

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 when applying for a job or internship and acts as a narrative filter or guide to the CV/resume. The two documents are complementary. Cover letters should be tailored to each specific job description and organization. Although crafting a tailored cover letter can be time consuming, a tailored letter provides important context and information about 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, which should match important skills and qualifications outlined in the job description**. 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 / motivation towards the work.

Where to start?

Before attempting to write a cover letter, it is important to 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 making a convincing case 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 reading the job description, carefully identify key skills, competencies and qualifications required for the position. Then **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
- No longer than a page (3-5 paragraphs), same font as CV/Resume, left justified
- Same contact header on cover letter as on CV/resume
- 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' or 'Dear Selection Committee',
- 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. second year undergraduate student in Culture, Politics and Society (CPS) 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 for a good 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 in relation 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—concrete projects you have worked on, research you have done, or other ways in which 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; explicitly stating this connection 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/ experiential learning opportunity/ 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
- Displays a willingness to learn and grow in the role
- Confident and convincing, but not arrogant
- Well written (among other things, your letter serves as a writing sample)
- Professional in tone and easy to follow structure (make sure you get someone to proofread!)
- Complements, rather than restates, what is on the CV

Additional Resources

The first resource should link to the BA Cover Letter sample

[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*)