

# **Cover Letter Guide**



***Career Development Center***

For an appointment, call or email us at:  
(630) 466-2368  
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**Additional resources available 24/7 at:**  
[www.waubonsee.edu/careerdevelopment](http://www.waubonsee.edu/careerdevelopment)

Please visit our online job board, **Waubonsee Career Network** to search for a job, or create your resume using “Resume Builder” at [www.waubonseecareernetwork.com](http://www.waubonseecareernetwork.com)

# Cover Letter Basics

**A customized cover letter should accompany every resume submission.** A well-written cover letter will help you effectively develop a connection with the employer and position. Use your cover letter to paint a picture of how you will work at and what you will contribute to the company or organization you are hoping to join.

## GETTING STARTED:

- Before you begin writing, read the job description thoroughly and determine how you meet the qualifications
- Research the organization and include references to their mission, needs, or vision throughout your document. Understand what they do and how your education and experiences align with the mission, needs, and goals.
- Identify key requirements of the organization and connect them to your experience. Compare your experiences to the job description:

<b>Job Description Duty/Responsibility</b>	<b>Your Skills &amp; Qualifications</b>
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

## COVER LETTER GENERAL STRUCTURE AND FORMAT:

### Paragraph 1: Introduction

- Open your cover letter with a strong, compelling sentence that draws your reader in immediately
- Brand yourself: who are you, as it relates to this position?
- What position are you applying for and why do you think you would be a good fit?
- Approximately 2 – 3 sentences that address your qualifications and/or interest

### Paragraphs 2-3: Qualifications

- Make connections for the employer: show how your experiences directly relate to the organization and position
- Tell a story. Do not repeat what is in your resume. Instead, contextualize it as it relates to this new job or organization.
- Approximately 3 – 5 sentences **OR** 3 – 5 relevant bullet points showing what you offer and making that connection between you and the company

### Paragraph 4: Closing (~2-3 sentences)

- Re-iterate your interest and how to contact you (include your phone/email)
- Thank them

# Cover Letter Worksheet

Use this worksheet to gather the necessary information to create a cover letter, then use the Sample Template to transform it into letter format.

To whom are you sending the letter?

**TIP:** Use LinkedIn, web searches, and your professional network to learn the name of the person who will be receiving the letter. If this is impossible, try “Dear Hiring Manager” or add the title of the person who is accepting the cover letter (if you know who that is).

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Company, Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Using keywords in the job description and your research about the job, what is the company looking for in a candidate? (What skills and experiences are they buying? What problem are they trying to solve? What results, approach, and abilities do they need?)

What are the 3-5 highest priorities for the company?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## First (Opening) Paragraph

1. Write a strong, unique opening line connecting you with the job and/or company.

**For example,** “Given my consistent sales track record of exceeding goals each month over the past fiscal year, I am ready to take on new challenges and continue to exceed goals as a part of the Sales Company team.”

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2. What is the exact job title? \_\_\_\_\_

3. How did you discover the job was available? \_\_\_\_\_  
**For example,** LinkedIn, Waubonsee Career Network, internal referral, career fair, recruiter, etc.

4. Why are you interested in this particular job and company? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Second & Third Paragraphs**

1. What experience, education, results, skills, approach, and/or abilities do you have that matches the employer's needs?

2. Create a few short statements about your experience that include key words from job description. Use action verbs. Show the impact and scope of your actions.

### **Fourth (Closing) Paragraph**

1. What do you want to happen after you send the resume? (An interview, a phone call, an email, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is the person expecting you to send? \_\_\_\_\_ **For**  
**example**, resume, letter of interest, salary requirements, references, portfolio
3. What is your phone and email? \_\_\_\_\_

## Cover Letter Myths & Tips

**Myth: A cover letter is not as important as a Resume.**

**TIP:** *A cover letter is just as important as a resume.* Because of the hundreds (sometimes thousands) of applications received for one position, the cover letter has evolved into a screening document. *If you don't tailor it to each specific job or company, you run the risk of being taken out of the candidate pool early in the process.* Some hiring managers prefer to read the cover letter as an example of a person's ability to communicate in writing. Use the cover letter to tell your story and make a connection to the position and organization.

**Myth: A cover letter is intended to give a reader an overview of your past.**

**TIP:** Rather than reviewing all your experience, focus on the most relevant experience. Your cover letter should clearly convey what you offer to the organization and how you can meet the needs listed in the job description. If you are writing to apply for an internship and have little (or no) direct experience, focus on your transferable skills and connect your academic background to the position. Be sure to convey a sincere interest in the organization and the skills or experiences you do have.

**Myth: Your cover letter is simply a repeat of your resume.**

**TIP:** Cover letters are your opportunity to "personalize" your interest, experiences and skills. Avoid repeating accomplishments or experiences verbatim and instead build on what you introduced in the resume to showcase how it is directly transferable to the new job. Make it about the organization and select items that are relevant or unique to them.

**Myth: A cover letter should begin with the salutation, "To Whom It May Concern".**

**TIP:** Use LinkedIn, web searches, and your professional network to learn the name of the person who will be receiving the letter. If this is impossible, try "Dear Hiring Manager" or add the title of the person who is accepting the Resume (if you know who that is).

**Myth: Your cover letter should be short—the shorter the better, even.**

**TIP:** An effective cover letter is most often 3-5 paragraphs in length and is tailored to the company by relating to its mission as well as to the specific job description at hand. It is important to weave your story into the company's to demonstrate not only your relevancy, but also your cultural understanding of the company and the workplace.

**Myth: Your cover letter is where you identify your feelings, passions, and share your personal story.**

**TIP:** Your resume is about you; your cover letter is about the employer. This means that your cover letter should NOT be full of “I” statements about why the position is good for you. Instead, your cover letter should focus on how your skills and abilities will be an asset to the job and organization.

## Sample Template

Your Name  
Address City, State Zip • Phone • Email

Date

Your header (name and contact info) should be formatted exactly the same as on your resume.

Contact Name, Title  
Organization Name  
Company Address  
City, State, Zip

Dear Dr./Ms./Mr. Last Name: (If you do not have the contact name, use “Dear Hiring Manager”)

In the 1<sup>st</sup> (introductory) paragraph, introduce yourself in a fresh way that is relevant to the employer/position. (Have you worked on a branding statement? If so, draw from that. If not, talk with the Career Development Center.) What position are you applying for and why are you a good fit? Include position title, how you found the position and mention a referral if you have one.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> (body) paragraphs, develop a relationship between you and the employer by displaying your knowledge of the organization or industry. Briefly describe your accomplishments and qualifications, relating them to the needs from the ad and/or job description. Make sure you are answering the question: “Why should I hire you?” Use the comparisons you drafted in the Cover Letter Guide to match the needs in the description with your accomplishments and skills. Concisely demonstrate relevant qualifications and match the organization’s hiring needs in 3 – 5 sentences **OR** 3 - 5 bullet points. If using bullet points, avoid pasting them from your resume without changes.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> (closing) paragraph, reiterate your interest in the position, company, or organization. Include your phone and email address so that they can reach you easily. Mention your interest in the next step next steps (for example, “I would appreciate an interview to discuss this opportunity further”). End with a professional but memorable closing statement that includes a thank you.

Sincerely,

Your First and Last Name