

Cover Letter Writing

You seldom get a second chance to make a first impression. In a competitive job market, your cover letter and resume are often your first impression. The purpose of a cover letter is to provide an engaging personal introduction, connect your unique qualifications to the specific qualifications for the position, and to peak the employer's curiosity enough that they want to see your resume.

Cover Letter Writing Tips

- Always send a well-written cover letter with your resume, unless the employer specifies otherwise.
- Use a standard, business-letter format when writing your cover letter. Times New Roman and Arial are acceptable font types. An 11 or 12 font size is most appropriate. Use margins of one inch (top, bottom, left and right), as your letter should be like a "picture in a frame." Do not use bold, italics or underline.
- Keep the cover letter concise – never more than one page. Do not use long, chunky paragraphs; employers will not take the time to read them.
- Whenever possible address your letter to a "named individual," ideally the individual responsible for hiring. Do not address a letter to "Dear Sir/Madam" or "To Whom It May Concern." You can call the employer and ask for the name and title (including correct spellings) of the hiring manager, or perhaps even find this person on the employer's website or sites such as LinkedIn.
- Employers typically assess two criteria when considering applicants – your unique qualifications for the position and "your fit" for the organization, based on the organization's vision, mission, values and culture. Make sure to address both of these criteria in your letter.
- Customize or tailor each cover letter you send to both the position and the employer. Focus on the specific contribution you will make – the value you will bring – in providing solutions to their problems. Whenever possible, use "keywords" from the job posting, employer website and the industry in general.

- The letter should express your unique personality – while also maintaining a business-like approach.
- Use the cover letter to subtly address any potential “red flags,” such as employment gaps, assumptions about age, reasons for a career transition and anything else that cannot be explained on your resume.
- Avoid negativity. Never use the cover letter to talk badly about a previous employer, colleague or work situation. If you do, employers will assume that you will talk the same way about them.
- Don’t use slang or acronyms in your cover letter. You may know what it means; the employer may not.
- Remember that your cover letter is a writing sample and may be used as such by the employer. Pay close attention to the “readability” of the letter.
- Proofread, proofread, proofread – do not send a cover letter with any typographical errors, misspellings, or incorrect punctuation or grammar. Although you should use spellcheck, do not rely on it. Have someone else proofread your letter as well. It needs to be perfect in every way!
- If printing your letter for mailing, use a laser printer and print your letter on high quality paper that matches your resume.
- Get your cover letter critiqued by contacting career@clarkson.edu

Cover Letter Sample Format

See an example on Page 3 on how to format your cover letter.

Date Created: September 2012

Date Revised: July 2013

Your Street Address

Your City, State and Zip Code

Date Letter Sent

Mr./Ms./Dr. First and Last Name of Contact Person

Title of Contact Person

Name of Organization

Street Address

City, State and Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Last Name of Contact Person,

Start by indicating the specific position you're applying for, and how you found out about the position. Briefly state what sparked your interest in the position. From your research, provide a statement or two about why you would be a "good fit" for the organization. Be specific and engaging here to arouse interest and curiosity.

Your middle paragraph(s) – two concise paragraphs at the most – should highlight your specific qualifications for the position. What makes you special and unique in regard to your qualifications for the position? What value will you bring in relation to your experience, education and skills? Cite specific accomplishments and achievements that display evidence of your ability to do this job in a way that meets (or exceeds) the employer's expectations. Do not simply rehash your resume here – provide some relevant highlights.

Your middle paragraph(s) can also be used to explain things that your resume may not. Use your cover letter to explain gaps in employment, reasons for a career change, assumptions about your age and other potential "red flags." Be positive and professional.

Use your closing paragraph to reinforce your interest in the position. Ask for action – namely an interview – and indicate that you look forward to hearing from them to schedule a date and time to talk. Include your contact information – phone number and email address – even though that information is on your resume. Thank them for their time and consideration, and tell them that you look forward to hearing from them.

Sincerely yours,

Your Full Name (Signed in black ink)

Your Full Name (Typed)

Enclosure(s): Resume (and any other documents requested by the employer)