



## CONSTRUCTING A COMPELLING COVER LETTER

While not every employer will ask for a cover letter as part of your application materials, understanding how to compose a strong, convincing cover letter is an important skill as you launch or move forward in your career. A strong cover letter introduces you to the employer and provides a strong sample of business writing skills. It is much more than a summary of your resume; it is designed as a complement to the resume that further illustrates your fit for the position. The goal of the cover letter and the resume is to convince the employer to invite you for an interview.

### COVER LETTER COMPONENTS: THE RULE OF THREE

Cover letters may seem challenging at first, but many people don't realize that all cover letters are comprised of three sections. While the content of the cover letter can and will change, the format remains consistent.

#### Opening Paragraph: Introduction and “Thesis” Statement

The first paragraph of the cover letter serves as your introduction. It should capture the reader's attention by including detail about yourself as a candidate, but it must also include these important elements:

- Your name
- The name of the position you are applying for
- How you learned about the open position
- The name of the person who referred you (if applicable)
- “Thesis” statement. This is usually the last sentence in the paragraph, and should succinctly describe your confidence that you are a great candidate for the position. For example, “I am confident that my skills in X, Y, and Z make me an ideal candidate to add value to this department.”

Keep the opening paragraph short and sweet—you'll use the second paragraph to argue your case. Four to five sentences are usually sufficient to make your point and deliver the relevant information.

#### Second Paragraph: Make the Case

The second paragraph is typically the longest of the three sections. It's fine to use bullet points or even to split this paragraph into sections or functional areas—find the format that most effectively communicates your points. This paragraph is NOT a place to summarize or rehash your resume. Rather, it should construct a narrative for the employer that demonstrates key areas of skill match and experience, while also communicating your enthusiasm and confidence.

#### Topics to include:

- Why you are interested in the position
- How you will add value and contribute to the team (speak as specifically as possible, illustrating your points with examples from your academic and professional past)
- Your knowledge of the company or organization
- How your skills and experience are a match for the company's needs



### Third Paragraph: Closing, Thank You, and Next Steps

Once you've reached this section, the hard part is over! Wrap up your cover letter by thanking the employer graciously for his or her time and consideration, refer to enclosed documents (like a resume and portfolio), and indicate your enthusiasm to be selected for an interview. Include the best way to reach you, and offer to provide any additional materials that might be helpful in the selection process.

### WRITING TIPS

- One page maximum. Remember that this document also functions as a sample of your business writing expertise. Employers need new hires who can write clearly, succinctly, and in a convincing manner.
- Incorporate action verbs. No one wants to read the same bland sentences over and over. Refer to our resume guide or conduct a quick Google search for inspiration.
- Format like a business letter. Include your address, the date, and the employer's address as the heading.
- Always try to find a name. Do NOT address the cover letter, "To Whom It May Concern." If you absolutely cannot find the name of the hiring manager, address the letter to "Hiring Committee" or "Human Resources Team." This shows that you have taken the time to personalize the cover letter.
- Read the cover letter aloud. This will help you eliminate confusing language or awkward wording. Even better, come to Career Services for an individualized feedback session!
- Proofread, edit, and then proofread some more. Typos and grammatical errors reflect poorly on your candidacy and your communication skills in general. Not your strong suit? Make sure multiple people review the cover letter before sending it off.
- If you are emailing your cover letter, include as an attachment, not the body of the email. The body of the email should include a polite greeting and indicate which attachments are included with the email.



As Anderson's Career Development Facilitator, I'm ready to work one on one with you to help you design your interview strategy and practice your skills! Our office is here to help with every step of the job and internship search, so don't wait—make your appointment today by calling Kate Williams at 277-3290.

