

A cover letter is a document sent with your resume to provide additional information on your skills and experience. It is a tool to help introduce yourself in a memorable, personal way during a job application. Although you will need a unique cover letter for each job you apply to, this guide provides a general formula for writing them, and a template and example at the end.

Getting Started

1. Read the job description, underlining, or highlighting the skills, tasks, and qualifications stated in the description.
2. Write down answers to the following questions:
 - What have I done – through prior work, volunteer experiences, and courses or trainings – that demonstrates that I possess the skills and qualifications I underlined/highlighted and can do the tasks required? Write down specific examples. Please keep in mind that you do not necessarily need to have experience in ALL the skills, tasks and qualifications to apply for the position.
 - What transferable skills do I have that would allow me to do or excel in this job?
 - What is it that energizes and interests me when I think about myself in this position at this organization?
 - In what ways is this organization's mission consistent with my own philosophy and goals?
3. Create your cover letter header.
 - Include your name, city, state, email, and phone number. Do not include a street address. A street address can actually be a way for employers to make pre-judgments about you depending on where you live (a low-income neighborhood, a subsidized housing development, or a notably wealthy area). Consider using the same header as your resume.
 - Do research or ask around about to whom to address the cover letter. Not having the name of the person shows the business you don't care enough about the job to do a little research. If you really can't find the person's name, you can write "Dear Hiring Director/Team/Committee."
4. Start writing your letter. Cover letters generally require several edits. If you are stuck on an opening sentence, move beyond that, and start writing where you can. You can fill in and edit your letter later.

Editing Your Draft

- Once you have a rough draft, go back to the job description to check that you have addressed the most important tasks and qualifications for the job.
- Read the letter as if you were the employer. Ask yourself the following:
 - If I were hiring for this position, does this letter tell me enough about the candidate to convince me that they want to do this job?
 - Is the candidate truly interested in this organization and do they seem to understand what we are about?
 - Does the candidate have the necessary background and skills to do job, or do I think they could learn quickly?
- Ask yourself – Am I writing from the perspective of what's in it for the employer? If all your paragraphs and sentences begin with "I," this might be an indication that you are writing more about what's in it for you. Try to rework your letter so you show what you can do for them, rather than how the position would be a good fit for you.
- Revise and edit as needed, bringing your content to 1-page. Reread your letter word for word, looking for typos. Spellcheck doesn't catch every typo or grammatical error. Typos in cover letters reflect upon your attention to detail. Read the letter out loud or to someone else to check for clarity. Have friends listen to and/or proofread your letters as well.

General Rules to Follow

Good cover letters:

- Are addressed to someone specific.
- Clearly state what job you are interested in and how you heard about it.
- Draw a direct link between what they need and how your skills and experience will meet that need.
- Highlight transferable skills and specific strengths. Employers will be reading your materials to see if you demonstrate the potential to do the job and/or to grow into it, even if you don't have actual experience doing that type of work.
- Reflect your knowledge of the company. Research who they are, what they take pride in, and find connections between their vision and your values, skills, and/or goals.
- Reflect your attitude, personality, motivation, and enthusiasm.
- May briefly explain how the position fits into your larger career goals while keeping the focus on how you can serve the company not how they can serve you.
- Are typo-free and both you and a friend have proofread them. Look for spelling, grammatical, and formatting errors.
- Are one page, are well-formatted with a readable font (10-12) and have sufficient margins.



Tip: A neat way to link your resume and cover letter is to use an identically formatted header (with your name, city, state, phone number, email) on both, like a letterhead.

Cover Letter Template

Your Name
City, State | Phone Number | Email Address

Date

Individual's Name, Job Title
Name of Organization
Street Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Jones*:

*Ideally you have someone specific to address the letter to – do some research and ask around. If you really can't find the person's name, you can write "Dear Hiring Director/Team/Committee."

First Paragraph: Clearly state what job you are applying for and where you saw the job posting. Did anyone refer you? Include their name only if they would be able to put in a good word for you. Give a succinct explanation of why you are interested in the position – you'll go into more detail later – and express your enthusiasm!

Example: "I am excited about this position because I believe strongly in your restaurant's commitment to local food. I feel that my two years of experience as a prep cook and my team-oriented attitude make me a good fit for your kitchen."

Second Paragraph: Provide more details about your professional and/or academic qualifications. Use examples of experiences, skills, and achievements to express how you can specifically fulfill the position responsibilities. Use action verbs and numbers (when possible) to expand on specific items from your resume that are relevant to the job you are seeking. Focus on your transferrable skills and directly respond to skills or requirements listed in the job posting. Do a bit of homework and demonstrate that you know enough about the employer or position to relate your background to the employer and position.

Optional Paragraph: Insert a short paragraph here to make note of anything that an employer might see as odd about your resume, but you are easily able to explain. For example, if you haven't worked for a while: "I made the choice to spend the past year caring for an ill family member, but I am excited to get back to work." If you have a gap in your work history due to incarceration, or there's something else on your resume that would be similarly difficult to succinctly explain in a cover letter, don't mention it at all but be ready to talk about it in an interview.

Third Paragraph: Give a strong conclusion about why you are a perfect fit for the job. If this job fits into your larger career goals, this is a good place to talk about that. Indicate that you would like the opportunity to interview for the position and state what you will do to follow up. Let them know you would be glad to provide the employer with any additional information needed. Write a gracious closing sentence, such as: "Thank you for your time and consideration. I will call your office next week to follow up on my application."

Sincerely,
Your Name Typed

Cover Letter Example

Sydney Falls

Winooski, VT | (802) 555-1212 |sfalls@email.com

ABC Non-profit Agency
1234 Main Street
Burlington, VT 05401

December 19, 2022

Dear Hiring Manager:

I am applying for the Program Manager position at ABC Non-Profit Agency (ABC-NPA) recently announced in Vermont Jobs. Your job posting caught my eye because I am passionate about fighting systemic inequities in Vermont, starting with providing equal rights to affordable housing and solutions for those without shelter. Having grown up in a low-income family, I find it of the utmost importance to ensure individual rights by creating housing programs for vulnerable populations. I would like to bring my commitment to community and experience in program management and customer service to the ABC-NPA team.

I have over six years of program management experience with three of those years working for non-profits. I have performed case management services for an average caseload of 20 clients. I have led development of community outreach programs resulting in a 10% increase in services, and maintained confidential client management data in a secured system. I have used various software programs such as MS Office and Google Office Suite, and am able to learn quickly on unfamiliar tools and organization-specific database systems. I work well independently and as part of a team. When it comes to taking charge of projects, I can focus and provide outcomes with the organization's best interests in mind.

Over the past 2 years, I took a break from my career to focus on caring for my aging parents. I am now ready to turn my attention back to my career. I have been looking for a way to combine my interest in housing access with further developing my community outreach and advocacy skills, and believe this opportunity meets my career's next steps. I also want to apply myself as an individual that has found the impact of the pandemic imbalanced for those with children. I feel returning to a career in a non-profit could help me advocate for the countless other individuals and families experiencing houselessness.

I am a very committed individual looking to assist your team in continuing the services ABC-NPA offers, along with finding ways to help ABC-NPA eradicate houselessness. I welcome the opportunity to speak with you about how I may apply my skills and expertise to support ABC-NPA's success. If you need further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I hope to hear from you, and I thank you kindly for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Sydney Falls