

How to Write Effective Cover Letters

Intro Paragraph

- ✓ Introduce the position and the organization to which you are applying.
- ✓ Provide a brief introduction of yourself that is compatible to the role and the industry, i.e., your “identifier statement”. This might include introducing your SIPA concentration and educational focus or other important words to describe the kind of profession you are seeking, e.g., collaborative, community-based.
- ✓ Be specific about the organization and why you are compelled to apply to this particular role. Impress them with your research and knowledge of who they are and how they work. Show compatibility!

Body Paragraph #1

- ✓ Present the most compatible highlight of your experience based on the role and the organization, as well as based on the job/internship posting’s requirements. Can you speak to several of the requirements by summarizing one highlight of your experience? Or by telling a story to give an example (i.e., a project you led from start to finish that showcases your compatible skills and produced great results)?
- ✓ Don’t forget to use key words from the job/internship posting and the organization’s website.
- ✓ Present quantifiable information whenever possible.
- ✓ Make conclusions in the body that are different from your resume and show evidence of why you are compatible with this role.
- ✓ Make the reader envision you in this role and understand your work style.

Body Paragraph #2 (+ Body Paragraph # 3, optional)

- ✓ Present another compatible highlight of your experience based on the role and the organization, as well as based on the job/internship posting’s requirements or even preferences.
- ✓ Same tips as above for Body Paragraph #1.
- ✓ Consider including aspects of your background that would be valuable to the employer, such as academic training (graduate coursework, additional coursework and degrees), certificates, professional development and other trainings, conferences (attending, presenting), research, publications, etc.

Conclusion (Closing) Paragraph

- ✓ Close your cover letter with a succinct but powerful sentence that summarizes the body of your cover letter (your highlights) and your enthusiasm for the role and the organization.
- ✓ Include a “call to action” that implies follow-up or a chance for an interview.
- ✓ Make sure you connote confidence, i.e., avoid saying something like, “I hope to hear from you soon.”
- ✓ Remember to thank the employer for their time and/or consideration.

Other Tips + Tricks

- ✓ Remember to tailor each cover letter to the role and the organization by viewing the job/internship posting and the website (plus any related websites) and including key words, familiar language, etc.
- ✓ Don’t match or narrate your resume in your cover letter! Your letter is a chance to make conclusions from the achievements on your resume that match you to the job/internship. Your cover letter should convey your compatibility, tell your story, and thus give the employer an idea of who you are as a professional.
- ✓ Proof your cover letter but also have a trusted friend review it for typos, syntax, and grammar.
- ✓ Check out resources like SIPA OCS, the Columbia Writing Center, and websites like The Muse and Glassdoor for cover letter guidance.
- ✓ Keep cover letters to one page. A succinct and impactful letter is better than one that is too long.
- ✓ Don’t rely on templates. A successful cover letter will sound like you and tell your story!