

Creating an Effective Cover Letter

What is a Cover Letter?

A cover letter is a one-page document that allows you to express your interest in a specific opportunity by showcasing your relevant experience and expertise. The cover letter takes the form of a professional letter, in both formatting and writing style. Cover letters should be descriptive and targeted to the specific opportunity; it is your best chance to demonstrate your qualifications.

In the past, cover letters accompanied every resume or CV that was mailed to prospective employers. These days, you *may* have the opportunity to upload or email a cover letter to a prospective employer. However, some employers prefer not to receive a cover letter. When determining whether or not to send a cover letter, read job postings and organization websites closely. **Unless the posting or website says otherwise, a cover letter should accompany your CV or resume.**

Cover Letter Content

- Outside address
 - Your contact information, displayed in the same format as on your resume and CV. This should be identical to the header you use on your resume or CV.
- Date
- Inside address
 - The hiring managers' contact information.
 - The cover letter should be addressed to the hiring manager or other organizational contact, if possible. You may have to do some internet or phone research to locate this information.
- Formal Salutation
 - Typically listed as, "Dear Mr. Smith".
 - If you are unsure of the gender or preferred prefix of the hiring manager, do some research through the company or use the full name, such as "Dear Jean Smith".
 - If you don't know the name of the person you need to address, think of a formal sounding but specific title, such as "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Search Committee Members". Refrain from using "To Whom It May Concern", as this is not preferred by employers.
- First Paragraph
 - Express interest in the specific opportunity.
 - Demonstrate where you learned of the opportunity, especially if you have an internal contact.
 - List the materials that are included in your application (resume, CV, references, etc.).
- Second and Third Paragraphs
 - Describe in detail the relevant parts of your experience and education. The content should not repeat or rehash your resume, but instead expand upon it with additional detail and anecdote.
 - Point to specific accomplishments that achieved results.
 - As a note, you can expand upon or add additional information that is not included in the resume or CV.
- Final Paragraph
 - Thank the reader for reviewing your material.
 - Recommend a next step, such as an interview or phone conversation.
- Closing
 - Use formal closings such as "Best wishes" or "Sincerely".
 - List your full name, beneath the closing. (There is no need to leave room for signatures anymore).