

How to Write a Standout Cover Letter: A Step-by-Step Guide

Your cover letter is one of the most important tools for getting the attention of a hiring manager and landing a job interview. A well-written cover letter allows you to make a strong first impression, showcase your qualifications, and explain why you're the ideal candidate for the role. Follow this step-by-step guide to craft an engaging cover letter that will help you stand out from the crowd.

Preparation: Things to Consider Before Writing

Before sitting down to write, take the time to thoroughly research the company, understand the role's requirements, and gather key information about yourself.

- Analyze the job description carefully and identify the core skills and experiences required. Make a list of your relevant qualifications.
- Study the company's website, mission, values, and culture to understand what they're looking for in an employee.
- Plan how you will highlight examples that demonstrate your fit for the role and company.
- Decide on your strongest selling points and achievements to emphasize.
- Update your resume to ensure consistency between the two documents.

The Cover Letter Format

While cover letter styles can vary, the basic format includes several key sections:

- **Header**
 - Include your name, address, phone number, email, and the date.
- **Salutation**
 - Use formal greetings like "Dear Mr./Ms./Mrs. [Last Name]" if you know the name.
 - Use "Dear hiring manager" if the contact's name is unavailable.
- **Opening Paragraph**
 - State the position you're applying for and where you found the listing.
 - Get the reader's attention with 1-2 high-level strengths relevant to the role.
- **Body Paragraph(s)**
 - Expand on your qualifications and use examples to illustrate your fit.
 - Explain why you're interested in the company and role.
 - This is typically 1-2 meaty paragraphs forming the core of your letter.
- **Closing Paragraph**
 - Restate your interest and summarize your key strengths.
 - Thank the reader for their consideration.
 - Provide a call to action like "I look forward to discussing the role further."
- **Complimentary Close**
 - Use a polite close like "Sincerely," "Best regards," etc.
 - Follow with your full name.

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How to Tailor Your Cover Letter

To maximize impact, your cover letter should be tailored specifically to each job you apply for.

- Study the job description and company info to understand their needs.
- Highlight achievements and skills that align with those required qualifications.
- Use some of the same language and keywords from the job posting.
- Include specifics about why you're interested in that particular role/company.
- Share examples relevant to the responsibilities outlined in the job description.
- Research the company culture/values and show how you're a good fit.

Tips to Stand Out

With the above formatting and tailoring strategies in place, incorporate these tips to further increase your cover letter's impact:

- Lead with a compelling opening statement to grab the reader's interest.
- Quantify your accomplishments with specific data and metrics when possible.
- Infuse your authentic voice and personality into your writing.
- Structure your letter in a clear, easy-to-scan format using sections and whitespace.
- Customize each letter; avoid reusing the same generic template repeatedly.
- Proofread carefully for spelling, grammar, and consistent formatting.

Cover Letter Examples

Here are three common cover letter formats with step-by-step examples:

1. Standard/Formal Cover Letter Format

Opening Paragraph:

- Introduce yourself and state the position you're applying for.

Example: *"I am writing to express my strong interest in the Marketing Manager position with ABC Company. With over 6 years of experience in marketing roles, I have developed expertise in strategizing campaigns, managing teams, and driving results."*

Body Paragraph(s):

- Highlight your relevant skills and experience. Provide specific examples that demonstrate your qualifications.
- Express your interest in the company and your knowledge of their work.

Example: *"At XYZ Corp, I successfully planned and executed marketing initiatives that generated a 28% increase in sales within 8 months. I am well-versed in market analysis, creating buyer personas, and developing omnichannel campaigns that engage target audiences across multiple platforms..."*

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Closing Paragraph:

- Summarize your qualifications and enthusiasm for the role.
- Thank the employer and provide a call-to-action (e.g. requesting an interview).

Example: *"With my proven track record in delivering successful marketing strategies and campaigns, I am confident in my ability to make significant contributions at ABC Company. I welcome the opportunity for an interview to further discuss my qualifications. Thank you for your consideration."*

2. Creative Cover Letter Format

Opening:

- Begin with a compelling statement, anecdote or quote related to the job or company to grab attention.

Example: *"They say the best marketing connects with people's emotions. That's exactly what I aim to do through creative, impactful campaigns."*

Second Paragraph:

- Introduce yourself, state the position, and summarize your relevant background.

Example: *"My name is [name], and I am excited to be applying for the role of Digital Marketing Specialist with [company]. With 4 years of experience driving results through innovative strategies and data-driven optimization, I have the skills and passion to thrive in this role."*

Body Paragraph(s):

- Highlight key skills, accomplishments, and experiences that qualify you for the role.
- Keep the tone conversational but professional.

Example: *"My experience developing and executing multi-channel marketing initiatives for both B2B and B2C clients has taught me a thing or two about crafting targeted messaging that resonates..."*

Closing:

- Reiterate your enthusiasm and fit for the role.
- Thank the employer and include a call-to-action.

Example: *"I'm excited by the prospect of bringing my strategic mindset, creativity, and knack for results-driven marketing to the [company] team. I welcome the chance to further discuss my qualifications in an interview."*

3. Accomplishments Cover Letter Format

Opening:

- Briefly introduce yourself, the position you are applying for, and grab attention with an impressive quantifiable achievement or fact.

Example: *"As an accomplished Marketing Manager with a track record of increasing sales by 35% year-over-year at my previous company, I am well-prepared to take on a challenging marketing role with your esteemed organization."*

Body Paragraphs:

- Focus each paragraph on a key accomplishment/achievement related to the target role.
- Use metrics/data and specific examples to demonstrate capabilities.

Example: *"In my previous role at [Company], I spearheaded a rebranding project that included revamping our website, launching new digital ad campaigns, and redesigning marketing collateral. This initiative resulted in a 22% increase in website traffic and a 17% rise in qualified leads within 6 months."*

Closing:

- Summarize why you're an ideal candidate based on qualifications and accomplishments.
- Express enthusiasm and request next steps/interview.

Example: *"With my proven success developing and executing high-impact marketing campaigns, expertise in leveraging analytics, and ability to drive revenue, I could make significant contributions as your next Marketing Manager. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this role and my qualifications further. Thank you for your consideration."*

By following this step-by-step approach, you'll be able to craft persuasive and compelling cover letters tailored to your target roles. An effective cover letter allows you to elaborate on your unique qualifications and motivations beyond what's provided on your resume alone. With an engaging narrative that sells your fit, you'll greatly increase your chances of getting selected for an interview.

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