

Career Resources for English Majors¹

What are the objectives of a cover letter?

A good cover letter puts your résumé in context and persuades the prospective employer that you are a *good match* for the position in question. If your cover letter does its job, the prospective employer will begin to consider your candidacy and go on to review your résumé in detail.



Your cover letter also serves as a sample of your **organizational** and **communication** skills. For this reason, it's **essential** to spend time writing and organizing the content, and to **proofread** it carefully. The time and care that you devote to constructing and writing your cover letter and résumé will demonstrate to the prospective employer that you're capable of producing high quality work.

Finally, your cover letter expresses your **Interest** in the particular position or particular organization. Cover letters should be individually tailored for each job prospect. Your letter should convey to each prospective employer that you have an understanding of the job, and that you've done some thinking about how you could fit in to the organization and contribute to its goals.

How should I approach the writing task?

Your cover letter is your opportunity to market those aspects of your skills, abilities, education, training, background, and experience which are most relevant to the position you're seeking. This means that you will need to begin by doing some thinking about your skills and background and how these relate to the position for which you're applying. Your cover letter should reflect your individuality, but remember that you are "introducing yourself" for the first time to a stranger: it's best to err on the side of professionalism.

Read the job announcement carefully.

- What are the most important qualifications being sought?
- How can you best demonstrate that you have them? Focus on a few specific examples from your work and classroom experience.
- Try to put yourself in the prospective employer's position: What would you want to know about a candidate for this particular job? What information would be most important to you?
- Remember, your cover letter is NOT a narrative of your resume. It should provide information and details not included in your other materials.

Include only the most relevant attributes and experiences you possess which specifically match the job for which you're applying.

Research the company or organization:

- What does the employing organization do?
- What are its goals?

- What is its history?
- How does it fit in to its industry?
- What characterizes the organization's culture (e.g., is it casual, conservative, highly structured, diverse, traditional, modern, fast-paced, etc.)?

Some information, such as the organization's mission, purpose, clients, partners, and a sense of its "style" can be found on its website (if it has one). There are also industry and employer directories available on the web, in the libraries, etc. Local and national newspapers, industry-related publications and journals, and the jobsinnh.com are also good resources.

Address the letter to a specific individual. As with all writing, it's important to identify your audience. Taking the time to find out the hiring party's name and correct title is another way to demonstrate your interest in the position.

How should I format my cover letter?

Your cover letter should be three to four paragraphs in length and limited to one page. Like an essay, its content can usually be divided up into three parts:

- **The introduction** states the position you're seeking, explains how you learned about the position, and indicates your interest. It often also contains a brief statement of your qualifications (education, experience, and skills).
- **The body** highlights *the most important qualities you can offer to this particular employer*, related to the position that you're seeking. What you are attempting to do is to get the employer's attention and interest him/her in your candidacy. This is the place to present other relevant information about your characteristics or background that may not be evident from your résumé. You might provide the employer with some **specific examples** of how you've demonstrated particular **key skills** or how you fulfill the most important qualifications listed in the job announcement.
- **The conclusion** should summarize your qualifications and your interest in the position. Be sure to close your letter with a request for action or an indication that you'll be following up. This might include a request for an interview, a statement of your intent to call the employer on a specific date, or the dates you'll be in town for an interview. Finally, always thank the employer for considering your application.

Make sure to **draft** several versions of your cover letter and share them with family, friends, professors, professional connections for feedback before sending them out to potential employers!