



Cover Letter Critique Form

A cover letter is a formal business letter which typically accompanies your resume. While some employers do not require a cover letter, and some students would prefer to just type out an email, we suggest having a cover letter ready to go and send along with your resume for the employers who do actually read them.

OVERALL FORMAT

- The overall look (margins, fonts, and formatting of your contact name/info) should match your resume. This brands you consistently and makes the two items look like they belong together.
- Keep to one page. Be concise and not too wordy.
- Center the content of your letter (from the date to your name at the bottom) from top to bottom. The top of your page begins immediately after your contact information and the bottom of your page is the very bottom of the document itself. The goal is to not have a large strip of white space at the bottom of your letter.

YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION

- Name and contact information should appear exactly the same as your resume. This brands you.
- Do not put contact details in the header of the document. If it goes through an Applicant Tracking System, all items in Header/Footer are lost.
- At minimum, you should include your first+last name, mobile number, and email. You may also include your LinkedIn URL or a personal website URL (optional.)
- It is optional to include a full mailing address; most employers will not be snail mailing you. You have the option to list only City, ST, and you also have the option to not include any location.

DATE & ADDRESSEE CONTACT INFORMATION

- Follow business letter format.
- Include date the letter is being sent (MM DD YYYY.)
- Add two lines of space, and then include recipient's name (Mr./Ms./Dr. FirstName LastName), title, organization, and organization address, with each on its own line.

"RE:" AND SALUTATION

- Add a **RE: Position Opening** (e.g. **RE: BUSINESS ANALYST**) before the salutation to make it clear what position you are applying for. Including this will mean you do not need to explain this in the letter itself, so your first paragraph may start with something more memorable than "I am applying for..." or "I am interested in the position of..."
- Address the letter to the hiring manager by name. Do anything you can to find that name: search Google, reach out through LinkedIn, make phone calls, send emails.
- Address "Dear Mr./Ms. (or Dr.) LastName:" Use a colon, not a comma.
- If you cannot identify a name to address your letter to, address to Hiring Manager.

OPENING PARAGRAPH

- Be memorable!** Use a creative opening line. This will make you stand out from the hundreds of other candidates who start their cover letters with "I am applying for the position of..." Examples include:
 - Tell how you became interested in the field.
 - Use a quote that resonates with the company.
 - Reference their mission statement and show how you are a perfect fit to it.
 - Name drop: if you know someone at the company, or if someone recommended you apply, mention their name.
 - Address a perceived problem: if you are over or underqualified for the position or if your major/degree does not seem to relate to the position, address that and show why you are a strong candidate despite that (or even because of that.) See examples in our resume and cover letter gallery.

MIDDLE PARAGRAPH(S)

- Identify three to five skills you possess that are listed in the job description and communicate how you have used them successfully in the past.
- Keyword optimize: utilize the exact keywords and phrases from the job description.
- Communicate why you are specifically qualified as a fit for this position and the organization. This may include soft skills and personal traits.
- Include the answers to these questions: Why should I hire this person? How is this person going to help my bottom line? How does this person fit the company culture?
- Show more than tell. Add some concrete examples to back up statements about the qualities/skills you bring to the table. E.g. Instead of saying you are an exceptional leader, tell in just a couple of sentences your success as a leader: "I successfully organized 100 volunteers for a 5K walk, with every participant crossing the finish line and raising over \$10,000.
- Quantify to prove you can use these skills; provide numbers that show the results you have produced in the past (see the above example).
- Focus on the future, not just on your past experience. Communicate how the employer will benefit by hiring you.
- Prove that you have done your research and are knowledgeable about the company and/or industry.
- Do not state, "As you will see in my resume..." as it is a waste of space.
- Do not repeat information that is on your resume: e.g. your degree, or listing of where you worked; it is more important to show demonstrated skills gained.
- Do not narrate your life-long dreams and ambitions. Keep it concise and focus on the company's needs.
- Do not commit four inches to a narration of how successful the company/organization is.

CLOSING PARAGRAPH

- State what you will do next; list a specific time when you will call or email to arrange a meeting to discuss your qualifications. Do not make empty promises; if you say you are going to follow up, make sure you actually do!

OR, State what you would like the reader to do next, asking for an interview, and writing "I look forward to speaking with you," or "I appreciate your consideration of my candidacy."

THE END

- Type "Sincerely" or "Regards", press Enter four times, and type your name.
- Press Enter two more times and type "Enclosure" to indicate that your resume is attached. If there are additional documents, type "Enclosures." If you are attaching to an email, neither is applicable.

MISCELLANEOUS TIPS

- Naming your document: we suggest using "last name + title of document + where you are sending it" — e.g. "Fonseca Cover St. Mary's." This avoids confusion as recruiters, and our office receive documents generically named "Cover Letter" from multiple people making it difficult to.
- Sound positive and confident, avoiding "I think" or "I feel" statements.
- Use "I" sparingly; start only one sentence per paragraph and one paragraph per letter with "I".
- Check spelling; proofread carefully, do not just rely on spell-check.