

Steps for Writing a Cover Letter: Basics



What is a Cover Letter?

A cover letter is a short, professional, tailored document sent with a resume when applying for a job or internship introducing:

- **Who you are**
- **Why you are interested in the position**
- **What your most relevant skills or experiences are**
- **How you can add value to the employer**

Writing a strong cover letter is about connecting your experiences to what the job description (JD) is asking for. Every cover letter is different based on what the person's experiences are and what their goal is. Don't be worried if yours doesn't look the same as someone else's.



Keep in Mind:

- If there is an option for a cover letter, **ALWAYS** add one!
- It's **KEY** to tailor your cover letter to each role.
- Keep it concise into one page
- Organize it clearly with an introduction, body, and closing
- Show enthusiasm for the opportunity, but avoid sounding overly dramatic or desperate
- Use examples to prove your strengths rather than only claiming them
- Keep the tone professional, confident, clear with correct grammar and spelling
- Clear and correct grammar



Try to Avoid:

- Copying your resume word-for-word
- Not sharing the specific skill set the employer is asking for
- Irrelevant personal details
- Writing a long list of skills
- Generic statements that could fit any company
- Negative comments about past employers
- Exaggerated claims



Use  **Jobscan's**
Cover Letter Optimizer
for support!



Steps for Writing a Cover Letter: Brainstorming

1. Reflect on the Job Description (JD)

Read the job description (JD) carefully and identify key skills, tools, and experiences the employer is seeking. Look for sections titled: required skills, preferred experiences, daily responsibilities, their missions and vision statements, and/or keywords repeated in the posting.

2. Reflect on Your Experiences

Reflect on all your experiences - not just paid - that built the skills aligning with the JD. This can include involvement with internships, employment, class projects, volunteering, campus involvements (such as clubs), or personal relevant projects.

Even if you have limited, direct experience, you can still build a compelling cover letter by focusing on transferable skills from your coursework!

- Focus on school achievements and projects, volunteer work, personal projects, and your passion for the role.
- Emphasize your reliability, willingness to learn, adaptability, and your transferrable skills.

3. Writing out your experiences

This is the most important step: show evidence, not just claims. Simple formula: Your experiences + Transferable skills + Employer needs = Strong Cover Letter

Use the **S.T.A.R method** to create impactful writing! This method will help you create a well-rounded description of your experience. See next page for example!

Steps for Writing a Cover Letter: Writing Out Your Experience Example

Job Description:

JD asks for strong written communication skills.



Your Experience:

I wrote research summaries and collaborated on group presentations that required clear and professional communication.



Situation: In my English course, I was responsible for writing research summaries and contributing to group presentations that required clear and professional communication.

Task: To ensure our work was accurate and easy to understand,

Action: I organized complex information into concise written summaries and collaborated closely with team members to refine presentation content.

Result: Our projects were well received for their clarity and professionalism, strengthening both team communication and audience understanding. I am confident these communication skills will allow me to effectively collaborate with colleagues and contribute to clear, professional communication in this role.

Steps for Writing a Cover Letter: The Breakdown



Your FirstName LastName

Bothell, WA | (425) 352-5555 | name@uw.edu

Month Day, Year

Dear [Manager Name, recruiter, Organization and/or Department, Hiring Committee],

Opening Paragraph -Who You Are + Why You're Applying: State the position you're applying for and how you learned of the organization/position, show interest and share briefly what skills make you an ideal candidate. The skills should be from the job description that you know you can expand on.

Middle Paragraph(s) - Explain How Your Experiences Built the Skills the Employer Needs:

Mention specific qualifications from the job description, and how you have demonstrated those hard skills in your past experiences and/or educational endeavors. Utilize the key words from the position description itself. Experiences can be paid or unpaid. For example, pull from academic projects, research, coursework, internships, study abroad, employment, volunteer work, leadership roles, etc. You are trying to show how you are a strong candidate for this position. Take 2-4 experiences from your resume, but make sure to seize the opportunity to expand on what you have already shared. Consider using the **S.T.A.R method** to support writing impactful examples! [STAR method link: What, How, Why & STAR Method Guide](#)

Additional Middle Paragraph - Why this organization/role: This paragraph is important! In 1-3 sentences state why you are interested in the company you are applying to. Researching is helpful, not only for the cover letter, but for the interview. Show what you find valuable about the organization and what that means to you and the role. Having trouble? Reflect on your [career values](#) and how they align!

Closing Paragraph: Indicate that you would like the opportunity to interview for a position or to talk with the employer to learn more about their opportunities. State that you would be glad to provide the employer with any additional information needed. Thank the employer for their time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Type out your full name. A signature is not a requirement, but a formality and adds a nice personal touch

Format

- Size 10 - 12pt font
- Your name is the largest font size (14 - 16pt)
- Professional font recommended: Times New Roman or Calibri
- 1 inch margins
- Maximum 1 page

