

WRITING PROFESSIONAL COVER LETTERS

Career Services at the University of Wisconsin – Green Bay

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Employers are seeking candidates with strong communication skills across all career fields, industries and majors. Therefore, it is critical that candidates compose well-written cover letters to demonstrate their professional communication skills. When you send a resume to an employer, a cover letter – also known as a letter of application – should accompany it. The purpose of the cover letter is to introduce yourself to the employer and identify your relevant skills and experiences as they relate to their specific position. This guide outlines standard cover letter content and format.

Before You Begin

Each cover letter you write should be tailored to a specific employer and position. What should you include in your letter? Review the position description thoroughly and note the required or desired education, skills and experience for the position. What is the employer's product or service? What is their mission or vision? This will help you frame your letter and determine what information will be most relevant to include.

Structure of Effective Letters

Professional letters follow a standard structure:

- Place your **return address** and the **current date** at the beginning of the letter - either top left corner, tabbed or flushed right in the upper right-hand corner of the letter. Do not include your name or telephone number or email here.
- List the **employer's address** at the left margin before the salutation. This includes the name, title, department, and complete address of the organization and/or individual to whom you are writing.
- The **salutation** is the formal greeting of the letter. *Dear Mr.* or *Dear Ms.* preceding the individual's last name is appropriate if you know that individual's preferred pronoun. If you do not, you may list their full name. If you do not have the name of a specific individual, use "Dear Human Resources" or "Dear Selection Committee." The punctuation following the salutation can be a colon (:) or comma.
- The **body of the letter** follows the salutation. The body may be three to five paragraphs in length and should highlight your interest in the position and organization, and your skills, education and experience as they relate to the position.
- Paragraphs can be indented five spaces or block style. Single-space the text within each paragraph and double-space between each paragraph.
- The **closing** follows the body of the letter. Align the closing with your return address and date that you listed at the top of the letter. A formal closing, such as *"Sincerely,"* is appropriate. Insert three to four blank lines then type your formal/legal name as it appears on your resume. If you are mailing a printed copy of your application, sign your letter above your typed name in blue or black ink.
- If you are enclosing additional documents (i.e. a resume, transcript), then it is appropriate to place the word *"Enclosure"* or *"Enclosures"* three lines below your typed name.

Tips for Writing High Impact Letters

- Do not send "form letters". Take the time to personalize each letter you write for greatest impact.
- Letters should not exceed one page in length.
- Use a high-quality paper. If you are submitting other documents, print them on the same paper and use the same font for consistency.
- Proofread each letter for errors – spelling, grammar, punctuation and sentence structure. Have others review your letters for clarity and to check for errors as well.

COVER LETTER FORMAT AND CONTENT

1234 Main Street
Green Bay, WI 54311
May 1, 20XX

*Your return address and
the date of writing*

Susan Johnson
Human Resources Manager
Acme, Inc.
4321 Industry Court
Milwaukee, WI 53204

*Don't have a contact/name?
Use a general greeting such as
"Dear Human Resources"*

Dear Susan Johnson:

Opening Paragraph

- Identify the position for which you are applying, or the type of position you are seeking
- Mention how you learned about the position (name of contact, type of advertisement).
- Personalize your letter. Why are you specifically interested in this position and organization? Find something from the organization's mission/vision statement to help provide direction.

Middle Paragraph(s) *(one to three, depending upon content)*

- The purpose of this section of the letter is to focus on your related skills, education, and experience. What can you do for this organization?
- Group similar items together in a paragraph. Examples of paragraph themes include: skills, work and internship experience, education, or personal qualities.
- If a job posting has listed specific skills, identify how you have demonstrated those skills.
- Be positive in content, tone, word choice, and expectations (i.e., don't come across as negative or pessimistic, and don't focus on what you are lacking).

Closing Paragraph

- Reiterate your interest in the position.
- Indicate that you would like the opportunity for an interview and welcome follow up (e.g., "Please contact me at 920-465-2163 ...").
- Thank the reader for their time and consideration.

Sincerely,

John Sample

John Sample

*Include your handwritten signature on a
printed copy.*

*For electronic cover letters, include your full
name typed in the same font as the rest of
the letter.*

Once you have drafted your cover letter, we encourage you to set up an appointment to have a staff member in Career Services review it with you. You will be asked to provide a printed copy of your letter for your appointment.

View additional letter writing information and samples on our website at www.uwgb.edu/careers.