

# COVER LETTER GUIDE

## What is a cover letter?

A cover letter is a **written pitch** to the employer. In your cover letter, you are explaining to the employer why you believe you are a great candidate for the position. Your cover letter does not simply restate your resume. Instead, consider it an opportunity to tell your story.

By writing a cover letter, you can highlight your **strengths** and prior **experiences** that support the reason why you are the leading candidate for a position. High quality cover letters will make you stand out as a candidate and will give employers an impression of the strength of your overall application.

## This guide will help you with the following:

- Pre-writing strategies
- Cover letter formats
- STARR method
- Outlining your cover letter
- Using your cover letter

By the end of this cover guide, you will be able to create an impactful cover letter that will strengthen your application and secure an interview!

*Need additional help?*

*Reach out to your academic and career advisor or a Career Ambassador to make an appointment!*

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## PRE-WRITING STRATEGY: REFLECTION

Before writing your cover letter, take some time to reflect on your accomplishments. This practice will help you organize your information so you do not leave any important information out. *Consider creating a table like this one to help you with this activity.*

	List 3-5 reasons why you are an exceptional candidate for a specific job or internship
	Ask yourself a few self-reflection questions: <input type="checkbox"/> Why do I want to work with this organization? <input type="checkbox"/> What do I already know about the employer? What do I already know about the job or internship? <input type="checkbox"/> How will this job or internship help me achieve my goals?
	Research your skills and strengths, and consider these questions: <input type="checkbox"/> What are my strengths and specialties as it relates to this position? <input type="checkbox"/> How does my skill set and strengths benefit the organization?

Table 1

## PRE-WRITING STRATEGY: EXPLORE THE JOB DESCRIPTION

A job description details the skills and strengths an employer is seeking in their leading candidate. It is important to read through the description in its entirety and note how it is organized. Most job descriptions have the following parts:

- ✓ Job title
- ✓ Job summary
- ✓ Responsibilities and duties
- ✓ Qualifications and skills
  - Required and Preferred

Let us get started! Have your resume and the job description in front of you to accomplish the activities outlined on *Table 2*.

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## PRE-WRITING STRATEGY: EXPLORE THE JOB DESCRIPTION

After taking a few minutes to research and note your accomplishments, it is time to review the job description and research the employer. Doing this will help you begin to align your accomplishments with what skills and abilities you can offer the employers.

<p><b>Step One:</b> Read the position announcement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Review the job description in its entirety</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use a highlighter or pen to identify the <i>required</i> and <i>preferred</i> skills of which you have successfully demonstrated through work, volunteer, classroom, or other experiences.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Note the skills that you need to improve on and develop through this experience.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step Two:</b> Review the position tasks and responsibilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use the following questions as a guide when reviewing the tasks and responsibilities:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do you have experience doing these tasks and responsibilities? If so, where did you accomplish these tasks?</li> <li>○ Are these tasks interesting? Do you think you will enjoy this work? Will this job or internship challenge you? Will this experience help you reach your goals?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Step Three:</b> Research</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Review the following information on the employer:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Company's history, mission, and vision</li> <li>○ Types of products or services the company provides</li> <li>○ Size of the company and overall corporate culture</li> <li>○ Recent news coverage and future direction of the company</li> <li>○ How the organization aligns with your goals, interests, and values</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use these tools to help you research:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Handshake</li> <li>○ LinkedIn</li> <li>○ Glassdoor</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Table 2

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# PRE-WRITING STRATEGY: PREPARE YOUR COVER LETTER

## Cover Letter Format

When drafting your cover letter, there are several considerations to make:

- Your cover letter should match the format of your resume:
  - Header containing your name and contact information
  - Font type and font size
  - Document margins and spacing
- A cover letter is **one page** in length and consists of 3-5 paragraphs
- Date the cover letter using the date you are sending the document
- Identify the person who will receive your letter. You can discover this information by:
  - Reviewing the position description for a point of contact;
  - Calling the company's Human Resources Department to inquire who will receive the application;
  - Or addressing the recipient by using the greeting, *Dear Hiring Manager*.

## STARR Method

Begin organizing your paragraphs by using the STARR (Situation, Task, Action, Results, Relate) Method. Create a rough draft of your paragraphs using the strategy outlined in *Table 3*.

S	T	A	R	R
SITUATION	TASK	ACTION	RESULTS	RELATE
Explain the situation you were in. Be sure to be detailed.	Describe the tasks that you were asked to complete	Describe procedure used to help resolve situation	Make sure results are in measurable time	How does it relate to the skills required for job?

Table 3

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# WRITING STRATEGY: APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE

## Header

Remember, your header should match the one listed on your resume. Make sure you include your name, contact information, the date you are sending the application, and the employer's information.

### *Example Header:*

#### **Anonymous**

Madison, WI - anon@gmail.com – 000 000 0000 - www.linkedin.com/in/anon

April 22, 20xx

ABC Company  
123 ABC Way  
Kenosha, WI 53144

## Introduction Paragraph

Your first paragraph is designed to grab the reader's attention by demonstrating enthusiasm and sharing your knowledge as it relates to the job or internship. Consider the following information to include in your first paragraph:

- List the position you are applying for and how you discovered the opportunity. *\*If you have a connection with someone who works for that organization, mention their name, position, and how you know them here\**
- Briefly explain why you are a leading candidate for the position – list **2-3 qualifications and skills** you have that prove you will be an exceptional employee.
  - Tip: include this information near the end of the first paragraph like you would a thesis statement on an academic paper.
- Everything you describe in your cover letter should be included on your resume. Do not bring new information into the cover letter.

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# WRITING STRATEGY: APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE

## **Body Paragraphs**

Now that you have the reader's attention, you will need to identify concrete examples of how you acquired your knowledge and skills. Use 2-3 paragraphs to describe your experiences and how they compare to the needs of the organization. Consider the following information to include in your body paragraphs:

- Describe your qualifications as they relate to the job or internship and give effective examples using the STARR Method
- Give specific examples from previous experiences that highlight your skills
- Connect the story back to the employer and how you can benefit the company
  - Use elements of the company's mission, goals, and vision

## **Paragraph formats to consider:**

### *Narrative-style paragraph:*

As a student of University of Wisconsin-Parkside, I received an opportunity to plan the "Fall Block Party" as the Events Chair of the Student Life Council. This successful event was an outdoor event that hosted 30 different student organizations and university departments that provided games and activities to fundraise community nonprofit funds. This event attracted over 300 students and raised close to \$5,000. Through this experience of motivating other students, coordinating details with vendors and departments, and publicizing the event, I realized my talent for event planning. I have also been actively involved in other student organizations while effectively balancing my academic work.

### *Bullet-point paragraph:*

ABC Company seeks hardworking individuals with exceptional scientific knowledge and problem-solving capabilities to serve its customers. Also listed on my resume, my particular skills and interests include:

- Advanced lab skills including spectrometry, PCR, Gel Electrophoresis, DNA and RNA, Isolation Techniques, Light and Electron Microscopy.
- Knowledge of laboratory sterilization and safety procedures.

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## WRITING STRATEGY: APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE

### Concluding Paragraph

This paragraph is the shortest paragraph of your cover letter. You will use this paragraph to invite the employer to review your resume and reach out to you to further discuss your application. It is important to end the letter by thanking the employer for their time.

Your final paragraph will include:

- A review of your accomplishments and how you will be an asset as a future employee
- An expression of interest in learning more about the organization and position
- A thank you to the employer for their time and consideration

### *Example closing paragraph:*

I am highly organized, detail-oriented, and creative. Through this internship, I am eager to learn the different facets of event planning and believe that you would be impressed with my work ethic and interpersonal communication skills. Thank you for your time and consideration. I will be contacting you in early February regarding a possible interview date. Should you have questions prior to that, please feel free to contact me.

### Closing

Concluding your cover letter includes a parting word like *Sincerely* along with a space for a handwritten or digital signature. Finally, include a printed version of your name under the signature.

Sincerely,

*Ben Alias* (Handwritten/digital ID)

Ben Alias

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**Chris Combination**  
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May 1, 20XX

Human Resources  
ABC Company  
Kenosha, WI, 53158

Dear Hiring Manager,

Leading innovative program initiatives designed to improve customer satisfaction and achieve business goals are what drives me to excel in my position as a professional in the marketing industry. As a marketing intern with NEC Corporation of America, I am called to strategize with cross-functional teams to create communication plans that inform customers that they are provided a strong IT infrastructure to support their business. I learned about the Area Manager position with ABC Company through my peer, Damian Jackson, who works in your business services department as an accountant. After reviewing ABC Company's website and learning more about its strong presence in the Kenosha community, I am excited to apply. My leadership abilities, data-informed decision-making practices, and ability to coordinate innovative projects make me an exceptional candidate.

During my time as an intern with NEC Corporation of America, I was able to work with a variety of teams to write internal and external communications for email newsletters and social media platforms to further engage with our customers. This experience taught me different project delegation and communication strategies so the projects were completed with accuracy and in an efficient manner. By working collaboratively, my team and other personnel were able to create a digital customer loyalty program that produced a repeat customer base of over 35%.

In order to prepare me for leading teams and working with others on large projects, I call on my time as a shift supervisor at Applebee's to identify effective strategies to use in the business industry. While working as a shift supervisor, I led 15 staff members by offering them open lines of communication, continued training opportunities, and reliable resources to help them be successful at their job. I not only learned how to be a leader but also a contributor in customer satisfaction, which I plan to reflect on and implement as a leader with ABC Company.

ABC Company's focus on providing reliable service to their customers aligns well with my passion of making data-informed decisions that will positively impact customer satisfaction. I am confident that my experience and skills will prepare me to excel as an Area Manager. I look forward to talking with you more about how I will make a positive impact at ABC Company.

Thank you for your consideration,

Chris Combination

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