

## Cover Letters

“To put forward a good candidacy, you’ve got to figure out what ‘evidence’ exists in your background, traits, skills, or experience that demonstrates ‘hmm, yeah this person might do really well in this role and here’s why.’ It doesn’t have to be strictly work-based, as long as you can compellingly tie it to what you’d be doing on the job.” – Alison Green of *Ask a Manager*<sup>1</sup>

A cover letter is a chance for you to show your employer your personal and professional qualifications that go beyond what is listed on your resume. Resumes tell employers which candidates are qualified; cover letters tell them which of the qualified candidates they should interview. You should always send a cover letter, along with your resume, as part of a job application, unless the job posting explicitly tells you not to.

### HOW TO WRITE A GOOD COVER LETTER

**Research the position and the employer.** This step is not optional. A good cover letter is a document that explains why you would be an excellent fit for that particular job and that particular employer. You cannot explain this if you do not know anything about the job or employer. Cover letters should be tailored very carefully to the skills and attributes required for that specific job. This means you *must* write a different cover letter for each position for which you are applying.

**Back up your assertions with evidence.** Evidence of your qualifications is the meat of your cover letter. You can’t expect a hiring manager to take you at your word when you say you’re a “hard worker.” Instead, think of a project or anecdote that demonstrates your work ethic, and tell that story in your cover letter. This will not only help you avoid re-hashing your resume (see “What Not to Do,” below), but it will also give your reader a chance to see a little bit of your personality.

**Demonstrate those “excellent written communication skills.”** Does the job posting ask for “excellent” communication or writing skills? If so, the cover letter is your chance to demonstrate them! Always edit and revise your cover letter at least once (if not more) and have a second person scan it for proofreading errors and typos. Make sure your language is clear, elegant, and professional.

### WHAT NOT TO DO

- **Repeat all the information on your resume in paragraph form.** Your employer already has your resume. They don’t need another re-telling of your work history. Instead, use your cover letter to delve more deeply into your most relevant experience or qualifications for the job at hand.
- **Be self-deprecating or negative about your abilities.** Writing about yourself without coming off as arrogant can be tough, but avoid the temptation to be down on yourself. You want employers to recognize you as someone with confidence in their own abilities.
- **Be overly pushy or gimmicky.** The best thing you can do to make yourself stand out in a cover letter is to clearly and elegantly explain your qualifications for the position. Likewise, while you *should* address how hiring you will help meet the company’s needs, identifying “problems” that hiring you would “fix” will come off as unpleasantly presumptuous.
- **Use a generic cover letter.** Using a cover letter that is not tailored to the specific position not only risks glossing over the qualifications that your potential employer is looking for, but it also demonstrates a poor work ethic. Yes, writing multiple, individualized cover letters is time-consuming, but it is also the best way to get that coveted interview slot.

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<sup>1</sup> Green, A. (2016, March 3). How do I write a compelling cover letter when I don’t have much work experience [Web log post]. Retrieved from [www.askamanager.org/2016/03/how-do-i-write-a-compelling-cover-letter-when-i-dont-have-much-work-experience](http://www.askamanager.org/2016/03/how-do-i-write-a-compelling-cover-letter-when-i-dont-have-much-work-experience).

**Full Name**  
Phone number

Home address

email address

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[Note that the above heading is the same as the one on the sample resume. A standardized heading helps your application look polished and professional].

Date

Name and title of hiring manager (if known)

Company Name

Company address

City, State, Zip

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Employer's Name OR Dear hiring manager/hiring committee/etc.

**First paragraph.** State the reason for the letter and the name of the position for which you are applying. If you were referred to this position by someone, mention their name and the circumstances of your referral. Give a brief (one-sentence) summary of what makes you a good fit for this position.

**Second and third paragraphs.** This is the meat of your cover letter. It is your chance to demonstrate both your qualifications and your (presumably excellent) personality. These paragraphs should explain your interest in the position and be attuned to the employer's needs. Look back at the job post often – it is there that you will find the key words and qualifications you need to expand on in this section. Remember that the best indicator of your future performance for your employer will be your past experience. Don't make promises. Instead, share the details of your past successes.

**Final paragraph.** Briefly re-iterate your relevant experience and interest in the position. If there are special personal circumstances that employers need to know about (for example, if you are applying for a job in a city where you do not currently live, but are interested in relocating), explain them here. Finally, thank the reader for their time and consideration and give them your contact information. While some resources recommend requesting or offering to schedule an interview in the final paragraph, this can come off as overly presumptuous. You should expect that most employers will contact you if they wish to bring you in for an interview.

Sincerely,

[signature] (if the letter is sent online or via email, no signature is necessary)

Full Name [typed]