

Cover Letter Guide

Anatomy of a Cover Letter

A cover letter generally consists of **three or four paragraphs** and is always less than a page; very experienced candidates applying for senior positions may write more. The **goal** is to give employers enough information to want to meet you, without overwhelming them.

Prepare

- **Research the employer** to identify what about the organization or its products appeals to you
- **Review** the job description in detail
- **List** each type of **experience** and **skill** *the employer is seeking*
- **Outline** how your **qualifications** *meet the employer's needs*
- Choose two or three of your best qualifications and identify concrete examples to illustrate them
- **Outline** how **your skills, interests, and goals** *match* those of the employer. **Focus on the positive.**

📌 **Note!** *Do not refer to qualifications that you lack!*

Salutation

- **Address** your letter to a specific person *whenever possible*
- **Be sure** of the correct spelling and **appropriate title** (Mr., Ms., Dr., etc.); you **should not** address the contact by their first name unless you know them personally
- **Avoid** "To Whom It May Concern." Acceptable **alternatives** include "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Search Committee"

📌 **Note!** *Use the same heading on your cover letter as you did on your resume!*

First Paragraph

📌 **Note!** *Since your name is at the bottom of the letter, you do not need to introduce yourself.*

Explain **clearly** and **concisely** *why* you are writing. State the **full name of the position** and **how** you learned about it, **including** the name of the person, publication or website and the date of the listing. This paragraph can be as simple as the following:

- *"I am writing to apply to the Special Events Assistant posted on NU Careers. I believe my skills and experience would enable me to excel in their position."*

Some applicants prefer to begin this paragraph in a way they hope will **grab the reader's attention**. This can be an effective technique if you know the personality of the organization or the individual receiving the letter, but it is risky if you don't:

- *"Alpha Software's commitment to innovative mobile application development resonates with me as a computer engineer with an interested in mobile technology."*
- *"As a recent Electrical Engineering graduate with a 3.9 GPA, I can offer your firm a mastery of the latest technologies..."*

If you were referred by somebody:

- *“I’m writing to apply to the Public Relations Assistant position at PR Worldwide posted on NU Careers. After speaking with Arnold Warner, a former PR Assistant at PR Worldwide, I am confident my past experience and education make me a viable candidate for this position.”*

Second/Third Paragraph

Write these paragraphs using the **outline you prepared, tailoring your letter to the job. Do not** repeat the content on your resume; instead use this space to **explain the value** that your experience would bring to the employer. **Highlight experience relevant to that position** and briefly **describe concrete examples** to match your qualifications to the job description:

- *“The research paper I wrote about the benefits Islamic banking would have on the U.S. economy required me to do extensive research of literary sources and interview experts in the field of finance. I am confident I could utilize these skills successfully as a Market Researcher at World Banking Inc.”*

Employers are interested in your motivation as well as your experience.

📌 **Important!** *Be sure to explain why this job and this organization appeal to you and fit into your career goals.* Demonstrate that you have **researched the organization** by referring to company products, services, philosophy or mission in your explanation of **why you are a good match**:

- *“Boston Pharmaceuticals’ cancer vaccine has revolutionized preventative medicine. One of my most important career goals is to help bring cutting-edge health care products to doctors and patients, which is why I would be proud to work for your organization.”*

📌 **Note!** *Sometimes a resume leaves questions in the employer’s mind, for example, about periods of unemployment or reasons for a career change or relocation.* These questions may be serious enough to prevent you from getting an interview, so it is usually best to address them directly:

- *“I resigned from my last position six months ago in order to care for an ailing family member. I am now ready to recommit myself full time to my career.”*
- *“Although I currently live in Boston, I am preparing to relocate to the San Diego area in order to be closer to my family.”*

📌 **Note!** *Do not point out qualifications/experience listed in the job description that you may not have.* Focus and highlight the relevant experience you do have and your motivation for applying to that particular position.

Last Paragraph

- The closing paragraph can be **short** and **simple**.
- **Stress your enthusiasm** for the position and **your interest** in meeting for an interview.
- State **how** and **when** you can best be contacted.
- **Thank** the individual and end with an appropriate closing:

“I am eager to discuss with you the kind of contributions I can make to Zephyr Advertising as an Account Representative. Feel free to contact me at 123-456-7890 or jobseeker@yahoo.com. Thank you for your kind attention to my application; I look forward to hearing from you.”