

Cover Letter Overview

What Is a Cover Letter? Why Is It Important?

A cover letter accompanies your resume, introduces you as an applicant, and highlights your qualifications. Cover letters also enable employers to get a sense of your writing skills and style. Not only do they serve to give your resume focus and accentuate relevant information, but they also give you a chance to make a positive impression and express your enthusiasm for the position or organization. The cover letter should be interesting, compelling, unique, and genuine. Cover letters should always accompany resumes (with the exception of On-Campus Recruiting when the employer may choose not to receive them). Do not write one general (form) letter to use for all of your applications; you should uniquely tailor your letter for each organization and for the specific position.

How Is a Cover Letter Structured?

A cover letter is structured like a business letter, as shown in the samples on the next three pages. Keep cover letters short—three or four paragraphs—and do not exceed one page. When sending your resume and cover letter by email, you may include your cover letter in the body of your email or attach it along with your resume with a short email stating what position you are applying to and that your materials are attached.

How Do I Write the Letter? What Should It Include?

Before You Begin Writing the Letter, You Should Do Three Things:

- **Research the employer:** Learn enough about the organization so you can articulate in your letter why you are a strong fit for their firm. Review the website, speak with current or previous employees, and read articles. Use social media sites like LinkedIn and Twitter and set up Google Alerts to read about the latest trends and news at the company.
- **Analyze the job description:** Look for skills, duties, and qualifications for the job so you can design your letter to prove that you match these requirements as much as possible.
- **Analyze your background:** Ask yourself what you have done that is similar to the duties required of the job, including classes, projects, work experience, internships, volunteer experience, activities, and travel.

Structure the Letter as Follows:

- **Introduction:** State why you are writing, the position for which you are applying, where you found out about the job, and who you are. It is also helpful to include here whether you have been referred by a connection to apply for the position (be sure to first ask the individual if you can include his/her name) and why you are interested in this job and company in particular. Consider what is unique about each company. Many employers want to see this emphasis in this first paragraph. Note that you may also reiterate your strong interest in the position and the company in the last paragraph.
- **Body:** Highlight your qualifications relevant to the position and to the organization. Market yourself and your abilities, communicating how your skills and experience can be valuable to the employer. Do not discuss or apologize if you feel you lack experience or accomplishments. Emphasize your strengths with examples, but avoid simply restating your resume. Describe the skills gained through your experience and how these skills prepare you for this job. The body of the cover letter may be one or two paragraphs and should be specific and relevant to the industry, organization, and position. Let the employer know why you are interested in working for them by demonstrating that you have done your research.
- **Conclusion:** Thank the reader and reaffirm your interest in the position. Reemphasize why you want to work for their organization, demonstrating that you've researched their firm and can explain why you would be a good fit to work there. Avoid endings that lack confidence, and be sure to sign the letter if you are mailing it to the employer.

What Else Should a Cover Letter Include or Accomplish?

- Your letter should be addressed to the specific individual who has the capacity to hire you.
- If you do not know who this person is, research the organization online or call to find out the correct name and spelling as well as the individual's appropriate title and current mailing address. If you cannot find a name, you can address the letter to the "Recruiting Coordinator" or to the "Hiring Manager."
- Use the active voice, keeping your tone positive and professional. Avoid beginning every sentence with "I." Use perfect grammar and sentence structure.

➔ Tips for a "Create Your Own Internship" Cover Letter

Even if a company or organization does not have an internship program or has never had an intern, it may be possible to convince an employer to create an internship for you.

- In your cover letter, acknowledge that while there is no internship program in their company or organization, you are proposing that they create an internship for you based on the skills you offer and the value you could add in return for real work experience and training.
- Be explicit in explaining the type of work that you would like to do.
- Demonstrate your knowledge about and interest in the company. Be enthusiastic and convincing as to why you want to work for them.
- Use social media or the company's "About Us" web pages to identify an actual person in the department that interests you and direct your cover letter and resume to that person.
- Follow up in a few days with another email or a phone call.



These letters (and on pages 41 and 42) are only guides to provide an idea of what to include in your letter! **DO NOT COPY THEM DIRECTLY!** We suggest that you write the first draft of your letter without using a sample to guide you. The most important quality you can convey in your cover letter is enthusiasm, and this must be done in your own style. Once you've created your first letter, those that follow will be much easier.

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July 23, 2013

Running Specialty Group
The Gart Companies
299 Milwaukee St., Suite 500
Denver, CO 80206

Dear Hiring Manager:

If I were a running shoe, I'd be the Nike LunarGlide+ 4. This lightweight and supportive model is dynamic, low-profile, and ready to race. It would provide a great fit for the position of Associate Content Producer as posted on Mediabistro.com. As a journalist wielding a master's degree and experience in the running industry, I fit the position requirements and possess the skills necessary to help enhance the Run.com site. Sure, I love to run, but my knack for producing quality content supersedes my talent (not to mention my VO2 max).

As a senior editor, copy editor, and editorial intern, I've honed my writing and editing skills. I've produced compelling digital and print content for multiple platforms, from tablet magazines and social media to glossy print pages and online news sites. I've written about The Runner's Center topics—training, racing, injury prevention, nutrition, weight loss, and inspiration. Peers and bosses alike come to me for proof reads, fact checks, top edits, and big-picture powwows. One of my editors recently called my reporting “meticulous.”

As a marketing and sales rep, project director, and coach, I've developed interpersonal skills that enable me to interact professionally and effectively with superiors, freelancers, and interns alike. I've gained exceptional organizational skills while managing multiple deadlines. My competitive work ethic and trainable nature would support your daily sales and merchandising goals. Available to travel and work flexible hours, I am willing and able to help the Director of Content and Community and RSG team successfully grow Run.com.

Please consider this letter and my attached resume. I would be delighted to discuss this opportunity at your convenience. I will follow up in one week. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Janis Dean

200 W. 108th St, Apt 6C
New York, NY 10025
(917) 555-0000
gp2127@columbia.edu

October 8, 2013

Ms. Sandra Davis
Morgan Stanley
Investment Management Human Resources
1221 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

Dear Ms. Davis:

Please consider the attached resume as my application for the position of Investment Management Analyst as posted through the Center for Career Education at Columbia University. I was referred to you by Mr. Rivera a former analyst in your company. I am currently a senior studying Economics at Columbia, where I have acquired and fine-tuned valuable skills such as analyzing difficult problems, articulating my opinions, and succeeding in an extremely competitive environment. I am eager to start at Morgan Stanley Investment Management, where I can put into practice the skills gained through my academic and professional experiences.

In addition to my education, I have a unique and varied set of internship experiences that have given me the financial skills to qualify for this position. While working at Oppenheimer Funds, I had the opportunity to see investing first-hand. My knowledge of investing and finance expanded during my internships as I took initiative, assumed responsibility, and stayed organized to complete projects that required innovation and critical thinking—attitudes essential for a Morgan Stanley Analyst. This summer, my quantitative and analytical skills were sharpened while working for a portfolio team headed by one of Barron's Top 100 Portfolio Managers. In addition, my market insights and investing abilities were put to the test and rewarded during the Intern Investment Competition. My own contributions and those of my talented teammates were recognized by the Chief Economist and head investors, who unanimously declared the team I headed the winner of the competition.

Whether in an office as an intern or on the football field as a team captain, I have gained a strong work ethic and a commitment to teamwork. My leadership activities have helped me develop the ability to collaborate with a diverse group of gifted peers in order to succeed and offer our best—skills I know are necessary for an Analyst to succeed in Morgan Stanley's environment.

After information sessions, discussion with Morgan Stanley employees, and a site visit, I feel confident I can successfully conquer any task or challenge associated with this position by being inquisitive, teachable, and results-oriented. I appreciate your consideration of this application, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

George Popovic

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New York, NY 10025
cs1111@columbia.edu

December 15, 2012

Ms. Jane Greene
APD Recruiting
Strategy Consulting Group
500 E. 22nd St., 21st Floor
New York, NY 10022

Dear Ms. Greene:

I am writing to express my interest in a 2013 consulting internship position at Strategy Consulting Group, which I learned about this fall through an on-campus open house event at Columbia University. As a fourth year Ph.D. student in Chemical Engineering at Columbia, I am on track to complete my doctoral studies by May 2013. It is my strong feeling that my extensive and varied academic training paired with past industrial internships have provided me with the experience and skills necessary to excel in the fast-paced environment at Strategy Consulting Group.

The past three years as a graduate Research Assistant in a cutting-edge chemical engineering laboratory have provided me with an abundance of opportunities to define and solve problems, set and achieve goals, and strengthen my communication abilities. I have learned to read and analyze scientific literature and data, and to connect them to my specific research. I have perfected existing experimental methods, designed and implemented new experiments, and become adept at analyzing and interpreting subsequent results. In addition to these hard skills, I have further developed my communicative abilities through formal lab meeting presentations, ongoing collaborations with other research groups, preparing scientific manuscripts and fellowship applications, and managing undergraduates assisting in my research.

While my current work is primarily scientific, past and recent academic as well as industrial experiences have been much more aligned with business. As an undergraduate student, I complemented major coursework with a minor in business, learning the fundamentals of finance, accounting, marketing, and real estate. In addition, this past spring I completed a certificate course through the Center for Biotechnology at Cornell University. This program focused on the business environment of the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries. Finally, during an undergraduate internship with Pfizer, I was a team member of a business group devoted to identifying and leveraging lower manufacturing costs within foreign countries to increase productivity.

I am truly excited about the prospect of applying my analytical and communicative skills to working with teams of like-minded professionals to solve challenging problems. Through conversation with a Strategy Consulting Engagement Manager, I've come to believe that your hallmark "client first" philosophy, as well as the exciting, team-based environment, makes Strategy Consulting Group a very strong fit for me, both culturally and professionally. I feel that my past and present technical and business training and industrial experiences make me a highly competitive candidate for a consulting internship with Strategy Consulting Group, and I look forward to pursuing this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Carlos Smith

AMY M. ROBINS
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August 25, 2013

Ms. Catherine Kramer
AIDG Guatemala
0-21 8a Calle "B" Zona 3
Quetzaltenango, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala

Dear Ms. Kramer,

I am writing to apply to your grant writer position, which was posted on your website. I was immediately drawn to this listing and AIDG's focus on business incubation and eco-friendly technologies. Your model offers many opportunities to create lasting improvements to infrastructures in Guatemala and Haiti. To help your company gain further funding for its mission, I offer proven writing, research, and communication skills as well as successful grant writing experience.

I was inspired to transition from magazine writing to grant writing when I started editing documents for the Refugee and Immigrant Fund (RIF), a not-for-profit agency that aids new immigrants as they adjust to life in the United States. Working with RIF's founder to create two grant applications, I found my editorial background equipped me well for the challenges of drafting and editing proposals to secure non-profit funding. Both applications were successful and resulted in grants needed to support two new programs.

In addition to the above experience, as the Assistant Research Editor at Budget Travel magazine, I pinpoint the most engaging details of a subject and write stories that appeal to a targeted audience. These skills have helped me create application grants that draw attention from an audience of grant givers and personal donors.

Finally, every day at Budget Travel, I communicate effectively across language barriers. Maintaining my record of zero printed errors, I routinely call and email small foreign businesses, from family-owned restaurants in Panama to three-room B&Bs in Italy. My French language proficiency, further refined when I studied in Senegal, will help me work closely with your staff in Haiti. Moreover, I am currently enrolled in introductory Spanish lessons and plan to continue classes in Guatemala.

I would be honored to join AIDG and help promote sustainable technologies, XelaTeco, and other business incubation plans. I look forward to discussing further how I can apply my writing, research, and communication skills and experience to this position to further help your organization grow and expand. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Amy Robins