



**SAINT MARY'S**  
UNIVERSITY SINCE 1802

One University. One World. Yours.

CAREER  
DEVELOPMENT  
CENTRE

Career Information • Resources • Résumé & Cover Letters

# COVER LETTER

The cover letter may be read first or second after the résumé, so it is important to include a general introduction to your skills and qualifications in the cover letter. Cover letters are often avoided by applicants who are often uncomfortable writing introductions to their résumés. However, a good cover letter can explain in more words why you want this job and the specific types of experience you can bring to the company. Parts of personality also come out in your cover letter and employers are more likely to pick up the phone and call someone they feel they know, at least a little bit.

Cover letters also allow you to impress the company by stating how you found out about the job if it was through some insider knowledge or showing that you know someone in the company already. It introduces you in a professional tone. Even if you know many people in the company, you will keep it professional. Just because a certain department is hiring doesn't mean that the department actually screens through the applicants. It could be a separate Human Resource department that actually reads through all the résumés and cover letters that arrive.

## **Key points:**

Like the résumé the cover letter must be a clean font and limited in size- most likely not more than one page. Format the paragraphs to be shorter rather than longer, and group your information clearly.

Overall, the format is like a business letter. More creative letters can be made for situations that suit an audience who is equally as flexible and creative. As long as you know the audience and the working environment of the company, riskier formats may work to make your application more memorable.

This guide is only that- a guide to get you started. As you become more familiar with the form, you will develop some of your own styles and in some cases have more opportunity for creativity.

## **Cover Letter Outline**

Business headings are done in this order:

1. Your name, address (mailing format if plain text.) space providing, You can sometimes use the header from your résumé and reference page. Otherwise, plain type will do.
2. Today's date
3. Contact's name, title and address.
4. Greeting: Avoid putting "to Whom It May Concern." You know at least that there is a selection committee or Human Resource Manager, so use those titles if nothing else.

Put two empty lines between these four elements.

### **First Paragraph**

This is like your profile. It can be worded slightly differently, but it is an identification of your skills and qualifications, as well as a brief statement of the job you are applying for and potentially your availability if the job starts after May or the actual start time for the job is not immediate.

### **Second paragraph**

You need to show the employer you did your own homework on their organization and the industry in general. Start with their company or agency website and note their mandate, their customer base and what their next goals are as a company, if that is stated. Put some of these details in your cover letter so that you can prove to the company you actually did read the website. Now is the time to look at their values and make sure you are putting forward some response to those values through your résumé and cover letter. This is also the paragraph to mention if you were referred to this job through someone in the industry or even at that company.

### **Third (and possibly fourth) paragraph**

How do your skills and qualifications specifically meet the challenges of this job? Now is the time to say so. Include mini-stories and examples of the type of work you have done that put your best moments in a context that perhaps the employer can see in his/her own working environment. Of course, you are going to highlight the demands of this particular job ad, not copy over the same paragraph you typed for another job.

Consider separating this section into two paragraphs if you have different categories of skills (technical vs. interpersonal for example) so that the reading is easier. If you have to break this section up into the specific skills and place the more transferable ones in another paragraph, ensure that there is a clear break in the types of skills you are describing in each paragraph.

### **Summary paragraph**

This is your last chance to be assertive and say in one line why you are the right candidate. Writing “As you can see in my résumé” is not enough. What particular skills have you been talking about in your résumé? Could you tell a brief story about a particular success doing that task? It infers to the employer that if you could do that work for someone else, you could do it for them as well.

### **Closing the letter**

Regards or Sincerely

You name (written)

Your name typed: Leave 3 lines between the ‘Regards’ and the typed name.

If you are sending a résumé through email, you can have your signature scanned into your computer and placed where you would normally sign. If you have no scanned in signature, you can just have one blank line between “Sincerely” and your printed name.

**Final touches:** Spelling, phrasing, and making sure you have personal, company and department names written correctly. Take the time to call the company and make sure you get it right.