

Careers and Internships

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What is a Cover Letter?

A cover letter is a document that introduces yourself to employers, states why you are sending a resume, and elaborates on your skills and experiences that make you qualified for a particular job position. The cover letter is your opportunity to explain how you will add value to the employer's organization.

The purpose of a cover letter is to get your resume read and to generate interviews. Therefore, it is important that you capture the employer's interest by writing a quality letter.

Basic Guidelines

Cover letters should always accompany your resume when being sent to an employer even when it is not requested.

Every cover letter you write should be tailored to highlight how your experience and skills match the qualifications of the position and how you will fit with the employer's values and expectations. Therefore, it is important to do research on the employer and to read the position description carefully.

The cover letter is one of the first contacts you make with an employer, so the tone of your letter must always be professional. Do not use casual phrases that you might use in an email to a friend. In addition, you will want your cover letter to be well written with no errors.

Structure of a Cover Letter

Heading

First, you will list your contact information including your full address with no abbreviations. You can include your email and phone number, but it is not required. You can set up your contact information in the upper left corner of your letter or you may format it to match the heading on your resume.

Next, you will leave some open space and then write the date you are sending the cover letter. The date should appear on the left side of your letter.

Then, you will leave more space and put your employer's contact information to the left side of your letter as well. Here you will include the name of the employer's contact person, the contact person's position title, the employer's name, and the employer's address.

Finally, you will identify and address the letter to the individual who has the power to hire you. Avoid addressing your letter with “Dear Sir/Madam” and “To Whom It May Concern.” Take the time to do some online research or to call the employer’s human resource department to retrieve the name of the person who will be reviewing your resume. You will want to end your salutation with a colon rather than a comma.

Opening

The beginning of your cover letter should catch the employer’s interest and get them to want to read more about you. If you are applying for a specific position, state it in your opening paragraph. Otherwise, indicate your reason for writing. Mention how you heard about the position. If you have been referred by someone who knows the reader or the organization, note this. You will also want to briefly explain your interest in the organization and what you know about the organization. If appropriate, you may also include an accomplishment that relates to the particular job opening.

Middle

Convince your reader of your interest in the position and your ability to perform the responsibilities successfully by citing your strongest qualifications that match the position requirements and employer’s needs. State your specific skills and experiences that demonstrate your interest, abilities, and personal qualities. Be sure you mention how you have demonstrated the skills that the position description requires. Your letter should not cover exactly the same information as your resume. It should merely sum up what you have to offer and act as an introduction and enhancement of your resume.

Closing

Restate your interest in the position and/or employer. Then thank the employer for their consideration and take the responsibility for following-up on your correspondence within an appropriate time frame. This may involve requesting an interview or indicating that you will call during a specific time period to arrange a meeting or check on your application status.

Signature

Lastly, sign your letter using sincerely and leave three or four spaces before typing your name because you will want to add your signature if you are sending it through the mail. If you are applying online or through an email, you still want to leave a space where your signature could appear even though you will not be able to actually sign it.

Final Considerations

- Make sure your letter is no longer than one page.
- Use quality resume paper and font that matches your resume.
- Proofread for correct grammar and spelling.
- Vary your sentence structure and do not start every statement with “I.”
- Show enthusiasm and passion for the employer and the position.
- Have your cover letter reviewed by a career specialist in the careers and internships office.
- View sample cover letters on our careers and internship resource site:
www.augsburg.edu/strommen