

Write an Effective Cover Letter!

Cover letters do, in fact, get read. Some hiring managers consider the cover letter to be the most important aspect of your application, more so than your resume. The cover letter adds context and story to your resume, telling prospective employers **who you are** and **why they should hire you**. This is your opportunity to **stand out from and above** all other candidates.

Tips and Tricks for Landing the Interview!

- Think about the Needs of the Company, Not Yourself
 - It's a common mistake to talk about yourself *only* throughout the cover letter, and what you hope to gain from the position. Really, **you should discuss how you're going to contribute** to the company/position.
 - Don't bring up salary, benefits, vacation, or any other perks this early unless it's asked of you in the position description. You don't want to seem like a Me, Me, Me candidate.
- Demonstrate You Know and Love This Company—Customize Each Letter
 - Show hiring managers what you can do for them now and in the future
 - Determine the key requirements for this job and **make it clear how you're going to deliver**, detailing your relevant strengths—*"Here's how I will specifically deliver results in this role..."*
 - **Hiring managers want to see you're excited about their position and company**, so when they get a mass-produced letter (*and they know*), they trash it. You can certainly start with a template, but then tweak it to make it your own!
 - Mirror the company culture in your letter's language—prove you're a great fit for the company and industry! Get in the mindset by reading over the company website (company/department) before you start writing.
- Don't Regurgitate Your Resume—Stay Focused!
 - Expand upon the facts in your resume to **tell the story of why you're the perfect fit for this company and this position**; provide additional details that didn't fit on your resume.
 - Stay **focused on your strengths and relevant information**; don't ramble as you're expanding on your resume. E.g., there's no need for a paragraph on your travels abroad where you "found yourself" unless you're applying as a travel writer.
- Highlight the Right Experiences and Don't Undersell Yourself
 - **Don't draw attention to your weaknesses or apologize** for skills you don't have. Lines like *"Although I don't have the specific experience you're looking for..."* or *"Despite my limited experience with..."* or *"I'm probably not the most qualified candidate..."*, will get you thrown out of the candidate pool. Why would the hiring manager not hire the most qualified person? Don't point it out.
 - Rather, stay **positive**, focus on your **strengths**, and communicate how your **transferable skills** are relevant to the needs of the position and company. Tell the hiring manager **how you're going to deliver**, making you a strong candidate.
 - Transition from your past experience to this new opportunity: *"I'm excited to take the next step in my career—management."* Or perhaps *"I'm eager to transition my experience from an administrative role to a more client-focused position at _____."* Then **dive in to HOW you're going to be successful there**.
 - Do not scatter a lot of facts in your letter in hopes that one or some are relevant. All skills and facts presented in your letter should be relevant to the job, as well as be paired with specific descriptions of HOW they are relevant.

- Cut the Fluff and Be Descriptive
 - “Team player.” “People person.” “Good communication skills.” —**Fluff**. Rather than use these generic terms to describe yourself, **show off your skills with statements that explain your skills and experiences**, providing context to your resume in the first person: “I’m an expert communicator with experience training staff members formally and informally in food safety and leadership development.” Although longer, this statement **provides evidence to your communication skills, while actually describing what you’ve done in your work experience**; it is so much stronger than a generic statement that’s been said in every other applicant’s cover letter.

Cookie Cutter Intros are Out—Tell a Story

Why are you applying for this job? What brings you to this company in particular?

Does their commercial provide some nostalgia from your childhood?

Do you use their product every day?

Do you believe whole-heartedly in the company values, and you know you can contribute to the company’s success?

Stories bring people, backgrounds, and experiences to life, so share! But keep it short and sweet. The point is to connect with the reader in a couple of sentences. Think about **introducing your letter with a connection—a story**—when you state the position for which you’re applying.

The days of the Cookie Cutter are gone: “Dear Sir or Madam, I am writing to apply for the position of Marketing Manager with the Jones Company...” You have a **limited amount of time to introduce who you are, what you have to offer, and why you want the job**. Is this really how you want to kick things off and be noticed.... or NOT be noticed?

Here are some themes for your story:

- **Be Passionate**—Hiring managers are looking for not only skill but folks who are going to be passionate about what they are doing every day at work. Show you’re excited to join the team.
- **Show Your Love for the Company**—Do you know, love, eat, breathe, sleep this brand already? Flatter them; tell them a story about how you know and love them. Be sincere, specific, and genuine.
- **Start with an Accomplishment or Skill**—You have to stand apart from the crowd, so now is the time to show off a character trait, an impressive skill, or an accomplishment that the hiring manager will really care about and remember from other applications.
- **Humor or Creativity**—**Disclaimer**—know your crowd and do your homework before using snark or sass. Making someone smile from the very beginning will win you major points, but if they don’t smile then your application is likely thrown out.

Skills VS Experience VS Education

Hiring managers care most about whether or not you can walk into the job performing the duties while being a good worker. Don’t make the mistake of focusing too much on your

education (college, GPA, courses, projects, etc.) in your cover letter and not your skills and work experience (including volunteer, internships, leadership experience, etc.).

The experiences that describe **how you'll contribute** to the company on Day 1 is most important in your cover letter and landing you the interview. ***When you know you have the potential to do the job, but you don't have the work experience to back it up, focus on your hard and soft skills in your cover letter.***

Hard Skills

Computer Skills (Windows, Microsoft Office, Typing, programming, etc.)

Math/Numeracy (finance/accounting, logistics, trade, data analysis, etc.)

Foreign Language

Planning Skills (marketing, project mgmt., sales, construction, etc.)

Soft Skills

Communication

Leadership

Adaptability

Problem-solving

Creativity

Teamwork

Time management

Do you have a winding work history?

You don't need a linear work history to be the perfect fit for a position. **Highlight your transferable skills** instead of why your specific work experiences make you the perfect fit! When your work history doesn't help your case, then let your skills speak for themselves:

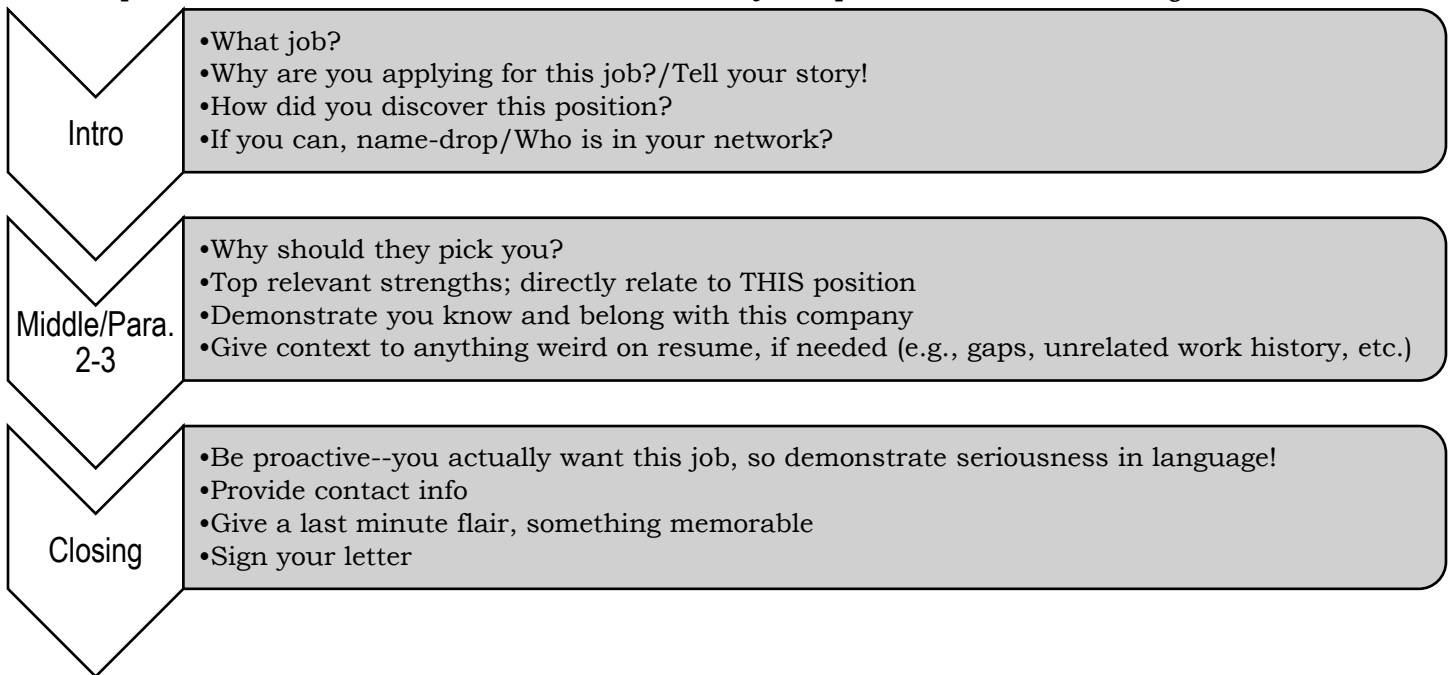
1. Figure out **which skills best showcase your ability to perform this job** (are these consistent with the top desired skills in the job description?).
2. **Choose three skills** out of this list to focus on. Brainstorm projects, assignments, and responsibilities from school, work, internships, leadership and volunteer experiences, etc. that illustrate your expertise in each skill.
3. **Choose one experience**/project (or a couple shorter experiences) **per skill to discuss**. Write your letter's middle paragraph content with this information! Feel free to get creative with formatting here, if you want!

Formatting your Letter

- **Short and Sweet...and Direct**—your letter should not exceed **one page**. 70% of employers prefer half-page cover letters (250 words). All you really need to include is the **position**, the **reason you can** do the job, **how you're going** to do the job, and add **personality**.
- **Do not start your cover letter with "My name is..."** You're going to sign this letter at the bottom. Dive into what you're going to bring to the job.
- Do start with the **hiring manager's first and last name**, and not a version of "*To Whom It May Concern.*" Example: Dear Ms. Emily Johnson
 - If this information is not provided in the job posting, **search online** (company website, list of executives, Human Resources). You could address your letter to the **head of the department or the Human Resources director, by name**.

You can also call the Human Resources department to find out to whom to address your letter (this is a normal and acceptable thing to do).

- When in doubt, consider addressing your letter to a very specific title: “Dear Senior Hiring Manager,” “Dear [job title] Search Committee” etc.—this will show that you made efforts and you’re writing to a specific audience.
- **Proactive** VS Reactive—frame your letter in proactive language. Let the hiring manager know that **you are truly interested in this job** (even asking for the job!), and you will **follow-up** after sending in your application. Reactive applicants simply provide their contact information and wait by the phone; *don’t let this be you!*



- Always **sign your letter** at the bottom. You can create an electronic signature picture file, or you can print your letter, sign it, and then scan it back to your computer.
- Be careful not to include personal information about your religion, race, marital status, etc., even if you think it’s adding personality. It is irrelevant to your ability to perform the job and could cause you to be discriminated against.
- **Too formal = Robot and insincere** → Read your letter out loud, and if it doesn’t sound like you, start over. You want to sound friendly, approachable, and like someone that people want to work with. Cover letters are first impressions.
- **Proofread** your letter. Have someone else read your letter for **errors** and **content**.
 - Content questions for the reader:
 1. *Does this sell me as the best person for the job?*
 2. *Does this letter get you excited?*
 - If the answers are “No” (or even a hesitation) then it’s time to rewrite.
 - **Errors will get your letter and your candidacy for the job thrown out.**

Resources:

Compiled from www.themuse.com/advice/
<http://www.businessphrases.net>
<https://hbr.org/2009/06/the-best-cover-letter/>