

A cover letter is your earliest written contact with a potential employer, creating a critical first impression. An effective cover letter explains why you are interested in the organization and the position. The letter identifies your experience and skills, particularly those related to the job description.

A small error like a typo can get your application rejected. So can a cover letter (even if it's free of errors) that is generic and makes no reference to the company of the job description.

You can create a compelling cover letter by considering the following guidelines.

1. Familiarize yourself with the organization and the position so you can match your skills and experience.
2. Explain why you are an ideal candidate. Hiring managers want to know what you bring to the position. Don't just duplicate your résumé.
3. Do not mention personal information about yourself or your family.
4. If you lack some of the qualifications of the position, don't mention those.
5. Do not write more than four to five paragraphs. Too much text will probably not be read.
6. Write a customized cover letter for each position for which you are applying.
7. Use letterhead that matches your résumé heading.
8. Never use generic salutations like "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Sir or Madam," as they are impersonal.
9. To convey your understanding of what the position entails, consider telling a story about a specific project that magnifies one of the first skills needed for the position.

Components of a Cover Letter

- » Your name, address, and date
- » The hiring manager's name and title
- » The company's name and address
- » A greeting/salutation (e.g., Dear Ms. Johnson)
- » An opening statement: paragraph #1
- » Short body paragraph (or two): paragraphs #2 and #3
- » Closing statement: paragraph #3 or #4
- » Complimentary close (e.g., Regards, Sincerely)
- » Your name/signature at the bottom

