



DOMINICAN
UNIVERSITY

Dominican Career Development Program

COVER LETTER GUIDE

This guide will help you create a cover letter that complements your resume and motivates the recruiter to interview you.

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GETTING STARTED

FIRST THINGS FIRST

A cover letter, often requested as part of an application, is a **subjective space** where you have the opportunity to expand on your relevant experiences and skills, clear up any misconceptions or possible red flags about your resume, and explain why you are the best fit for that job, project, and/or company. If no cover letter is requested, it is recommended that you still include one. At minimum, you should include this information in a shorter format within an email.

GETTING STARTED

Your cover letter should express the following ideas in their respective sections. The most common way to create sections is with separate paragraphs.



Section One - "I'm interested in the job."

- Introduce yourself, state which job you're interested in, and explain how you found it or how you are connected to the company (if applicable). You should also make sure to mention why you're enthusiastic about the position (i.e. their mission inspires you, you're excited about their projects).



Section Two - "Here's how I shine."

- Detail the things that make you stand out from other candidates. Talk about what makes you passionate about your work, your relevant experience, and the value you would bring to this position because of who you are. Don't just rehash your resume here; pick a few projects/roles that you want to highlight.



Section Three - "Please, thank you, and give me an interview."

- Close out by thanking the reader for their time and state that you're looking forward to hearing from them about the position.

Tailor your cover letter to the specific job or internship for which you are applying, using the position description as a guide. The points highlighted in your cover letter should align with the skills outlined in the position description. Select a few strong experiences to expand upon in your cover letter. The experiences you choose should demonstrate the skills required for the position.

FORMATTING

- You shouldn't indent the beginning of each paragraph (because this is a formal business letter), but do leave spaces in between paragraphs.
- Be consistent & concise.
 - The letterhead should match the one on your resume.
 - Aim for 1/2 to 3/4 of a page. Do not exceed one page, including letterhead, addresses, and signatures.
- If you know (or can find out) the person to whom this position reports, be sure to address them at the top of your cover letter.



NOTE

Refer to the Dominican Career Development Program Resume Guide for more information about the S.T.A.R. approach. Your cover letter will tell a stronger story if you focus on the results of your work and avoid describing traits or skills that you possess. With the S.T.A.R. approach, the underlying philosophy is that the best predictor of future performance is past performance that can be conveyed by observable behavior and concrete results.

OVERVIEW

ELEMENTS OF A COVER LETTER

Find information about different cover letter sections, including the heading, introduction, job fit, wrap-up, and closing on the following pages.



HEADING

Choose to match your cover letter heading to that of your resume to create a consistent look. Ensure that your heading includes your contact information, the date, and the name and address of the person you are contacting about the job posting.

- Note: If the name of a contact person is not listed on the job posting, research the company's website or call the employer's main line to inquire about the appropriate person. Avoid using "To Whom It May Concern" in your cover letter.
 - If you cannot find a contact person, you can address your cover letter to the hiring manager (Dear Hiring Manager) or the company/team (Dear Marketing Team, Dear Research and Development Department).

<p style="text-align: center;">Jaxson Johnson 123 Division Street, River Forest, Illinois 12345 (555) 555-5555 jjohnson14@gmail.com</p> <p>November 12, 2023</p> <p>Ms. Patricia Hightower Human Resources XYZ Company 66 Hollow Road Oakbrook, IL 61111</p> <p>Dear Ms. Hightower:</p>
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INTRODUCTION

The first paragraph provides an introduction to who you are, what position you are interested in, and why you are interested in that position. This also is the place to mention if you have any connections with the company. A few notes:

- If you were referred to the company through a personal connection, mention that link and the person's name in the first paragraph (if not the first sentence).
- You do not need to say, "I am applying for the position posted on LinkedIn on October 5, 20xx." You should only state where you saw the posting if it demonstrates a particular connection that might set you apart or is relevant for some other reason.

I was excited to learn about your open Human Resources Specialist position. I have enclosed my resume for your consideration. I will be graduating in May of 20xx from Dominican University with a degree in management. I believe my strong organizational and customer service skills, strengthened through my nonprofit development experience, make me an excellent candidate for this position.

ELEMENTS OF A COVER LETTER



PERSON-JOB / PERSON-ORGANIZATION FIT

The second and third paragraphs allow you to elaborate on the skills mentioned on your resume. *Do not repeat the information on your resume.* Instead, provide strong examples of how your skills have been demonstrated. Describe your accomplishments and how they predict success in future endeavors.

One of the best ways to organize your accomplishments into a clear paragraph is to use the S.T.A.R. approach. This approach can be used to write your resume and effectively answer behavioral interview questions. S.T.A.R. stands for: **Situation** (overview of what you are talking about), **Task** (the job to be done), **Action** (the action you specifically took), and **Result** (the end result of your actions or what you learned from the experience). Using this approach to showcase your accomplishments provides proof that you have the skills the employer is looking for in a good candidate.

If you have had specialized training that is relevant to the position, point that out within these paragraphs as well.

My organizational skills have been honed through my experiences during college. I have worked in multiple part-time positions while successfully managing a full academic load. I also developed strong customer service skills through my work at Best Buy. I was promoted from Sales Associate to a Sales Lead position within 18 months. I am currently responsible for training all new sales associates to work on the floor and handle customers coming to the returns and service desk.

At Loyola Medical Center's Foundation Department, I work closely with large donors and have access to all donor records. Through face-to-face meetings, email, and phone-based outreach, I helped achieve a 10% increase our annual donations. More relevant to your position, I was part of a team charged with increasing data security. I am familiar with the importance of confidentiality of certain records and protocols, as well as the more technical issues surrounding data security.



WRAP-UP

The final paragraph provides a short conclusion to your cover letter.

- Restate your enthusiasm about this position. Be as specific as possible about what makes their department, team, or company of interest to you.
- Provide your contact information if it is not provided in the header or your closing signature.
- Thank the person for their time and consideration in this paragraph or the closing.

I think I would be an excellent addition to your team at XYZ Company. I am particularly excited to be a part of your department's innovative training program.



CLOSING

End your cover letter with "Sincerely" or a statement of thanks. If sending your cover letter in the body of an email, do not include the address block or your actual signature; do include your contact information at the bottom. If sending a PDF of your letter, it is common for the signature to also be left off, although your scanned signature is a nice touch.

Thank you for considering my application,

Jaxson Johnson

ADDRESSING RED FLAGS & MISCONCEPTIONS

Cover letters give you the opportunity to elaborate on any parts of your resume that may appear to be potential red flags for employers.

How to Address Possible Red Flags

Reference: Harvard Business Review, 2021

Again, cover letters allow you to give detail about yourself in a succinct way. Potential red flags should be addressed concisely, before you switch focus to the benefits of your employment gaps, career pivots, job-hopping, or otherwise. Play to your strengths, even when talking about your weaknesses.

Switching industries and/or job functions

Explain why you are pivoting roles or industries. This should be more profound than just "wanting to try something new." Talk about your professional development, previous connections to this new industry, ability to adapt, and transferrable skills from previous experiences. This will provide justification to your confidence that you will excel in this change.

Employment gaps

If you were able to take on side projects (i.e. freelancing, continuing education, creative pursuits with transferrable skills) during these gaps, talk about what you accomplished and the positive impact it had on you. If the employment gap did not allow for side projects (i.e. job search, medical leave, personal tragedy), talk about how you were able to reassess your interests, current skills, and ideal career path. Then, talk about how the position you're applying for aligns with that.

Frequent switching between jobs, or "job-hopping"

While job-hopping is more accepted today than it has been historically, many recruiters will notice if your job history has frequent changes or small amounts of time in each position. Emphasize the quality, not quantity, of your time spent in a position by detailing your accomplishments. Highlight the number of transferrable skills you acquired, your level of fast adaptation to different teams and industries, and the fast pace at which you have grown.

Seeming lack of relevant skills or qualified history

Sometimes, connections to the position's requirements are not immediately noticeable on your resume. Name specific experiences and skills that apply to this job, being sure to say which job position you were in at the time so the recruiter can reference your resume. Transferable skills, especially in more recent roles, are also good to point out.

Example

"In addition to my career as a video editor, I have also developed my skills in web design. I first became interested in web design three years ago at a networking event where I met three individuals working in the field. I had the opportunity to explore this interest after I left my last full-time role when I enrolled in a 40-hour online web development course and earned a certificate. Not only did I build a foundation for myself in web design through this experience, but I also improved my time management skills by balancing my class schedule and other projects. My ability to learn quickly, combined with my knowledge in web design, will allow me to excel in this role."

PROFESSIONALISM

MAKING YOURSELF STAND OUT

While it's easier to write generic cover letters than it is to write a cover letter specifically targeted to the position for which you are applying, it's a crucial part of the process that is often overlooked or ignored. Creating a custom cover letter and managing your communications professionally will help you stand out to employers.



CUSTOMIZATION



RECOMMENDED LENGTH



COMMUNICATIONS

CUSTOMIZATION

The position description is an important tool to use to write an effective cover letter. Read the position description and requirements carefully. In some cases you will have direct experience (e.g. one year retail experience, GPA 3.0 and above) and in some cases you will leverage your transferrable skills.

A transferrable skill is a skill that you have attained regardless of where you learned it. For example, strong communication skills are a skill that you may have developed in your on-campus job as a Phonathon member or from receiving feedback from professors on class presentations.

RECOMMENDED LENGTH

The letter should be less than two-thirds of the page so that the reader does not get discouraged seeing a full page of text. Use standard business letter format and a font size that matches your resume. If you are pasting the letter into an online portal, do not include the address blocks. Include them when you upload a file.

COMMUNICATIONS

- Reply to emails within one business day.
- Use meaningful subject lines in all emails.
- Correct your spelling and grammar and ask someone to proof-read your communications before you hit send. Never send text messages.
- Send thank you notes and/or follow-up emails within 24 hours of your meeting to each of the people with whom you met (individually, no group emails). Your notes can be handwritten on a professional thank you card, they can use the same format as your cover letter, or you can email them. In each note, try to write at least one comment that specifically relates back to your meeting with that person.
- If you are submitting electronic versions of your resume and cover letter, save them as PDFs and name the files in a simple and professional manner. For example:
 - “MyLastName_MyFirstName_Resume.pdf”
 - “MyLastName_MyFirstName_CoverLetter.pdf”
- Similarly, all attachments should have file names that allow the recipient to identify them easily.

COVER LETTER

EXAMPLE

Jaxson Johnson

123 Division Street, River Forest, Illinois 12345
(555) 555-5555
jjohnson14@gmail.com

November 12, 20xx

Ms. Patricia Hightower
Human Resources
XYZ Company
66 Hollow Road
Oakbrook, IL 61111

Dear Ms. Hightower:

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