

Crafting Your Cover Letter

What is a cover letter?

A cover letter is intended to be a personalized introduction to a prospective employer that **outlines your interest in the position and the organization and highlights why you are qualified and what you can contribute**. A cover letter should always accompany your CV/resume and act as a narrative filter for the CV/resume when applying for a job or internship. You should write cover letters that are tailored to each specific job description and organization. Although crafting a tailored cover letter can be time consuming, it provides important context and intent that cannot be obtained from the CV/resume alone.

In a cover letter, aim to **make an explicit connection between the 2-3 most relevant skills that you have developed and which match important skills and qualifications outlined in the job description**. You will want to demonstrate how you meet the required qualifications through specific examples from past experience and directly address how your skills can be used in the position you are applying for. The cover letter is also the place where you must demonstrate what you know about the organization and your genuine interest in the work.

Where to start?

Before attempting to write a cover letter, it is important you fully understand the advertised position and the organization and also *yourself*. Researching the mission of the organization will help you learn about their values, priorities and culture, which is important for framing your interest and being convincing about your fit for the position (and also to ensure you've checked that this is indeed an organization for which *you* want to work). When you read the job description you should carefully identify key skills, competencies and qualifications required for the position. Then you should **ask yourself these five questions**:

- What is the employer looking for in a candidate?
- What skills/attributes/experience/knowledge do you have that matches what the employer wants?
- What examples can you use to highlight the above stated skills/attributes/experience?
- Why do you want to work for this organization?
- Why are you interested in this position in particular?

Keep this simple formula in mind: **Why You + Why Them = Why You for Them**

Format

- Professional/business letter format (details listed here, sample below)
- Not longer than a page (3-5 paragraphs), same font as CV/Resume, left justified
- Use the same contact header on your cover letter that you use on your CV
- Top of letter: date, employer name, employer contact information (if you are short on space, remove the employer name/contact info and only include the date)
- Formal greeting (Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. _____ - use person's name, when possible). If you do not know the person's name, use 'Dear Hiring Manager'
- End of the letter: formal sign off, then your full name
- Always send as a PDF

Content and Framework

Introduction Paragraph: Present who you are (i.e. graduating MA student in Gender Studies at Central European University), what you are applying for, and how you found the vacancy (1-2 sentences). Demonstrate your interest in and knowledge of the organization by making a specific connection between who you are and why that makes you a fit between you and the employer (2-3 sentences). Conclude your introduction with a short statement that highlights the 2-3 related skills that will enable you to be an asset in the position (i.e. "My experience conducting statistical analysis combined with my knowledge of labor regulations and ability to take initiative make me a strong fit for this position").

Body Paragraph(s): Your body paragraphs should include knowledge and skills that will help you make a contribution. Focus on your 2-3 strongest relevant skills that relate to the position for which you are applying (in some cases you might include these all in one paragraph, in other cases you might separate them out). Then showcase each skill by using specific examples– talk about concrete projects you have worked on, or research you have done, or how you have used your skills in specific situations. Employing the STAR model (**S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction, **R**esult) or CAR model (**C**hallenge, **A**ction, **R**esult) can help you effectively present your examples. When possible, demonstrate how a particular skill will help you accomplish what is required for the position; making this connection explicit is important. There is no need to repeat your CV/resume word for word, but you may briefly reference items from your CV/resume.

Closing Paragraph: Concisely summarize your qualifications and reiterate your interest in the position/employer. Thank them for their time and invite them to speak with you further regarding how your qualifications and interests align with their values and priorities. You should also include any relevant details regarding your availability, and with long-distance searches, let the employer know of any plans to visit the area (if applicable).

Elements of a strong cover letter

- Tailored to the position and employer
- Built around a clear thesis about how/why you are a fit for the organization/job
- Focuses on 2-3 skills that align with what the employer seeks
- Uses specific examples from past experience to highlight these 2-3 identified skills
- Clearly demonstrates understanding of and knowledge about of the employer
- Conveys a genuine interest in the position, field and organization
- Confident and convincing, but not arrogant
- Well written (among other things, your letter serves as a writing sample)
- Professional tone and easy to follow structure (make sure you get someone to proofread!)
- Complements, rather than restates, what is on the CV

Additional Resources

[7 Things You Might be Forgetting to do in Your Cover Letter](#) (from *The Muse*)

[5 Steps to Crafting a Killer Cover Letter](#) (from *The Muse*)

[Using SWOT analysis to help you write a stronger cover letter](#) (from *Psychology Today*)

Sample Cover Letter

A note: The sample cover letter on the following page is included to show how the format, structure and content of a cover letter might look in practice. **It should NOT be used as a cut and paste template.** Each individual applicant for a specific job will have unique skills and experiences that tie together and link to the desired job differently, so the narrative in every cover letter will be different. It is important that the *real you* comes through in your cover letter.

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Oxford Policy Management
52 Cornmarket Street
Oxford, OX1 3HJ

Dear Hiring Manager,

It is with great enthusiasm that I present my interest and qualifications for the Assistant Consultant position at Oxford Policy Management (ref: 2019/576OX). I am very eager to work in a client-oriented consultancy role focused on international development cooperation. I believe Oxford Policy Management's multisector and holistic approach to sustainable development and its partnerships with leading development organizations would offer the ideal environment to start my career. I am confident that my quantitative and qualitative research skills, previous experience working with development projects at the NGO and intergovernmental level, and academic background in social policy and development leave me well equipped to step into this role and make a positive impact.

My interest around poverty and social policies dates to my 2013 experience volunteering for five months with a Mexican NGO dedicated to providing education to children from humble backgrounds. This led to my decision to pursue a Master's of Public Administration at Central European University in Budapest, Hungary, of which I will complete in June 2019, with a specialization in development. In lieu of a thesis, I am working on a capstone project in cooperation with an external client, RIADIS (The Latin American Network of Non-Governmental Organizations of Persons with Disabilities and their Families). As a member of a three-person student team, I am conducting research aimed at identifying ways in which RIADIS could improve their technical cooperation with UNICEF and national governments in Latin America, and thus better fulfill their mission of promoting respect and realizing the potential of persons with disabilities. The final deliverable is an organizational assessment accompanied by a case study of their technical cooperation in Guatemala, based primarily on qualitative interviews that I conducted both in-person and via Skype. During my MPA, I also focused on developing my quantitative analysis skills, through elective courses including applied regression analysis and impact evaluation (using R and SPSS).

In the summer of 2017 I interned in Tanzania with Fundación Capital Africa, a foundation dedicated to promoting economic inclusion. It was here where I first learned about OPM, through its involvement in the Cash Learning Partnership, while researching projects with a cash transfer component. My tasks included assisting the Post-conflict Division in the design and implementation of a youth economic inclusion project as well as researching how the foundation could use its expertise in working with displaced populations in countries other than Tanzania. In 2016 I also worked as an intern for International Organization for Migration Ukraine, which added to my research, policy writing and project management skills. I assisted IOM Ukraine with drafting project proposals, creating project logframes and revising indicators to measure results. Based on my experience I believe I could significantly contribute towards OPM's projects related to inclusive social development, in addition to assisting in the evaluation stage of projects.

I am very motivated to use my skills and knowledge acquired thus far in order to contribute to the projects of OPM in a meaningful way. Thank you very much for your consideration and I look forward to the opportunity to further discuss how I could assist in developing solutions for the clients you work with.

Sincerely,

Maria Enriques