

Cover Letter

What is a Cover Letter?

A cover letter is a one-page document you send with your resume that provides prospective employers with additional information about your skills, qualifications, and experiences relevant to the job you are applying for.

Resumes *tell* employers your qualifications
Cover Letters *show* your qualifications!

Why Do I Need One?

Cover letters are like persuasive essays that help hiring managers understand why you would be a good fit for their role. It's a chance for you to advocate for your candidacy.

Format & Length

A cover letter's recommended format and length is one page or around 3 to 4 paragraphs, single-spaced, using a consistent font and size of 11-12pt with 1-inch margins on all sides. Here are things to keep in mind while writing your cover letter:

Check employer requirements. Sometimes employers may include specific instructions for your cover letter in the job posting. They might also provide a writing prompt or questions for you to answer. Make a good impression by following the directions.

Keep sentences and paragraphs focused. For the most impact, focus each of your paragraphs around one central idea. The topic sentence should tell the employer what your paragraph is about. The following short and descriptive sentences should support the main idea.

Don't give everything away. Your cover letter aims to generate interest and ultimately land an interview. For this reason, avoid explaining every quality you will bring to this new role. Instead, focus on your proudest accomplishments and reveal just enough to spark the hiring manager's interest and encourage them to schedule an interview.

Use the job posting as a guide. Carefully read and assess the job duties and responsibilities that the role requires. Look for tasks and assignments within the listing similar to those you've done in previous experiences. Highlight those skills within your cover letter using similar language.

First and Last Name
Email and Phone Number

Dear _____,

- Insert the actual contact person's name here, or if not available, use "Search Committee, Hiring Manager, Internship Coordinator, etc."

First Paragraph: Where You Need to Stand Out the Most

- Identify the position you are applying for or the purpose of the letter if it is a cold contact/internship opportunity.
- State where you saw the job or internship advertised. State if someone referenced you.
- Answer the question "Why?" Why do you want this job? (Don't say just for the money).
- Demonstrate your knowledge of the company by referencing the organization. Acknowledge the company's mission/reputation/accomplishments to form a positive connection from the start.
- Relay your enthusiasm for the job.

Second Paragraph: Talk Mostly about Your Experiences and How You Learned the Skills You Have

- Give specific examples of how your strongest qualification matches the position requirements.
- Introduce and sell your relevant skills and experiences.
- Describe how you meet the employer's needs by providing evidence of your related skills and experiences.
- Use short narrative examples and showcase how your skills and experiences match the position.
- Reinforce qualifications presented in your resume by showing, not telling.

Third Paragraph: Should Be Mostly About How Your Credentials Would Benefit the Position You're Applying For

- Discuss how your experiences can translate into what you're applying for.
- Give specific examples of what you've done and how those experiences can be something you can bring to the company/organization.
- Talk about what the position offers you in building professionalism and necessary skills.

Closing: Is Your Last Chance to Make an Awesome Impression

- One more sentence highlighting your credentials and interest in the position.
- Thank the employer for their time and consideration given to your application.
- Suggest a plan of action (request an interview, indicate follow-up in two weeks, etc.)

Best Regards,
Your Name (Typed)

Sample Job Posting

Boston Non-Profit Housing Association (BNHA) seeks a well-organized, self-motivated individual for the role of Program Assistant to help coordinate advocacy efforts as part of BNHA's regional work. BNHA is a 36-year-old membership association that focuses government policy on housing solutions for low-income people who suffer disproportionately from the housing crisis while promoting the preservation, development, and quality management of affordable housing. The Program Assistant will help pass policies and programs on the local and regional levels that will support the development of affordable housing in Boston.

Job Duties and Responsibilities

Coordination and Advocacy

- Help **schedule meetings, draft agendas, take notes, and circulate information** to the Housing Action Network.
- **Participate in meetings and discussions** with local advocacy groups to ensure connection between regional and local work.

Organizing and Training

- Assist in **coordinating regional trainings** on Inclusionary Housing, Community Acceptance, Housing Elements, and other local or regional housing efforts.
- Assist in **organizing** local support by doing **outreach** around sign-on letters or hearings.

Qualifications

- Required: Bachelor's degree in Gender Studies, Political Science, Sociology, or other related field.
- Experience in either organizing or campaign work preferred.

↓ *Review the correlated sample cover letter on the next page* ↓

Jane Doe

(123) 456-7890 • jdoe@umass.edu

Dear Hiring Manager,

It is with great enthusiasm that I apply for the **Program Assistant** position posted on Handshake. As a senior **Political Science major** at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, I have developed a sincere passion and interest in advocating affordable housing for all. With my experience working at Springfield No One Leaves, coursework, and additional experiences, I consider myself a strong candidate for this position.

Last summer, I had the opportunity to intern for Springfield No One Leaves, a non-profit organization dedicated to keeping immigrant families living safely in Springfield and providing legal help and resources when necessary. I was exposed to various **advocacy efforts** and **campaign work** in this position. I also used my strong organizational skills to **schedule regional meetings, take notes**, and provide regular updates to the program directors. Additionally, I aided in **creating promotional publications** to provide for individuals that utilized our services.

Having the opportunity to work as the Program Assistant at BNHA would provide me with the necessary skills to continue my work in the non-profit and campaigning sectors. By utilizing my passion and past experiences in other non-profits, I believe I would be a strong asset to the BNHA team. I have a background that translates well to this role, and I seek the opportunity to grow professionally. In addition, I have many professional connections with people involved with the mission of housing and homelessness, and I feel prepared to utilize these connections to support and further organizational goals.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration regarding my application. I look forward to discussing my qualifications further with you in the coming weeks.

Best Regards,
Jane Doe

Important Reminder!

- Have your cover letter reviewed by a career advisor in Career Services before using it for an application. Career advisors are trained to edit and provide feedback so that you can make the best impressions during your application process.