

HOW DO I WRITE A COVER LETTER?

What is a cover letter?

A cover letter is a custom letter that introduces you to an employer and shares why you are excited about the position/company and ways you feel qualified for the position. Your cover letter serves as a closer/deeper exploration of your qualifications and experiences. It offers a space for the details that do not fit on your resume. The cover letter shows how your experiences and skills relate to the job to which you are applying.

A job posting will let you know if they are looking for a cover letter, but it is to your advantage to always include one. A cover letter is a great opportunity to make you stand out as a candidate, introduce yourself as an individual, and highlight your best qualities. Limit your cover letter to one page (3-4 paragraphs).

Do I have to address it to someone...what if I don't know who is going to be reading it?

By addressing your cover letter to a specific individual, it shows you are interested in making a personal connection with the organization and care about your application. If there is no specific name associated with the application materials, use your resources to find who may be relevant to your application (hiring manager, manager of department, ask someone you know at the school/company, etc.) With thoughtful research, you should be able to find someone to address the letter, to show that you put effort into your application.

How do I start a cover letter?

Some people choose to introduce themselves, what they are studying, etc. Others look to jump right into why they are applying to the position to catch the reader's attention. Your first paragraph (brief, 3-4 sentences) should help orient the reader to who you are and why you are interested in the position – look to be direct and dynamic. You may share how you found the job (job posting, network, mutual contact) – sometimes this helps the employer connect better with you. You could share what about the company/organizer draws you in or makes you feel connected to them; highlight your passion in the field or similar values/goals that you may share with the organization; or discuss your basic qualifications.

Okay, got it. What comes next?

The middle paragraph(s) is your opportunity to go in depth about your skills and experience (not simply restating your resume). Look to elaborate on the 2-3 experiences that are most relevant to the position (educational experiences, other jobs, organizations, internships, volunteer positions, etc). An employer will want to learn how you approach tasks, your accomplishments, how you developed to take on this new role. Offer insight about how you can deliver on the key requirements and priorities for the position - what you can do for the organization (not necessarily what they can do for you). Even if past experiences are not directly related, hopefully they have taught you transferrable skills (so maybe a retail job helped build your customer service, so now you feel comfortable working with patients in a healthcare setting). Consider your transferrable skills and qualities and use **concrete** examples from your past experiences and achievements to illustrate what you are capable of and how you can advance the company's agenda.

Have the job description readily available to reference while writing your cover letter. Your cover letter should complement, not copy the job posting. Use similar language and highlight your experiences as they relate to what you'd be doing in the new position.

A good cover letter showcases competence and accomplishments, but if it feels awkward to talk about yourself, consider the perspective of a friend, mentor, or past boss. If you asked them to write about your capabilities, what might they share about your experiences, how you handle yourself, or skill sets?

Almost done, now how do I end this letter?

In your final paragraph, look to highlight your top skills/qualities, how you believe you'd be a good fit for the organization, or consider adding something else you feel connected with about the company. Depending on your style/approach, you may want to do any of the following: politely request an interview, add links to LinkedIn or portfolios, share contact information, and let them know when and how you plan on reaching out regarding the position.

Thank the employer for the opportunity and indicate future action (like you can provide any further materials they may need or you look forward to hearing from them soon). Sign off with a professional closure and your name.

Am I done, what might I be missing?

Did you proofread? Did you consider your audience and research the organization? A well-written and composed cover letter will showcase your professionalism and show your understanding of the school/company culture.

Did you PDF your cover letter before you send it? This essentially provides a screenshot version of your cover letter (do this for your resume too). This ensures that someone looks at your documents in the format you intended and it cannot be manipulated in any way.

Some students use templates that say "enclosure" on the bottom. "Enclosure" is used to denote the number of materials in your application. It's not necessary, but if you do, be sure to include the number. So if you submitted a resume and cover letter, two lines below your name, you'd put "Enclosures (2)".

Until you learn more about the school/company culture or their communication style, communicate and conduct yourself with more formal professionalism. Watch for overly formal or flowery language, as it sometimes appears disingenuous (I am extremely excited about this amazing opportunity at your wonderful company) or "salesy" statements, which may seem presumptuous ("I'm the best candidate for the job" or "I have great qualities that you'll find make me the perfect candidate.")

If you would like feedback on your cover letter draft, email a MS Word copy to: ceelcareer@montclair.edu. Include a copy of the job description if available.