight “Professional Fit” & provide evidence of key skills

- To clearly show you understand what it takes to do the job you are applying to well & that you have the most important skills to succeed in the position, clearly highlight the 2-3 key skills most valued by the organization at the end of the first paragraph to set up transition from “personal” fit to “professional” fit
- Support that you possess each key skills by highlighting a specific example which demonstrates each skill uniquely
- Make each example a ‘mini story’ – 1 sentence to provide context, 1-3 sentences highlighting concrete tasks/actions you took which directly relate to the skill you are referencing, and 1 final sentence which provides an outcome/result in relation to the skill; each ‘mini story’ serves to prove you possess the skills you have referenced

Final paragraph: Close and call to action

- Ensure a memorable and lasting impression regarding your ‘value proposition’ by once again summarizing the 2-3 most relevant skills you would bring to the organization/ position (tell them what you told them)
- Use different words/wording when reinforcing key skills/attributes so language does not appear repetitive
- Close with a view of continued contact; remind reader you appreciate opportunity to state your interest, you believe you are an excellent fit for the opportunity, and you would appreciate the chance to speak to the organization/review your skills & abilities in greater detail

Student Name: _____

Assessment Checklist

Absolute "Must Do"s (Be extra certain that your cover letter meets these key criteria)	Yes	No	N/A
Cover letter is no more than one page in length			
Cover letter contains no spelling or grammar mistakes			
Cover letter provides reader good sense of both your "Personal" fit (why you want to do the job/why you're interested) AND your "Professional" fit (identifies key skills that make you the best choice)			
Cover letter focuses on the organization's needs & the value you will bring to the organization			
Cover letter is tailored (can't simply adjust company name/position title without further changes)			

Recommendations - Content Elements	Yes	No	N/A
Cover letter contains content answering these questions (for the reader): 1. Who is this (writing)? 2. What is this about? 3. Why does this person want to do this? 4. Why should I choose them?			
Cover letter highlights your "Personal" fit by aligning your values with the organization <u>OR</u> sharing info about the organization & highlighting depth of knowledge beyond what is commonly known			
Cover letter clearly references the 2-3 most relevant skills/traits/capabilities you possess which you feel make you the best candidate for the position you are applying to			
Cover letter provides a distinct 'mini' story for each professional skill referenced, in order to provide demonstrated 'proof' of the professional skills you have stated that you possess			
Cover letter 'mini' stories include specific info to highlight when skill was demonstrated, detail as to the actions/tasks/duties carried out which utilized the skill & the result of your efforts using the skill			
Cover letter closes in a manner which reinforces the key skills/traits/capabilities you can bring to the position you are applying for and expresses enthusiasm to speak further about the opportunity			

Recommendations - Format & "Tone" Elements	Yes	No	N/A
Cover letter clearly indicates author & target audience for the letter (your contact info at top of page against right hand margin; company contact info below your contact info against left hand margin)			
Cover letter is written (as recommended) in the letter/professional correspondence format			
Cover letter includes date (against the right margin below your personal contact information)			
Cover letter content written in consistent font size/style for all components/sections			
Cover letter is written in same font style/size as resume for consistency/ease of review for reader			
Cover letter focused on strengths/value (no inclusion/focus on what you're 'missing' or weaknesses)			
Cover letter includes consistent spacing before and/or after section headings or within sections			
Cover letter demonstrates effective use of white space throughout document (text not too crowded or too far apart, information does not look cramped)			
Cover letter is focused on your strengths and value you can bring (no inclusion or focus on what skills/experience/capabilities you are missing or potential 'weaknesses')			
Cover letter has an overall positive tone and is written in a 'humbly' confident (not arrogant or conceited) style			
Cover letter works in partnership with your resume by speaking similar skills/experiences/info to create consistent 'brand' message (information referenced in cover letter also found in resume)			

Additional Comments: