

# Cover Letters

A cover letter is often the first document an employer sees when you apply for a position, and it can establish the tone for the rest of your application. The cover letter highlights the top reasons why you're a great fit for the position and why you are interested in working for this particular organization.

**First rule of cover letter writing: ALWAYS WRITE YOUR OWN COVER LETTER.**  
Skip Google and follow the steps in this guide.

**Second rule of cover letter writing: NEVER REUSE A PREVIOUSLY WRITTEN COVER LETTER.**  
Instead, customize and tailor each document to the position and organization that you're applying for.

With these rules established, let's dig a little deeper. Before you start writing, genuinely reflect on why you're interested in this opportunity and why you would want to work at this organization. A well-written cover letter conveys your ability to effectively communicate and clearly demonstrates your interest and qualifications for the position and organization. If you struggle to express why you would like to work in this role, an employer will have difficulty picturing you in that role, too.

Your cover letter should sound like it comes from you rather than a robot or written like every other cover letter found in a Google search. Just as you would never turn in a previously-written paper for class, never submit a previously used cover letter. Recruiters can tell in an instant if a cover letter has been written for general use. Be purposeful about why you want to work at this organization and what you have to offer.

## What is considered an ideal cover letter?

- Addressed to an individual or role (i.e. Hiring Manager)
- Tailored to a specific position
- One-page in length
- Written in conversational yet professional style with short sentences
- Closed with a request for action and a "Thank you for consideration"

## When should you submit a cover letter?

- When it is requested...
- When it is optional...
- When there is no mention...

*Unless the employer explicitly states they do not want a cover letter, you should submit a cover letter.*

## Who will or might read a cover letter?

- Recruiter
- Hiring manager
- The interview team or hiring/selection/search committee

# Anatomy of a Cover Letter

## Personalize!

Through LinkedIn, Glassdoor, and many other resources it is possible to determine the primary recruiter for a position. At the very least, you can determine the name of the human resources director at a larger firm or the CEO of a start-up or non-profit.

## Wow them with a good opener!

"After recently speaking with the head of regional sales, John Doe, I'm excited at the opportunity to bring my synergetic leadership style to the team at XYZ INC."

## Content:

- Mention **how** you are a good fit for the position, organization, and industry
- Use the job description as your guide, but also research the organization
- Proofread; read out loud to ensure it makes sense and flows well

## Wrap Up:

- Remind your reader why you are a good fit and restate your interest in the organization
- End on a cordial note
- Express your interest in speaking with them further about your qualifications

Your Present Address  
City, State Zip Code

Date

Name of individual  
Job title of individual  
Organization Name  
Street Address or P.O. Box  
City, State Zip Code

Dear Dr. Last Name/ First & Last Name/ Hiring Manager/ Selection Committee:

**First paragraph:** Why are you writing? Let them know what role you are applying for at their organization. Share why you're interested in working in this position at this specific organization. Transition with how you meet their qualifications.

**Middle paragraphs:** Take the next paragraph (or two) to provide examples of the major areas you introduced in the paragraph above. Do not repeat your resume; simply highlight the most important pieces. Since your resume simply documents your accomplishments, your cover letter provides an avenue to add narrative to explain why your experience has prepared you for this position and connect the dots for the employer.

**Last paragraph:** Reiterate your interest and focus on how you can meet the employer's needs rather than what the position will do for you. Then, let them know you would be excited to speak with them about this opportunity (avoid being presumptuous). Without using exclamation points, show some enthusiasm. Let them know the best ways to reach you and thank them for their time.

Sincerely,

*(your signature in blue or black ink)*

Full name typed

## Formatting:

- Business letter, left-aligned (no indent for each paragraph)
- Keep to 1 page
- Body of cover letter should be 1/2 to 2/3 of a page (from start of first paragraph to end of last paragraph)
- Use same font and size as resume

**Avoid overused words such as "Passion," "Asset," or "Team Player"**

Instead...

- ...describe which part of the role that excites you most!
- ...show an example of how you demonstrate your perseverance.
- ...share how you engage with the world around you.

# Sample Job Description & Cover Letter

Really know the position and organization. What do they do? What is their mission? This requires further research into the organization (such as their website).

Note what requirements or qualifications the organization is seeking. What are 2-3 that you have that you'd like to highlight?

Notice key words that the organization and industry uses in the job description describe their work and characteristics they are looking for.

## Research Associate

Institute for Biomedical and Clinical Research - Tacoma, WA

The Research Associate is a vital member of a well-established internationally/nationally renowned laboratory with a reputation for conducting human T cell assays associated with autoimmune diabetes. The Research Associate performs assays to support research investigating human autoimmune diabetes.

### General Duties

Work with human blood specimens, tissues, and human cell cultures performing T cell cultures and assays, sterile culture work. Pick up and transport samples. Work with radioisotopes and labeled specimens. Help in maintenance of laboratory, help organize and track samples/data, order supplies/equipment, and make media.

### Requirements

The position requires a BA/BS degree in an appropriate field of technology or science, plus at least one year of research experience.

Must be willing to work with human blood products and tissues, radioactive isotopes, and biohazards.

Must have a basic knowledge of computers for word processing and graphic presentation of data.

Must be willing and able to work outside the normal workweek if required by experiment. Some weekend work may be required.

Must have own vehicle for transporting samples.

Since all of the samples are from patients, the ability to be careful and accurate when recording data and patient information is required.

Salary will be dependent upon experience. Institute for Biomedical and Clinical Research offers excellent benefits.

To apply, please send resume, cover letter, and references to [Institute@fakeemail.com](mailto:Institute@fakeemail.com).

1500 N Warner St.  
Tacoma, WA 98416

October 21, 2018

Hugh Manreese-Orsus  
Director of Human Resources  
Institute for Biomedical and Clinical Research  
12345 Avenue Ave.  
Tacoma, WA 98416

Dear Hugh Manreese-Orsus,

I am applying with high interest in the Research Associate position at the Institute for Biomedical and Clinical Research. IBCR is conducting groundbreaking research that will make strides in serving individuals affected by autoimmune diabetes. With family members personally affected by this disease, I have committed my undergraduate studies and research to better understand autoimmune diseases. I graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Molecular and Cellular Biology in May of 2019 and look forward to utilizing my education, experiences, and lab skills to continue to study autoimmune diabetes. I am eager to work and learn beside the renowned scientists at IBCR and can offer my dedication, ability to focus and prioritize effectively under pressure.

As an undergraduate researcher for the 2017-2018 academic year, on top of a full academic schedule, I devoted 20 hours per week while working independently under the supervision of a biology faculty member, Dr. Biolo Gee. In my research, I used mouse models to study effects of diabetes and the disease onset and development within a relatively short amount of time. With the lab's advanced imaging, I observed dendritic cells bearing autoantigen in these mouse models during their interactions with T lymphocytes. After analyzing and compiling this research into an academic poster, I presented my findings during the Fall Science Symposium at the University of Puget Sound. From this experience studying T lymphocytes and reactivity, I'm prepared to further aid in the studies IBCR scientists are conducting.

Along with my academic background and previous research in an lab environment, I bring the ability to hold myself accountable when managing projects independently. As a course assistant, Genetics, I provided assistance to a lab of 12 underclass students, helping them develop basic lab skills such as conducting assays and taking cultures. I managed my time between demonstrating and enforcing lab protocols, grading lab reports, maintaining excellent records while holding confidential information, and managing the facility including cleanliness and keeping an inventory of supplies.

I am driven to work to combat diabetes as a career path and look forward to learning under guidance and instruction of the scientists while playing my part as IBCR conducts life changing research. I welcome the opportunity to speak with you about my skillsets and interest in this position and can be reached at [GrizzLeeBear@pugetsound.edu](mailto:GrizzLeeBear@pugetsound.edu) or 123.456.7890. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Grizz Lee-Bear

## Lines No One Likes to Hear:

**The Line:** “I will call your office in a week to schedule an interview.”

**UGH Factor:** It is presumptuous to assume they will want you to interview—it should always be up to the hiring manager to offer an interview.

**INSTEAD:** “I welcome the opportunity to speak with you about how I can contribute to reaching the goals of Our Kids Are Awesome with my experience in developing educational curriculum.”

**The Difference:** As a hiring manager, that would peak my interest. You are offering a specific skill set that our program needs. You express interest in an interview without pressuring me as an employer.

**The Line:** “Through this position I hope to gain a deeper understanding of...”

**UGH Factor:** It focuses on what you will gain rather than how the employer will benefit by selecting you for the position. Remember they are trying to choose the candidate who brings something unique and valuable to the position.

**INSTEAD:** “I am excited to offer my expertise/knowledge/experience in...”

**The Difference:** As a hiring manager, now I feel that you want to help my organization, not just use this position to bolster your career.

**The Line:** “I don’t like writing cover letters and you don’t like reading them.”

**UGH Factor:** A sense of humor can be hard to read correctly in a cover letter and can leave an impression that doesn’t accurately describe your character, talents, or potential.

**INSTEAD:** Write a good cover letter. Share why you’re a good fit for the position/organization.

**The Difference:** You take yourself seriously and as a hiring manager, I respect that.

## Cover Letter Checklist

Review the following questions to gauge your cover letter’s quality and effectiveness. If you cannot answer “yes” to the vast majority of these questions, examine your draft carefully and make changes that will allow you to answer affirmatively.

### APPEARANCE

- Is your letter neat and easy to read?
- Do you use block formatting?
- Have you included your return address & the date?
- Do you include a specific person’s name along with a department and company address?
- Is your cover letter free from typos and misspelled words?
- Do you use same font and size as your resume?
- Does your cover letter look professional and businesslike?
- Do you keep your letter to one page?
- Are your sentences and paragraphs a length that allows for easy readability?

### ORGANIZATION

- Is your phone number and email address easy to find?
- Do you open with a proper greeting?
- Do you address a specific person at the organization?
- In your opening paragraph, do you name the position you are applying for?
- Do you transition smoothly from one paragraph or topic to the next? Do you use bridge/transition statements?
- Do you have a proper closing and signature?

### CONTENT

- Is it clear why you want to work for this organization?
- Were you consistent with your resume?
- Do you mention a person by name within your letter (if you spoke earlier with a company rep. or were referred by an other person)?
- Do you explain/show what makes you a great candidate for the position? (qualifications, attributes, contributions)
- Do you describe your areas of expertise?
- Do you make the connection between the requirements for the job and what you have to offer?
- Do you give specific examples regarding work you have done that is related to the job you are applying for?
- Do you take the time to address any important qualities that are not on your resume but relate directly to the job?
- Is your overall tone professional, courteous, and respectful?

### WHAT EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR

- Have you demonstrated your ability to communicate well in writing?
- Are you able to convincingly sell yourself to the potential employer?
- Have you demonstrated your knowledge of the organization?
- Have you demonstrated your knowledge of the role?
- Is it clear that you would be a good fit?
- Does your word choice reflect your professionalism?
- Is your tone appropriate and professional?
- Do you project confidence but not arrogance?
- Is it clear you are energetic and motivated?