

COVER LETTER WRITING

A successful cover letter “hooks” an employer in the first paragraph. The first few sentences should show that you’ve done your research about the job or internship and the organization, and should make an employer want to learn more about you. A cover letter is also the first writing sample that an employer sees from you. Make every word count and make sure the final version is polished and error-free. You can review student cover letter samples on the [CareerLAB website](#).

BEFORE YOU START

1. Research the position. What are its key responsibilities? What skills, knowledge and qualities are listed in the posting?
2. Research the organization. What is its culture? Its history? Its strategic goals? How do describe themselves and what sets them apart? You can find this information online and through informational interviews.
3. Identify your most relevant skills and competencies. Then create “stories” from your experience that illustrate your competencies in the required areas.
4. Download and complete the Resume/Cover Letter/Interview Prep Sheet from the [CareerLAB website](#).

FORMATTING BASICS

- **Font** — Use 12 point standard font (Times Roman, Garamond, Verdana, Helvetica, Arial).
- **Spacing** — Set document margins to 1” all around. Center your letter on the page and left justify all text.
- **Heading** — Use business letter format and use the same heading as your resume.

WRITING THE LETTER

- **Be specific** — Tailor each letter to the position and employer. This shows the employer that you are truly interested in the job and that you took the time to research the organization.
- **Whenever possible, address the letter to a person** — Spell names correctly.
- **Be concise** — Keep it to one page. Be clear and avoid using flowery or boastful language.
- **Complement your resume** — Rather than repeating information from your resume, tell specific stories and use examples. The tone should be what you can do for the employer, not what they can do for you.
- **NEVER be negative** — Don’t apologize for not yet possessing a skill they would like to see.
- **Proofread, Proofread, Proofread** — Typos signal a lack of attention to detail.
- **Come to CareerLAB to meet with a PCA** — To get a critique with a Peer Career Advisor (see [Handshake](#)).

First Paragraph

Tell the reader why you are writing (I am writing to apply....) and then go on to very specifically describe why you are interested in that specific job and that specific organization. The reader should feel that this letter was specifically written for them and not a template you use for all jobs. Details that appeal to you about the organization and/or job are critically important. Did you notice how often we use the word “specific”?

Second and/or Third Paragraph

Choose two or three specific experiences from your resume that are the best examples of your ability to do the exact job for which you are applying. Describe the situation - action - result of what you did and how it relates to the job. Be very specific but brief and concise.

The second paragraph should be highlighting in detail the most relevant/impressive you have to offer. The third paragraph will highlight the next most relevant experience.

Last Paragraph

- Reiterate your interest in the organization and position.
- Indicate that you are available to discuss your qualifications in a personal interview.
- Close by stating that you look forward to hearing from them, and reiterating your contact info.