SWC 8: Composing a Cover Letter

A cover letter is a short (typically one page) document that expands upon your resume and provides hiring professionals and/or graduate school admissions offices with additional specifics surrounding your education, work history, and other relevant experiences. While a resume is a brief overview of your general qualifications, a cover letter gives you the opportunity to explain why your qualifications make you the ideal candidate for a particular internship, job, graduate program, etc. In other words, it is your initial sales pitch, and like a resume, you will customize this to the specific application and position.

Overall Goals:
- Introduce yourself as a candidate with the skills for this specific job position
- Provide context—how you learned about the opening
- Explain why this particular job interests you
- Show how the job is appropriate for you by using language or terminology similar to the advertisement
- Highlight and explain specific qualifications in your resume
- Emphasize relevant skills and experiences

Tips for Successful Cover Letters:
- Read the job description carefully and follow instructions
- Avoid copying phrases verbatim from the advertisement
- Match your tone of the letter to the language of the advertisement
- Do not include unrelated personal information (keep it professional) or salary, benefit, or schedule requests
- Do not create a replica of your resume; a cover letter should be more in-depth and specific.

Writing about Yourself: It is important to use strong action words when describing your jobs and accomplishments.

Stronger Cover Letter Words:

Accomplished	Exceptional	Proficient	Talented
Capable	Experienced	Seasoned	Thorough
Confident	Expert	Skilled	Authorized
Efficient	Practiced	Successful	Mediated

Overused, Vague Cover Letter Words/Phrases:

Detail-oriented	Motivated	I am the best candidate because
Go-to person	Problem solver	
Good	Team player	I feel
Hardworking	As you can see on my resume	I think I'd be a great fit

Design: When designing your cover letter, use a simple font sized at 11 or 12 point. If submitting with a resume, consider making the formatting (header, font type, and font size) the same to promote readability and organization. Margins should be set at 1" to maintain professionalism.

Your Name Here

City, State zip code   Email   Phone Number

Date of application

Employer Contact Information (if you have it)
Name (if there is not a name, use a phrase like Hiring Committee)
Job title of the individual you are addressing (if applicable)
Company
Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear _____, (insert the name/phrase that you used to address the letter)

Paragraph 1 – Opening:
- Why you are writing (state the position you are interested in)
- Where you found the advertisement/job opening
- Brief summary about who you are (school/degree/expected graduation date)
- Why you qualify ("My *paragraph 1 topic* and *paragraph 2 topic* qualify me….")

Paragraph 2 – 1st body paragraph:
- Longest paragraph
- Strongest claim to the job (experience, education, etc.)
- Expand details from your resume to show relevance to the position you are applying for

Paragraph 3 – 2nd body paragraph:
- Second strongest claim to job (experience, education, etc.)
- Expand details from your resume to show relevance to the position you are applying for

Paragraph 4 – Conclusion:
- Request an interview – "I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you…"
- Contact information – "You can reach me at..."
- Closing – "Thank you for considering my application."

Sincerely,

Your Name Signed

Your Name Typed Out