COVER LETTER WRITING GUIDE: BUSINESS SECTORS

What is the Purpose of a Cover Letter?

Your cover letter is one of the ways to market yourself to a potential employer by highlighting the skills, experiences, and qualities that make you a strong fit for that company and position.

4 Steps to Writing a Compelling Cover Letter:

1. **Before** writing your cover letter, research the company.
   - **What are its mission and values?** What clients does the organization serve? What challenges does it face? What are the company’s goals? What are they known for? What are their recent achievements? Understanding the organization helps you position yourself as someone who will contribute to its success.

2. **Before** writing your cover letter, use the job description as a guide.
   - Closely review sections such as “Desired Qualifications” and “Job Responsibilities.” What key words are used? What specific skills are being sought? What capabilities are necessary in order to be successful in the position? Identify the top 2-3 things the employer is looking for in a candidate.

3. **Prove it:** align your skills and experiences with the job description.
   - Your goal is not to **tell** an employer that you have the skills/experiences they’re looking for, but to **prove it** using specific examples. Using the top 2-3 things the employer is looking for, ask yourself: “What have I done that demonstrates I possess this skill, experience, or quality?”

4. **Follow the cover letter format to structure a professional letter.**
   - Now it’s time to start writing! Use the format and section-by-section details on the next page.

Key Things to Remember:

- **Focus on the company’s needs.** A common mistake is focusing on what you hope to gain out of the experience instead of what you will bring to the organization. Employers are interested in how you will help their company achieve its goals, NOT what the position can do for you!

- **Tailor each cover letter to the position.** You will write a unique, tailored cover letter for each position to which you apply. Express what excites you about the specific company/position.

- **One page: keep it concise.** Focus only on the skills and experiences that are most relevant to the position. The letter should be one page maximum and should include plenty of white space. Do not discourage the employer from reading the letter because it is too long/“text-heavy” or includes irrelevant information.

- **Use key words.** Incorporate exact wording from the position description into your cover letter – don’t make the recruiter guess whether “managed finances” is the same thing as “allocated funds.”

- **Proofread.** And then proofread again. Spellcheck is not foolproof! Have 2 people review your cover letter to ensure that there are no spelling or grammatical errors you may have overlooked.

- **Take the initiative.** Unless an employer specifically requests that you do not send a cover letter, include one (even if it is not required). Taking the time to write a cover letter demonstrates your genuine interest and gives you the opportunity to expand on the most relevant information from your resume.
Date
Ms. / Mr. First and Last Name
Title
Company
Street
City, State ZIP

Dear Ms. / Mr. Last Name,

**Paragraph #1: INTRO**

The following information should be included in the first paragraph:

- Where you go to school, what degree you’re earning, & what year you are.
- The position for which you are applying (if you are not applying to a specific position, include your areas of interest within the organization).
- If you learned about the position/company through a personal connection (ex: a recruiter, GW alum, guest speaker in one of your classes, family friend), mention the person’s name if they are OK with that; DO NOT exaggerate the relationship. If you are writing to someone you already know, remind them of how you know each other.
- A sentence that demonstrates you have done your research. Why are you interested in this position/company? Be specific and tie your interest back to your experience (ex: a company initiative that is related to work you do with a student organization). Do NOT simply cut and paste a blurb from the website.

**Paragraph #2: PROVE YOU HAVE RELEVANT EXPERIENCE**

- Choose 2-3 specific examples you can include that *prove* to the employer that you have the top 2-3 things the employer is looking for based on the job description.
- Do NOT start the paragraph with a “filler sentence” (ex: “I believe my internship and academic experience have prepared me well for this position”). Your first sentence should get to the point quickly and should include something interesting that makes the employer want to keep reading (ex: “In my recent Entrepreneurship class, I created a business plan with a team for a gaming app called Pokémon Go that also promotes activity/exercise”).
- Do NOT copy the bullet points from your resume! Your cover letter allows you to talk about your accomplishments in more of a narrative/story form and can include more detail than your resume bullet points.
- Your examples can come from work experience, internships, campus leadership positions, course projects/papers, volunteer experience, or entrepreneurial activities.
- You can divide this section into two paragraphs if you have a great deal of relevant experience, but make sure that the MOST relevant experience appears first. You can also use bullet points to emphasize your relevant qualifications in this section, but do not copy/paste from your resume.

**Paragraph #3: CLOSING**

- Briefly summarize your qualifications for the “final sell.”
- State that you are very interested in the organization and would appreciate the opportunity to interview.
- Thank them for their time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Your First and Last Name