

Cover Letters



A cover letter is designed to introduce you and your background to a potential employer. It should stimulate the reader to 1) read your resume and 2) grant you an interview. Your cover letter is your first chance to make a good impression. It also serves as an example of your written communication skills. A poorly written letter may be rejected before the resume is even considered! Although parts of your cover letter may be useful for several different job/internship positions, tailor your cover letter for each specific opportunity. For more guidelines and sample cover letters, check out the CEL website at www.stolaf.edu/services/cel.

The QUICK 5-Step Start:

- Write several (4-5) opening sentences that will catch the reader's eye and then select your favorite. Utilize the cover letter books at the CEL for some great examples.
- List three skills required by the job/internship position for which you are applying. Then list examples of accomplishments that demonstrate your ability to utilize each skill. Turn this list of examples into a sentence format.
- Outline why this organization would want to hire you. What do you have to offer the organization that would make you a top candidate?
- Say what you know about the organization: background, size, products & services, community involvement, growth, and so on. Use bits and pieces of this information to personalize your cover letter. Show interest in each organization to which you apply.
- Describe your greatest accomplishment — the one that relates most directly to the position for which you are applying. Make this into an impressive, eye-catching statement, something that will make you stand out in the potential employer/supervisor's mind.

Format & Layout

The form and content of your cover letter should conform to all the rules of a good business letter.

- Your cover letter should be only one page in length. It should be single-spaced and should contain three to four paragraphs.
- Double space between paragraphs.
- Block content to the left margin.
- Print your cover letter on the same quality 20# bond paper as your resume.
- Don't forget to sign your cover letter by hand.
- Save a copy of your cover letter for your personal files.
- If you submit your cover letter electronically, make sure to put your name in the filename: i.e., "Smith, John_Cover Letter" rather than just "Cover Letter".

Cover Letters

(continued from front)



Content

Although parts of your cover letter may be useful for several different job/internship positions, always create a new cover letter for each opportunity.

Guidelines

- Your cover letter should begin with the date, name of contact person, that person's title, organization, and address. End the cover letter with your name, address, phone, and email.
- The cover letter should present clear and accurate information that highlights the academic background and experience you have to offer the organization.
- Personalize each cover letter by including something specific about the organization and/or its products or services.

Sample Outline

Opening Paragraph

- Indicate your reason for writing.
- Articulate the position or type of work for which you are applying.
- Say how you learned of the position.
- Briefly summarize the qualifications that you have for the opportunity you are seeking (this piece of information may be part of a catchy opening sentence).

Body Paragraph

- Explain how your academic/work background has prepared you for the position.
- State the skills/strengths you will bring to the job that parallel those needed to fill the position.
- Paint a picture of your skills and qualification by giving examples. Examples should show how you've utilized key skills and how those skills transfer into the prospective position.

Closing Paragraph

- Refer the reader to the enclosed resume.
- Indicate your desire for a personal interview.
- Close with a statement indicating you will follow up.
- List phone numbers, day and times you can be reached.
- Thank the contact person for their time.

Should you get an interview, review what you wrote in your cover letter and resume so you can be well prepared to answer questions.