



What Is A Cover Letter?

The purpose of a cover letter is to convince an employer that your skills and background make you worth interviewing. While a resume summarizes your experience, a cover letter persuasively relates that experience to the specific job to which you are applying.

A good cover letter will make you a more attractive candidate by demonstrating:

- Knowledge about the job, the company, and the industry
- Effort in your job search and enthusiasm for the job
- Writing and organizational skills
- Understanding about yourself, your skills, and your potential contributions

It's true that some employers barely glance at cover letters; however, many others review them attentively. View it as an extra opportunity for you to promote yourself, and increase your chances of getting an interview by sending a well-written cover letter with every application.

Anatomy of a Cover Letter

A cover letter generally consists of three or four paragraphs and is always less than a page; very experienced candidates applying for senior positions may write more. The goal is to give employers enough information to want to meet you, without overwhelming them.

Prepare

- Research the employer to identify what about the organization or its products appeals to you
- Review the job description in detail
- List each type of experience and skill the employer is seeking
- Outline how your qualifications meet the employer's needs
- Choose two or three of your best qualifications and identify concrete examples to illustrate them
- Outline how your skills, interests, and goals match those of the employer. Focus on the positive. Do not refer to qualifications that you lack.

Salutation

- Address your letter to a specific person whenever possible
- Be sure of the correct spelling and appropriate title (Mr., Ms., Dr., etc.); you should not address the contact by their first name unless you know them personally
- Acceptable alternatives include "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Search Committee"

First Paragraph

Explain clearly and concisely why you are writing. Since your name is at the bottom of the letter, you do not need to introduce yourself.

Cover Letters

State the full name of the position and how you learned about it, including the name of the person, publication or website and the date of the listing. This paragraph can be as simple as the following:

"I am writing in response to your advertisement for a Special Events Assistant in the May 24 Boston Sunday Globe. My skills and experience would enable me to excel in this position."

Some applicants prefer to begin this paragraph in a way they hope will grab the reader's attention:

"If you're looking for a Sales Associate with boundless energy and a record of excellence, your search is over..."

"As a recent Electrical Engineering graduate with a 3.9 GPA, I can offer your firm a mastery of the latest technologies..."

This can be an effective technique if you know the personality of the organization or the individual receiving the letter, but it is risky if you don't.

Second/Third Paragraph

- Write these paragraphs using the outline you prepared, tailoring your letter to the job. Don't just repeat the content on your resume, but explain the value that your experience would bring to the employer. Explain how your qualifications match the job description by highlighting relevant experience and briefly describing concrete examples that demonstrate your capabilities:

"The research paper I wrote about the benefits Islamic banking would have on the U.S. economy required me to do extensive research of literary sources and interview experts in the field of finance."

- Employers are interested in your motivation as well as your experience.
- Explain why this job and this organization appeal to you and fit into your career goals.
- Demonstrate that you have researched the organization by referring to company products, services, philosophy or mission in your explanation of why you are a good match:

"Boston Pharmaceuticals' cancer vaccine has revolutionized preventative medicine. One of my most important career goals is to help bring cutting-edge health care products to doctors and patients, which is why I would be proud to work for your organization."

Sometimes a resume leaves questions in the employer's mind, for example, about periods of unemployment or reasons for a career change or relocation. These questions may be serious enough to prevent you from getting an interview, so it is usually best to address them directly:

"I resigned from my last position six months ago in order to care for an ailing family member. I am now ready to recommit myself full time to my career."

"Although I currently live in Boston, I am preparing to relocate to the San Diego area in order to be closer to my family."

Last Paragraph

- The closing paragraph can be short and simple.
- Stress your enthusiasm for the position and your interest in meeting for an interview.
- State how and when you can best be contacted.
- Indicate how and when you will follow up with the employer, and then do it. (Make every effort to identify the appropriate person responsible for the position, but know that you may not always be able to do so.)
- Thank the individual and end with an appropriate closing:

"I am eager to discuss with you the kind of contributions I can make to Zephyr Advertising as an Account Representative. I will contact you next week to follow up on my candidacy. Feel free to contact me at 123-456-7890 or jobseeker@yahoo.com. Thank you for your kind attention to my application; I look forward to hearing from you."

Email and Applicant Tracking Systems

Applications will usually be sent via email or a company's applicant tracking system.

Email

Put the cover letter in the body of the email, and attach the resume as a PDF document. Always include a direct reference to the specific job title or requisition number in the subject line.

Applicant Tracking Systems

Put your cover letter in the designated field. If there is no specific cover letter section, you may include it in "additional information" or "other" sections of the application.

For either format, make sure that your cover letter is grammatically correct and has NO MISTAKES.

Spell checkers don't catch every type of error ("field" when you mean "filed," "defiantly" when you meant "definitely", etc.), so proofread your letter very carefully after the spell check.

Sample Internship Cover Letter via Email

Subject: Editorial Intern

Dear Mr. James:

I am currently a first-year student at Northeastern University where I am pursuing a degree in English. I am interested in the Editorial Intern position that was listed on our Career Services jobs website. As an English major I have developed strong editing skills and attention to detail, and I am eager to gain additional hands-on experience before I begin co-op next year.

My supervisor at the Gap, where I am now working, would tell you that I am responsible, motivated, and a quick learner. For example, one customer recently went out of her way to speak with my manager to praise my customer service skills. These personal characteristics will serve me well as I develop professional experience.

Enclosed is my resume for your review. I will follow up with you next week to discuss the possibility of an interview. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Gottado Something

Sample Letter Tailored to Job Ad

Sample Letter Entry-Level Position

Dear Ms. Farah:

I read with interest your advertisement in the April 16 Boston Sunday Globe for an Entry-level Software Engineer. Please accept this letter and the enclosed resume as my application for this position.

As a recent Computer Science graduate of Northeastern University, I have solid knowledge of a variety of operating systems, software development tools, and networking and file systems as well as practical experience in these areas. During my cooperative education placements, I had successful experience in developing and debugging C++ code; in fact, during my placement at Genius Software, my supervisor told me I was the most efficient student programmer he had ever worked with. When my classes required me to collaborate with other students on team projects, I was nearly always asked by my peers to organize the work and present the results. In addition, I found that my problem-solving skills were enhanced by working as part of a team and by considering other people's ideas.

AlphaOmega Technologies is a leader in creating data storage solutions, while at the same time being a small, focused enterprise. Both of these qualities appeal to me greatly. I am actively seeking the kind of challenge offered by working for a technically innovative firm that is small enough to be flexible in response to the market.

I am eager to have the chance to discuss this position with you in an interview. Please contact me days at 123-456-7890 or evenings at 098-765-4321. Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Notta Geek

Sample Job Ad

(Entry-level Position)

Entry-level Software Engineer,
AlphaOmega Technologies

Requirements:

- BS in Computer Science or equivalent related experience
- Strong coding, debug and troubleshooting skills
- Solid knowledge of operating systems (Windows, OS9, OSX, UNIX)
- Ability to work well in a team environment
- Strong problem-solving skills
- Knowledge and practical experience with software development tools

Experience:

- Relevant coursework in operating systems, development methods, networking and file systems
- Knowledge of internal workings of a kernel file system highly desirable
- Practical experience in developing and debugging C and C++ code

Sample Letter Tailored to Job Ad

Sample Job Ad

(Advanced Candidate)

Managing Director, Urban Mentors Collaborative

Requirements:

Urban Mentors Collaborative seeks a master's level experienced program leader with strong communication, organization, and management skills. The ideal candidate would have five to ten years of experience in non-profit management and staff supervision, and a demonstrated passion for making a difference in the lives of urban youth.

Responsibilities include:

- Organize parent communication, including parent meetings and family events
- Recruit and screen students and coordinate ongoing evaluation of participants' progress
- Oversee the recruitment, screening, and training of volunteers as implemented by program staff
- Communicate clearly and consistently with Principals and lead administrators at partner schools
- Hire and train highly qualified, passionate people
- Provide guidance, support, and leadership to program staff
- Communicate program developments to Board of Director

Sample Letter Advanced Candidate

Dear Ms. Chang:

I grew up in an urban neighborhood where a program much like yours helped me and many of my friends to achieve our educational and career goals. I am writing to apply for the Urban Mentors Collaborative Managing Director position listed on your website because I am committed to making the same kind of difference in the lives of the next generation.

Program development for young people is one of my particular interests. As a school guidance counselor, I created very successful workshops and presentations on a range of personal and academic issues. I introduced the practice of actively including students in the program development process. We used their ideas extensively and with great success. In addition, I provided guidance, support and leadership to these students and to other staff members, which I found very gratifying.

The style I developed as a Jobs for Youth program manager is similarly inclusive. My ability to communicate candidly to superiors, subordinates and community members earned me a great deal of trust and credibility. I made it a priority to organize regular meetings, newsletters and other communications to keep employers, students, parents, and volunteers informed and involved. As a result, my programs had overwhelming support and participation.

Urban Mentors Collaborative has earned its outstanding reputation not only through the success rate of its participants but by demonstrating how all the resources of a community can be mobilized to succeed at a common goal. I would feel privileged to have the chance to use my experience and enthusiasm to lead Urban Mentors Collective to even greater success.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my qualifications with you. Please call me at 123-456-7890 if you are interested in arranging an interview. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Anita Dogood

Sample Referral Letter

Dear Mr. Kikuyu:

I am writing at the suggestion of your colleague Sara Caruso. At a recent meeting with Ms. Caruso, she told me that Acme Securities had openings for entry-level analysts and she advised me to apply.

During my education at Northeastern University, I learned about the intricacies of the market including options, dividends, bond valuation, and mutual funds. My membership in the Northeastern Finance and Investments Club for the past year enhanced my financial background. I have practical experience through my cooperative education jobs at State Street Corporation and Gillette, where I built upon my already strong communication skills by working directly with customers and gained valuable first-hand experience in the financial industry.

Acme Securities' online brokerage department particularly interests me. Your innovative approach to allowing customers access to research and real-time movement has intrigued me throughout my participation in the Finance and Investment Club. I believe that my experience developing online banking systems, as well as my personal use of your online brokerage system, will help me become a valuable team member in your organization.

I am confident that my skills and experience qualify me as a strong candidate for an entry-level position in your company and I would welcome the opportunity to interview with you. I will follow up with you the first week of July, or I can be reached at 123-456-7890. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Will B. Abanker

Sample Letter Entry-Level Position

Dear Ms. Jones:

I am applying for the position of Public Relations Assistant that is posted on your web site. This position interests me because of the excellent reputation that Style Ads has developed over the years, especially through your work with clients such as New Balance, Loreal, and Kenneth Cole. Through my co-op work and my academic training within the field of journalism and public relations, I have developed insight based on practical experience which I am excited to bring to Style Ads.

Through my co-op experiences, and through my training as a journalist, I have learned the value of communication in its many forms. In my most recent co-op experience, I learned that building strong interpersonal relationships with my clients enabled me to better assess and serve their needs. As a market analyst, I made major presentations and discussed my findings before an audience of industry professionals, thus instilling in me the significance of professional demeanor and articulation. My co-op experiences have helped me to become an effective communicator in the professional world while teaching me the importance of client relations.

I would be an asset to Style Ads, not solely for my skills, but also because I am creative, flexible and dedicated. I have carried this work ethic with me through college and co-op, and I would bring this to your company as well. Thank you for your consideration. I will contact you during the week of February 28th to follow up regarding an interview.

Sincerely Yours,
Shecan Write

Sample Letter Entry-Level Position

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am interested in the Associate position that you have posted on the Northeastern University HuskyCareerLink web site. With a Bachelor of Science degree in both Finance and Management Information Systems, I would like to bring my knowledge and skills to a firm with Boston Consulting Group's reputation for creative strategic thinking. I strongly believe that my experience, skills, and capabilities as an active contributor would be a positive match with BCG.

During my undergraduate years at Northeastern, I had the opportunity to participate in a cooperative education program that developed and rapidly advanced my quantitative and communication skills. As an Assistant Bank Examiner at the F.D.I.C, I was involved in insured depository institution examinations where I developed great problem solving and communication skills with upper management. Also, beyond and above expectations, I prepared drafts of exhibits and wrote quantitative analyses for inclusion in the completed report of examination. My analytical skills were further enhanced at Gillette as a Cost Analyst where my key responsibilities demanded keen quantitative analysis, precision and quick action. I also used my organizational and time management skills to deliver relevant, quality data to my manager under rigorous time constraints.

Enclosed is a copy of my resume that details my experience and qualifications. I would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you to discuss my candidacy in further detail. Please feel free to contact me at (617) 666-6666 or via e-mail at i.consult@gmail.com. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely Yours,
Iwanna Consult

Sample Letter Entry-Level Position

Dear Hiring Committee:

I am writing in reference to the Research Associate, US Foreign Policy position posted on Idealist.org. I am passionate about American foreign policy, and I have a desire to learn more. I believe the Council on Foreign Relations' offers some of the most insightful and inspiring work that exists today. Through previous experience conducting research in International Affairs courses as well as my internships and work experience, I believe I would make an excellent candidate for this position.

Through my cooperative education I have worked in domestic and international politics. During my experience at the United Nations, I witnessed negotiations among diplomats. I heard speeches from presidents, prime ministers and ambassadors and observed debates among individuals from various cultures or backgrounds. I believe these interactions have offered me a breadth of knowledge allowing me to carefully analyze written work by the Fellow. At Massachusetts State Senator Robert O'Leary's Office, I followed several relevant news sources for the senator and staff. On several occasions I used this research to answer constituent questions on topics such as the Massachusetts' universal health care system and budget decreases during the economic downturn. In addition, in all three of my previous co-op positions, I assisted in administrative tasks, corresponding and handling scheduling for the senior staff.

As an International Affairs student, I have researched several Middle Eastern issues. In my International Conflict and Negotiation course, I wrote foreign policy memorandums to President Obama regarding the Arab/Israeli conflict and the Somali Peninsula. In my history course, I studied Iran's historical relationship with the United States and China. I have a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and political issues surrounding the Middle East and the United State's relationship with the Middle East. I believe I could bring fresh ideas along with this knowledge while serving as Research Associate.

I am thrilled at the possibility of beginning a career in the international relations field at the Council on Foreign Relations. I hope to speak with you further on what the position entails, and look forward to hearing from you. Please feel free to contact me at phil.jackson@husky.neu.edu. Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,
Phil Jackson

Sample Letter Advanced Candidate

Dear Hiring Manager:

I am writing to you in response to the Marketing Executive posting in the career opportunities section of the Taylor Group's website. My professional and academic background would enable me to excel in this position.

In my current position I deal with high level executives to provide risk management and insurance solutions. I've quickly become a top producer in the Middle Atlantic Division, finishing the year in the top ten percent of all sales representatives and exceeding my sales quota by twenty-five percent. Much of my success can be attributed to my work ethic, attention to detail, focus on exceeding expectations, and proactive approach to customer service. In my four years with my current employer, I have reached my career goals and I am now seeking the opportunity use my skills in a consulting environment.

The Taylor Group's 6-Step Risk Management Process provides Marketing Executives with the framework to successfully generate new business and retain customers. I believe my consultative, value driven sales approach would be a good fit for your organization. Additionally, my customer service philosophy strongly aligns with your corporate goals and values. I excel when part of a culture of learning such as yours.

I've included a copy of my resume along with a book of accomplishments that details my success in my current position. I look forward to talking with you and would welcome the opportunity to learn more about the Taylor Group. Within the next week I will contact you to answer any questions and to confirm that you received my cover letter, accomplishments book, and resume.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Amy Carver

Sample Letter Advanced Candidate

Dear Hiring Manager:

I am writing to apply for the Development Associate position listed on Idealist.org for The Children's Fund. I was thrilled to see that a position exists at an organization whose mission is one in which I already have great faith and support. I am extremely interested in harnessing my marketing experience in a development capacity to support the efforts of TCF on behalf of foster children.

My professional experience thus far has been focused in marketing and communications for both private business and the non-profit sector. One of my major strengths has been creating documents that required tailoring my message and language for a specific purpose. In addition, I have a keen sense of how to improve my own work as well as the work of my colleagues. In this role, I successfully managed multiple assignments and duties, and delivered the results on time.

Beyond my writing capabilities, I have experience with Wordpress, as well as with current internet media and search engines. Whether it's researching donors, outlining talking points or requesting corporate solicitations, I pursue data searches with energy and enthusiasm. I have also worked extensively with vendors and business partners to support fund raising and other events. In addition, I have collaborated with print vendors and volunteers as well as mail and technical departments to execute the delivery of time sensitive materials and correspondence. My experience also includes creating PowerPoint proposals for prospective clients and working with relational management tools similar to Raiser's Edge, diligently tracking and documenting information about prospective and current clients.

I am excited to learn more about the position as Development Associate and to demonstrate what I have to offer. Thank you for taking the time to look through my application. I would love the opportunity to speak with you further about the position; you can contact me at email or 123-456-7890.

Sincerely,
Andrew Morison