



Cover Letter Essentials

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On-line or phone appointments:

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On-campus appointments:

<https://outlook.office365.com/owa/calendar/CenterforCareerConnectionsOncampus@BellevueC.onmicrosoft.com/bookings/>

HANDSHAKE (job & internship postings): <https://www.bellevuecollege.edu/careers/handshake/>

Academic Internship Program: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/internships>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/BellevueCCC>

LinkedIn Group: Center for Career Connections at Bellevue College (BC)

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Purpose of a Cover Letter

Job seekers often don't give enough attention to their cover letters. This is a way for employers to weed people out, so you should make sure this document is **well-written** and **specific** to the job to which you are applying. The purpose of a cover letter is to convince an employer to call you for an interview. Cover letters should not simply repeat what is on your resume. A cover letter should address your qualifications specific to this job and show you know something about the company. **The cover letter should focus on what you can do for the employer, not what you are seeking in a job.**

Basic Rules for Cover Letters

- **Always send a cover letter**, even if the job advertisement doesn't ask for one. A cover letter will help you stand out because it provides more detail about how you fit an employer's qualifications.
- **Do not send a generic cover letter.** Employers can easily see generic cover letters, and they don't like them. Create a new cover letter for each job for which you apply.
- Most experts say that cover letters should be one page, three to four short paragraphs and under 150 words. The idea is that your cover letter should fit one computer screen in length.
- **Do not simply repeat what you have written in your resume.** Instead, a cover letter should bring your resume to life by adding information not on your resume that shows how you meet an employer's qualifications. Use simple direct language to a) demonstrate your interest and enthusiasm for the position, and b) explain why you are qualified for the job. A successful cover letter highlights and enhances the information on your resume and targets it toward the prospective employer.
- It's okay to let your letter reflect your individuality. Do not be aggressive, overbearing, overly confident, familiar, or cute, and don't write your life story.
- Use the same text font that you used in your resume. Many people use the same heading that is on their resume (name, phone, email) and put it on the top of their cover letters. It's like having your own personalized stationery, and if your documents get separated, they are more easily identifiable.
- **Use perfect grammar, spelling, and punctuation.** You want to stand out by having professional, mistake-free, visually appealing documents. Proofread your letter before sending it to anyone, and have a friend, family member, or Career Specialist in Bellevue College's Career for Career Connections proofread it before sending it to an employer! If you need help with grammar, visit the BC Writing Lab:
<https://bellevuecollege.edu/asc/writing/>

Tips on writing cover letter

- **Research:** Find the company online and read their 'About Us' page and mission statement. In your letter, you'll want to include language that describes how you fit with the company or department's mission/values/goals if possible.
- **Personalize:** Cover letters should be addressed to a specific person whenever possible. Try to find the hiring manager's name and email address on the company's web site. Or you can call them *once*, but do NOT harass the company just to get a name.
- **Qualifications:** Use the required and preferred qualifications in the job posting to help you write the letter. The content of your letter should describe how you meet those requirements. If there are too many topics to address in your letter, pick two or three of the most important to address specifically and then summarize the rest if you have space. Remember, the letter should be brief. It is always appropriate to refer the reader to your resume to avoid repeating things like your college degree. You should provide **additional** information about your education and/or prior work experience that is not on your resume if it will help the employer understand how you meet required and preferred qualifications.
- **Key Words:** Use key words from the posted job description in your cover letter. Your cover letter may be put into a database which uses a key word search to identify qualified candidates.
- **Avoid starting every sentence with "I"** – turn the focus to what you can do for them. For example, change "I have expert knowledge of Photoshop" to "Your marketing department would benefit from my expert skills using Photoshop."
- **Soft Skills:** Prove you have soft skills (like communication and team skills) by describing what you did that utilized these skills.
- **Address Issues:** Briefly address weak spots in your resume but don't get too personal.
- **Follow up:** We don't recommend saying you will call them in a week because it is often impossible to find an email or phone number, especially for large companies. And, most likely they don't want you to call unless it's a sales position.
- **Error Free:** Read the letter out loud to help you catch mistakes and/or identify any awkward sentences. Have a friend or family member (or Career Specialist) proofread it. There is no excuse for spelling errors!
- **File Format & Name:** If sending your documents as an attachment, name the documents appropriately, such as "Jane Doe Admin Asst Cover Letter.doc" Demonstrate your file management skills while making sure they can identify the document on their computer without having to open the document.

Ways to submitting your application materials

- **Always follow the directions provided in the job posting.**
- **Online:** Create a plain text version of your cover letter with simple formatting before you copy and paste it into the text box in the form. Or, scan or create a PDF of your signed letter and upload it as an attachment.
- **Email:** If there are no specific directions, email one of two ways: 1) Send your resume and cover letter as PDF attachments (this retains formatting). Write a brief message for the body of the email. Or 2) Copy and paste your letter directly into the body of an email (use simple formatting) and attach your resume.
- **Snail Mail (USPS):** Use this method if explicitly instructed to or if there is no online form or email option. Use a full-sized manila envelope so you don't have to fold your documents.
- **Hand Deliver:** This is an effective method when an employer is local and you have a short deadline. Use a full-sized manila envelope to keep your documents flat, and type or print the label neatly.

Contents of a Cover Letter

- **Letterhead:** Your resume and cover letter should match. This means use the exact same type style, type size(s), spacing and organization for both. Always include your name, email, and phone.
- **Date:** If you are sending your letter as an attachment, make sure you put the date as the first line under your letterhead. If you paste your cover letter into an email you do not need to date the letter since all emails are automatically dated when sent.
- **Company Name & Address:** Do some internet research if you don't have this information.
- **Greeting:** Personalize the greeting with a name whenever possible. When using the person's name, always use the formal address which is either "Mr." or "Ms." (Never use "Mrs." unless you know the person is married.) If you do not know the name use one of these greetings: "Dear (name of department or company)", "Dear Hiring Manager", or "Hello". Do not use "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Sir/Madam" because these are considered old fashioned.
- **Paragraph #1:** This paragraph (and all subsequent paragraphs) should be written in a confident manner that shows enthusiasm for the position. Begin by telling the name of the position (and job number if applicable). Based on your research of the company, mention how you can contribute to their success by summarizing (in one or two sentences at the end of the paragraph) how your education and work experience have prepared you for the position.
 - Drop names in the first paragraph if you know someone in the company. Hiring managers take unsolicited resumes more seriously when they assume you were referred by one of their employees or customers.
- **Paragraph #2:** For individuals who are currently in school or have just graduated, describe how your recent education has prepared you for the position. *Emphasize the skills and abilities gained from your education that relate to the job for which you are applying.*

For individuals who have been out of school for a while, use paragraph #2 to describe how your work experience has prepared you for the position. Identify the skills and abilities developed through experience that relate to the job for which you are applying.

 - Entice the reader to find out more about you by reading your resume. And remember that the reader will view your cover letter as an example of your writing skills.
- **Paragraph #3:** Individuals with extensive work experience may need a second paragraph to describe how you meet the employer's qualifications. For students and recent graduates, use the third paragraph to discuss internship experience in your field and work experiences that have developed relevant skills/abilities related to the position as well as foundational workplace skills such as reliability, responsibility, leadership, and honesty. Include volunteer experiences if appropriate.
- **Paragraph #4:** The conclusion should be concise. Briefly restate your interest (one sentence) and let the reader know you would like an interview. If you have a portfolio (this is particularly important for arts related positions such as graphic and interior design), provide a link to your online portfolio or say you will provide it. Close your letter with something like: "I look forward to hearing from you soon." and "Thank you for your consideration."
- **Closing:** Always use "Sincerely." If you are emailing your documents, you can use a font signature if you like, or scan your signature and insert it as an image.

Ask Yourself These Questions

- Knowing *only* what is on your resume and cover letter, would you hire you?
- Do you clearly qualify for the position (you have at least 70% of the skills/knowledge they seek)?

- Is it obvious that you value *this job* and *this company*?
- Is everything perfect? This is a test of your writing skills, as well as your ability to pay attention to details.

Don't disqualify yourself! Read and re-read the application instructions, and make sure you've done everything they requested. **The number one way that people disqualify themselves is by not following instructions.**

Thank You Letters

After a job interview, send a follow-up or thank you letter addressed to the person(s) who interviewed you. Thank the interviewer, express your continued interest in the position, and include any additional relevant information, which you may have overlooked during the interview. **Send the letter within 24 hours of the interview.** This is good practice and helps the interviewer(s) remember you and understand that you are motivated, courteous, and responsible. Follow-up letters can be emailed, typed and sent in the mail, or hand-delivered to the office. Keep in mind that spam filters often block unfamiliar email addresses so you cannot be sure that your email will be seen plus it is very easy for people to hit the delete button without viewing your message. Personally addressed letters, both mailed and hand delivered, are much more likely to be read.

Acceptance Letters

When you are offered a position and you decide to accept, send a letter of acceptance to the company, addressed to either your future supervisor or the personnel officer who offered you the position. Let the employer know when you can begin and that you're looking forward to joining the company or organization.

Declining a Job Offer

If offered a position and you do not want to accept it, let the employer know as soon as you have made the decision to decline the position. Thank her or him for offering you the position. You don't have to give details on why you're declining the position, but this helps you maintain good relations with the company. Who knows, maybe there will be a job there in the future that you really want!

Sample Cover Letter

Sometimes it helps to see an example. Below you will find a sample job advertisement, as well as a sample cover letter. Notice that the cover letter directly addresses the qualifications in the advertisement. Here are some other things to keep in mind when looking at the example:

- Do NOT just plug your information into this template. Give your documents your own style and demonstrate your writing skill.
- Different circumstances require different approaches. Your cover letter may need to look drastically different depending on your industry, age, experience, skills, etc.
- You don't know if the employer will read the resume or the cover letter first, so both must clearly outline your qualifications.

Sample Job Advertisement

Accounting Intern Wanted:

Small accounting firm is looking for an accounting intern. Qualifications include:

- Associate degree in Accounting or Finance (or nearing completion of degree)
- Advanced MS Excel, Access, and Word required, Peachtree knowledge a plus
- 2+ years of professional work experience
- Effective oral and written communication skills
- Self-motivated, high energy, and excellent organization skills

Email resume & cover letter to: lpalm@evergreenaccountingservice.com

Sample Cover Letter

Sarah Sample

Cell: (206) 596-5984 | jsample@email.com

February 20, 2023

Ms. Louise Palm
President & CEO
Evergreen Accounting
10028 South Kensey Avenue
Renton, WA 98124

Dear Ms. Palm:

I am pleased to apply for the accounting internship advertised on Bellevue College's HANDSHAKE web site. Having reviewed your company's website, I was impressed by your commitment to providing personalized and affordable services. I am confident that the skills I developed while earning an Associate of Arts Degree in Accounting coupled with my prior work experience have well prepared me for this position.

While in the Accounting program at Bellevue College, I acquired the skills, abilities and knowledge needed to be a successful intern at Evergreen Accounting. Through this program I gained a thorough knowledge of PeachTree, Excel, Access, Word, and QuickBooks. I also studied federal and state income tax regulations which means I have a better understanding of the bigger picture of the work you do at Evergreen.

In addition to my education, I have four years of office administration experience. As the Lead Receptionist at Media Link, I polished my oral and written communication skills. I was recognized by my supervisor as being highly organized and reliable. I was twice selected as Employee of the Month. Clients often commented on my upbeat and helpful attitude.

I am a highly motivated professional, and I am eager to apply my knowledge and skills as your intern. I look forward to speaking with you about the position and how I can contribute to the success of your firm. Please contact me at your convenience to schedule an interview. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah Sample

Sarah Sample

Internet Resources

Monster.com: Cover Letters examples and tips

<https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/sample-cover-letter>

Covers advice and samples of cover letters. Offers resources for job search.

OWL (Online Writing Lab) at PURDUE

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/job_search_writing/job_search_letters/index.html

Purdue University's website offers a comprehensive guide to tips, formatting and what to include and exclude in cover letters.

How to write a cover letter

<https://hbr.org/2014/02/how-to-write-a-cover-letter>

A great article from Harvard Business Review on how to write a cover letter

Please make an appointment with a Career Specialist in the Center for Career Connections who will review and give you feedback on your cover letter. We are located on the 3rd floor, U Bldg, main campus. Room 304.

On-line (Zoom) or phone appointments:

<https://outlook.office365.com/owa/calendar/MichaelReese@BellevueC.onmicrosoft.com/bookings/>

On-campus appointments:

<https://outlook.office365.com/owa/calendar/CenterforCareerConnectionsOncampus@BellevueC.onmicrosoft.com/bookings/>