

Writing Cover Letters

Why Cover Letters?

It is an opportunity to tell the employer more about yourself than what appears on your resume. It is important to write a unique cover letter for each position for which you are applying.

To get started, review the position description and identify how the requirements are related to your particular accomplishments. It is up to you to connect the dots for the employer regarding how your skills and experience match the needs of the company. Remember experiences can come from a variety of sources (paid work, volunteer experience, class projects, coursework, etc.). See *Guide to Cover Letters & Sample* handout.

Tips:

- Remember that this is a professional letter and should follow formal business writing.
- A cover letter is a sample of your writing abilities. Like your resume you want it to be free of grammar and spelling errors. Have multiple people look over your letter including Career Services.
- Research the company (explore their website if they have one)
 - What is the culture of the company/organization?
 - What are the company's core values/mission?
 - What buzzwords (verbiage) do they use and how can you mirror that language?
 - Be aware of the words they use and weave that language in!
- Use the hiring manager's name when possible. If you are unsure, utilize:
 - Dear (Organization Name) Representative/Manager:
- Talk about how your skills align with what the company is seeking
 - List out tasks and demonstrate how you have used or will be able to use these skills by using real examples ("For example, as an intern at Flow-Cal, I was able to build relationships by...")
 - Put yourself in the employer's shoes: Who is the ideal candidate? What are the top 2 or 3 skills, qualifications, and qualities that the employer is seeking for this role?
- How will you be an asset to the company? Demonstrate how you fit with the company.
 - Use the mission statement as a guideline. (Do not copy verbatim.)
- Focus on strengths, not weaknesses
 - Do not apologize for skills you are lacking (e.g. "Despite my lack of experience with Sales...")
 - Focus on your personal strengths and lead with that!
- Ensure the font style matches your resume and it is simple and easy to read.
- Check your layout for adequate margins and white space and center it top to bottom.
- Convert the cover letter and resume to PDF to ensure the formatting stays consistent.

Remember that cover letters may vary by industry, visit Career Services if you are unsure.

Items to Avoid:

- Do not repeat your resume
- Do not overuse the pronoun "I"
- Do not use contractions (i.e. "I am" rather than "I'm")
- Cover letters should be no longer than a page

- ☒ Do not explain why you left your last job or want to leave your present one
- ☒ Do not use a form letter and do not *only* change the company name
- ☒ Do not include your salary requirements, unless asked to provide this information
- ☒ Do not Inflate or exaggerate your experience or qualifications
- ☒ Do not hint that you are interested in virtually any job within that organization

Pro Tip:

Place the job description on your desk on one side and your resume on the other. Remember that you are “connecting the dots” for the employer on your skills and how they match the position. When you review the job description, highlight the critical parts of it reflected in your resume. See example below:

Position Description: Legal Advocate Intern for Local Area Non-Profit

NOTE: () indicate words or sentences that are of importance

(Manage incoming calls) from local schools, hospitals, law enforcement and other relevant agencies, (maintain program participant records, collaborate with full-time staff on relevant projects), provide direct advocacy, support and follow-up to program participants, assist with (promoting) the mission and goals of the agency through (grassroots advertising efforts) and assisting with semi-annual fundraiser. Pursuing a degree in the social or behavioral sciences, public service and leadership, marketing or related field, at least one semester of related experience, volunteer work is acceptable. Strong written and verbal communications skills, public speaking; ability to work independently; (social media knowledge). Preference for MS Access and web development knowledge. XYZ is a non-profit; community based social service agency providing a variety of assistance services to families in need and community education/crime prevention activities in the Houston area.

Your Related Accomplishments:

- UHCL Student with Student Life Office experience
- Answered phone calls, greeted students, updated and maintained files, entered relevant information into databases daily in the Student Life Office at university.
- Led group project on evaluation of a non-profit for Current Topics in Urban Society course.
- As part of Student Life Office, assisted in promoting annual “Welcome Back” university event by creating flyers, updating social media, and promoting to student organizations.