

# WRITING PROFESSIONAL COVER LETTERS

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Employers are seeking candidates with strong communication skills across all career fields, industries and majors. Therefore, if candidates can compose a well-written cover letter for a job or internship application, it can demonstrate their ability to write effectively and professionally.

The cover letter complements your resume and allows an employer to understand how your skills, education and experience relate to a 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. How do you meet these qualifications? Why are you interested in this position? What is the employer's mission or vision, product or service? 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** (can limit to city and state) 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 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 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 unless specified.
- For printed documents (i.e., resume, cover letter, references), use a high-quality paper. If you are submitting other documents, use the same font for consistency.
- Thoroughly 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

*Street address is optional*

*Your return address and date*

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

Dear Susan Johnson:

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

### 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, website or job board).
- 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 or motivation.

### 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., avoid negative content or bringing attention to skills/experience that 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 questions (e.g., "Please contact me at 920-465-5555 or phoenixb@uwgb.edu ...").
- 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.*

View additional letter writing information on our website at [www.uwgb.edu/career-planning](http://www.uwgb.edu/career-planning). Once you have drafted your cover letter, we encourage you to set up an appointment with your Career Advisor to review it with you.