



WHEATON
COLLEGE
For Christ & His Kingdom

COVER LETTER OUTLINE

Writing a cover letter is more of an art than a science: there's not always a strict formula to follow, but there are guiding principles for writing a compelling one.

WHY BOTHER?

Because some employers will eliminate you automatically if you don't have one! Cover letters are an opportunity to connect the dots between your liberal arts education, your skills, interests, and experience, and the requirements of the job. They're also a chance for you to demonstrate the written communication skills and flexibility you picked up as a liberal arts student. Employers will assess you based on the writing and the message you send – so make sure both of them are strong and error-free.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR WRITING AN EFFECTIVE COVER LETTER:

1

Mention referrals. If someone has referred you to the position or organization, e.g. an alumni contact, family friend or parent, mention this at the beginning. Be sure you have their permission to include their name!

2

Target/customize your letter to match each particular position. Make every effort to [tailor each letter](#) or email to show the connection between your qualifications and the employer's specific requirements. Highlight key aspects of the role and the company that you are excited about, and outline how the company's values line up with your own.

3

Focus on how you can add value to the company.
Not how they can make you better.

4

Keep your cover letter short.
A good target is 250-300 words in no more than three concise paragraphs.

5

Format. Match your cover letter font to your resume font, and keep a consistent personal brand in all your documents.

6

Edit your cover letter

carefully. Is it interesting and persuasive? Does it tell a compelling story of your college experience, your pertinent qualifications and skills, and a bit of your personality? Re-read it from the employer's perspective. Does it answer the question: "Why should I hire you?"

7

Close your cover letter with a clear call to action.

State what you will do next, such as calling to see if an interview can be arranged at the employer's convenience. Thank them for their consideration.

8

Proofread your letter by reading it out loud.

Then have several people proofread your letter for persuasiveness, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and typographical errors. Your letter must be neat and absolutely error-free. Realize the reader will view the cover letter as an example of your written communication skills.

9

Sending your cover letter.

Decide whether it is best to send your cover letter in the body of your email or whether you're going to attach it as a separate document. Including your cover letter in the body of your email is generally more convenient and preferred for hiring managers, but if formatting is highly important to you or the employer, attaching a PDF is also acceptable.

Pro Tip

If a cover letter is optional, submit one! Employers want to see that you're serious about the position—writing a cover letter can do just that.

cover letter TEMPLATE

Date of Writing

Mr. or Ms. Employer

Title of Employer

Organization

Street Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr. or Ms. Employer,

SIDE NOTE: Make every effort to address the letter to someone specific. If a name is not available, use "Hiring Manager" or "Internship Coordinator." Obviously, knowing someone in the company who can pass along the name of an HR contact is great, but get creative if you don't have a notable "in." Search on LinkedIn, see if any contact names are listed online, etc. A personalized cover letter makes a great first impression!

First Paragraph

- Refer to anyone in the company you may know. For example, "I was greatly encouraged to explore your company after an excellent conversation with Sally Smith in your Analytics Division."
- Describe why you want to work for that specific employer by drawing a connection between who you are, what unique and specific skills you bring, and why you're a good fit for this company. There are a lot of companies in the world - why this one? What about their mission, industry, work environment, aims, etc. make them stand out to you? Do a bit of digging online. Don't simply regurgitate their mission back to them - but show them that you understand what they're about and are aligned with the same values they are.
- Finish this section off with a concise "thesis statement" that highlights 2-3 relevant skills that equip you for this position (e.g., "My experience with statistical analysis combined with my ability to break down complex problems into workable pieces makes me a strong fit for this position.")

Second Paragraph

- Based on the information-gathering you've done about the company, identify a problem they have and help them see how you can help solve it.
- Build on the 2-3 skills you mentioned at the end of the first paragraph. Provide brief, specific examples of how you've previously used those skills, and how they will help you problem-solve in the role you're applying for. There's no need to repeat exactly what's said on your resume since they will have that too.

Third Paragraph

- Summarize your qualifications and why you are interested in the employer. Don't be afraid to say something like "XY company is where I want to be." Sometimes we underestimate the power of plainly stating our desire!
- Close out this section by including your call to action, and thanking them for their consideration.

Sincerely,

(Handwritten Signature)

First and Last Name (typed)

Email | Cell Phone