

PROFESSIONAL COVER LETTER GUIDE



STUDENT, GRADUATE & CO-OP
EMPLOYMENT CENTRE



PROFESSIONAL COVER LETTER GUIDE

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Purpose of the Cover Letter

A cover letter is used to attract a hiring manager’s attention and make the company want to find out more about you. It should summarize your suitability to an already existing specific position. Typically, a hiring manager will quickly review your cover letter prior to reviewing your resume; however, some hiring managers may do the opposite and read your resume first.



The cover letter can be used to demonstrate your written communication skills. If it is well written, it should explain why you want to work for that particular company, what makes you a good fit, and should provide specific examples to demonstrate key skills and experience relevant to the position. It should demonstrate that you understand the company’s needs and that you are able to match your qualifications with those needs all in a one-page document.

If you have analyzed the job posting carefully, and have created a T-chart in preparation, you should be able to expand and make the connection between your resume and the job description.

Don’t panic – most students worry about what to write for their cover letter. Companies want you to write a letter that reflects you and your own style. Every student’s cover letter should be different. Writing a good cover letter is not about following some secret formula – there is no such thing as a perfect cover letter. Your job is to write a letter that best represents you. If your cover letter includes skills and experience related to the specific job you are applying for, it should persuade the employer to want to interview you because you have shown you have the skills and experience they are looking for.

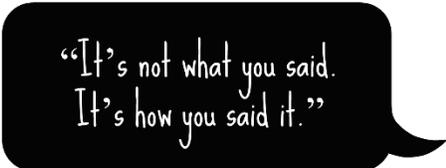
Formatting and Creating a Professional Image

- Your cover letter should be 1 page (maximum) in length.
- Use a standard font (Arial 10, Times New Roman 11, or Calibri 11)
- Include the date, contact person’s name and title (if known), company name, company address, subject line, and salutation (i.e. Dear Mr. /Mrs. /Ms. (last name) OR Hiring Manager)
- Ensure your cover letter fits onto one page
- Don’t go overboard with fancy formatting (bolding every second sentence, italics, etc.); keep your format and font style consistent with your resume (is it easy to read?)
- Ensure the company name is correct for the company you are applying to (i.e. don’t mention KPMG in a cover letter submitted to Deloitte)!
- Ensure there are no typing, spelling or grammar mistakes
- Ensure you include ‘Sincerely,’ an inserted image of your signature underneath (optional) and your typed name underneath that
- Below your typed name, include ‘Enclosed: Resume’ (you can also include Transcript and References (only if requested on the job posting))
- If printing your cover letter, use the same type of paper for both your cover letter and resume; preferably light colored, plain high quality paper

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The Tone of the Cover Letter

- Your cover letter should come across as genuine and allow a hiring manager to get a sense of your personality and character - they are reading through hundreds of these, so think about making your letter stand out in a unique way.
- Don't rely on humor to set yourself apart from other applicants – there is a fine line.
- “Sell” your qualifications but be sincere.
- Do not include personal information such as marital status, age, religious denominations, etc. and do not include your photo
- Avoid over use of superlatives: “I am so excited”, “I am the perfect candidate”, etc.
- Focus on your experience and the value you bring by being specific.



“It’s not what you said.
It’s how you said it.”

The Content of the Cover Letter

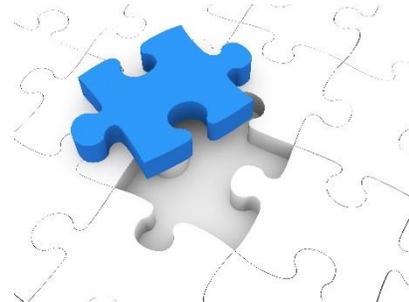
Your cover letter should demonstrate the following:

1. Why you want to work for the company – it should be honest, unique, and interesting

- Describe why you would be a strong candidate for the advertised position by elaborating on short and long term goals, personal qualities that you possess, and your decision making process for why you chose your career path and the factors that contributed to that decision
- Explain what makes you unique and how this relates to the job; highlight campus experience

2. How you fit! – based on your research of the company

- Customize your cover letter for EACH company
- Spell the company name correctly!
- Read the job description carefully; analyze and interpret what that company is looking for
- Target the company specifically – mention what it is about their company that attracts you. The more specific, the better.
- Try to make a connection between something specific you know about the company (based on your research) and how you could add value (i.e. do you know someone who works at the company who has told you something specific about the culture? Do the company values or mission statement resonate with you? Is there something specific the company did that was appealing to you and that you could add value to if they did something similar in the future?)
- Demonstrate how you would be a good fit through your knowledge of the company
- Connect your reasons for being a good fit back to the skills & experiences on your resume





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3. How you know you can do the job - include detail on your relevant skills and accomplishments

- Address requirements of the position, both stated and implied - research clients, trends, etc. and connect to long term goals
- Emphasize not just “what” you did in your examples, but what results you had and how you accomplished them; Recruiters like to see how you demonstrated key skills like leadership, teamwork, customer service, analysis, written and verbal communication, decision making, initiative, accountability, problem solving and time management, to name a few.

Cover Letter Sections

Header

Use the exact same header that you use at the top of your resume (see the Professional Resume Guide on our website) and follow the sample below for formatting (you can insert a scanned image of your signature under ‘Sincerely’):

LESLIE SMITH	
1234 Somewhere Street Kelowna, BC, V4V 1K9	250-123-4567 leslie.smith@sample.com
Date	
Contact Name	
Contact Title	
Company Name	
456 Gray Boulevard Kelowna, BC, V4V 1L9	
Subject Line: to indicate which competition or position you are applying for. (i.e. Re: Market Analyst Internship, Job # 12345)	
Dear _____ (contact person – use Mr. or Ms.). Avoid using ‘To Whom it May Concern’ or ‘Dear Sir or Madame’. Show that you are resourceful and find the correct person to whom you should address your letter. If all else fails, use ‘Dear Hiring Manager’.	
First Paragraph	
Middle Paragraphs/Body of Letter	
Final Paragraph	
Sincerely,  Leslie Smith	



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First Paragraph of Letter

In the first paragraph of your cover letter, there are a few things you should include to pique the reader's interest and to help provide flow to the rest of the letter.

- Include the position you are applying for along with the competition number (if applicable)
- Generate interest by noting either a mutual contact or something specific you learned about the company based on your research (dig deep rather than just listing something from the company home page) and try to make a connection between that research and how you could add value.
- Explain why you are interested in the company or the particular position
- Explain your current situation (i.e. currently pursuing a _____Certificate/Diploma/Degree or are a recent graduate of the _____ Certificate/Diploma/Degree)
- Write a summary sentence about what makes you a strong candidate for the position. This sentence should provide flow to your middle paragraphs

First Paragraph Example (please do not copy word for word):

I am writing to apply for the Accounting Assistant Co-op position at XYZ Company, as posted on the Okanagan College Co-op Job Posting site. In speaking with Robert Jones at the Okanagan Business Student Association (OBSA) Connect event at Okanagan College, I was excited to learn about the collaborative working environment within XYZ. As a first year Bachelor of Business Administration student at Okanagan College with a specialization in Accounting, I believe my teamwork skills honed through the program, in addition to my professional experience with accounts payable and accounts receivable, would make me a strong candidate for the position.

Middle Paragraphs/Body of Letter

- Include one or two middle paragraphs with a specific topic for each of those paragraphs. Highlight only those qualifications that are relevant to the position of interest (do not be afraid to repeat things stated in your resume – just do not copy and paste directly from your resume).
- Provide SPECIFIC examples to demonstrate key skills/qualifications
- Use action verbs when summarizing your experience, skills and qualifications
- Be concise and avoid negative language
- **Avoid focusing on what you will gain from the position, and instead, focus on how you could add value for the employer



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Middle Paragraphs/Body of Letter Example (please do not copy word for word):

As a student in the Culinary Arts Management Diploma program, I have gained a variety of skills in the kitchen related to hot and cold processes and procedures in preparing ingredients such as meats, vegetables, fruits and cheeses under the specifics of provided recipes. My salad and soup making capabilities have been commended as exceptional, and I have a passion for creating entries particular to French and Italian cuisines.

I have gained knowledge in safe food handling, supplies inventory, and managing both preventative and regular maintenance on kitchen appliances and utensils. My instructor has commended my ability to ensure that orders are prepared and delivered on time in a fast-paced environment, and that garnishing and portioning activities are carried out according to provided instructions when working in the Infusions restaurant.

Final Paragraph of Letter

- Reaffirm your interest in working with that company and/or write a summary sentence about what makes you a strong candidate for the position (use different wording from the summary sentence at the end of the first paragraph)
- Indicate that you would appreciate the opportunity to discuss your qualifications in person
- Thank the reader for their time and consideration

Final Paragraph Example (please do not copy word for word):

I believe the water treatment experience I have gained through the Water Engineering Technology Diploma program at Okanagan College, combined with my mechanical aptitude and willingness to learn make me a strong candidate for the Water Conservation Assistant Co-op position with the Sunshine Coast Regional District. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss my qualifications in detail. Thank you for your time and consideration.