

Cover Letter Essentials

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What Is a Cover Letter?

- A cover letter is a one-page document sent with your resume or CV.
- It introduces you, explains your interest in the role or program, and highlights relevant experience.
- A good cover letter shows your personality, motivation, and fit.

When Do You Use a Cover Letter?

- When applying for jobs (attach to resume).
- When applying to graduate school or academic programs (attach to CV).
- When applying for fellowships, research positions, or internships.
- Many job postings say “optional” — but it’s almost always better to include one.

Cover Letter vs. Resume

Resume:

- Bullet points, concise, lists experience & skills.
- Emphasizes what you've done.

Cover Letter:

- Paragraphs, storytelling style.
- Explains why you did it, what you learned, and why it matters.

Cover Letter for a Resume (Jobs)

- Targeted to a specific job.
- Emphasizes relevant experience and accomplishments.
- Shows you understand the role and organization.
- Tone: Direct, professional, confident.

Cover Letter for a CV (Academia/Research)

- Explains your academic path and intellectual goals
- Describes research experience and interests.
- Often used for graduate school or fellowships.
- Tone: Reflective, scholarly, personal.

Cover Letter Structure

- Header (Your info + Date + Recipient info)
- Greeting (“Dear [Hiring Manager/Committee]”)
- Paragraph 1: Who you are and why you’re writing.
- Paragraph 2: Relevant experience or research.
- Paragraph 3: Why this position/program/org.
- Final: Thank you + next steps.
- Sign-off: “Sincerely,” + Your name.

Do's For Writing a Great Cover Letter

- Start with a strong, specific opening.
- Show enthusiasm and motivation.
- Match the language of the job/program.
- Highlight 1–2 key experiences with detail.
- Keep it concise: one page, 3–5 paragraphs.
- Proofread carefully — no typos!

Don'ts – Common Mistakes

- Don't repeat your entire resume.
- Don't be generic (“I want a job at your company”).
- Don't use the same letter for every application.
- Don't forget to address the letter if you know the name.
- Don't write in first-person overload (“I... I... I...”).

Quick Example For Resume Cover Letter

Opening: “I’m excited to apply for the Housing Policy Assistant role at NYC HPD...”

Body: “As an intern at New York Housing Conference, I...”

Closing: “I look forward to contributing to your efforts to expand affordable housing in NYC.”

Quick Example For CV Cover Letter

Opening: “I’m applying to your MA program in Urban Policy with a focus on housing equity...”

Body: “My senior thesis explored eviction patterns through spatial analysis...”

Closing: “I am eager to continue this research in a supportive academic environment.”

Final Tips

- Every cover letter should be personalized.
- Think of it as your professional story.
- Ask mentors for feedback.
- Use active language and positive tone.