COVER LETTERS
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How to Use This Booklet
This booklet is intended to guide you through the parts of a cover letter, what should (and should not) be included, and *why*. Read through it once fully, then go back to reference sections as you begin writing your cover letter.

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A cover letter is an introductory letter included with your resume in your application. This your chance to go into more detail about *why* you'd be such a perfect fit. Cover letters are sometimes required, but are more frequently optional.

A resume is limited to concise facts and short phrases. A cover letter is where you can expand on your experience and tell a relevant story. It's an opportunity to set yourself apart from other candidates; even other candidates with more experience.

I heard nobody reads cover letter.
Cover letters unfairly get a bad reputation. Some recruiters love cover letters and read every one; others think they're outdated and ignore them. However, there's no way for you to know which recruiter will be reviewing your materials, so don't pass up this opportunity!

The reason cover letters are considered outdated is because so many cover letters *are* outdated. A templated, overly formal letter is not engaging or interesting to read.

"Hello, I am interested in applying for the Junior Designer position at your company. I am passionate about design and believe I would be a great fit at your company."

Did you just fall asleep? Now imagine reading roughly the same cover letter 100 times. The above sentence is exactly the same sentence that every other candidate for the Junior Designer position can write.

However, a *good* cover letter is powerful. It can engage the recruiter, help you stand out in a pool of applicants, and showcase your personality.

Can I just have one generic cover letter?
No. Employers see a lot of these and can instantly spot a form letter. Many employers find it offensive that you do not care enough about this application to write a new cover letter for them.

"We trash generic inquiries automatically. If you don't care to put in a little effort to tailor your communication to my company, I sure don't care to read it." - Ash Arnett, Creative Director at PARTICULAR

You will need to write a new cover letter for every position. Obviously, you are one person with one set of skills, so there will be a lot of overlap between your cover letters.

THE RÉSUMÉ IS WHAT YOU'VE DONE.

THE COVER LETTER IS WHO YOU ARE.

"So, tell me a little about yourself."
That can be a tough question to answer! However, thinking critically about your professional identity and branding will help you throughout your career.

"Personal branding is how we define ourselves in the work space while also incorporating the personal elements that make us who we are," -Dawn Rasmussen, President of Pathfinder Writing and Career Services.

Think through the below questions to get started. If you're early in your studies, focus on what you hope to accomplish, why you chose your major, and research professionals in your field.

What type of work do you do?
What are you best at?
Why did you choose this major/field?
What do you want to be known for?
What's your dream job? What do you hope to accomplish?
What are your strengths?
Where do you fit within the rest of your industry?
    Do research into professionals you admire.

EXAMPLE

Ⓐ **Your Name**
555.555.555 / you@email.com / website.com

December 18, 2018

Ⓑ Daisy Gaither [Hiring Manager's Name]
XYZ Toys [Company]
123 Main Street, 3rd Flr. [Company's Address]
Savannah, GA 31401

Ⓒ Dear Ms. Gaither,

Ⓓ When I was three, XYZ Toys' signature plastic firetruck was my best friend. I creatively named it "Truck Truck." Even though it was made out of hard plastic, that did not stop me from cuddling it every night. Truck Truck and I would go on epic adventures across my yard, battling the frightening backyard terror of "weird tree." Truck Truck was a huge part of my childhood and helped me connect with my first non-truck friend in preschool. Toys can bring people together and accompany them on their most imaginative adventures. The idea of creating
Ⓔ the next Truck Truck for this generation of kids is what led me to Industrial Design at SCAD. I would like to apply for the position of Toy Design Intern with XYZ Toys.

Ⓕ I love to think of my designs from the perspective of problem solving. In my Product Design Visualization class, I was asked to design a product with at least 12 separate parts. Beyond that, we were free to do whatever we wanted. While most of my classmates designed complex consumer electronics, I saw an opportunity to combine my love of design with my interest in oceanography. I wanted to use my project to communicate the delicate balance of ocean life, and less overtly, address today's problem of dying coral reefs. After extensive research, I designed a puzzle toy of 14 interlocking pieces to represent the importance of a complete ecosystem! Take away even the smallest brine shrimp, and the environment crumbles. I loved the chance to think creatively about the problem at hand.

Ⓖ I am excited about the possibility of working for XYZ Toys. I look forward to discussing this opportunity at your convenience. Thank you for your time and consideration, and please tell Truck Truck I said "hello."

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

A Header
B Contact Info

C Greeting
D Hook
E Intro Paragraph

F Body
G Conclusion

HEADER

Your Information
Include your name and contact information on the top of your cover letter in case it is separated from your resume.

Company's Information
The format of a cover letter is a bit formal. Include the date, name of the person your are writing to (see below), and the company's address.

GREETING

You need to do some research and figure out who to address your letter to. Try the company website, Google, LinkedIn, or even call the company to ask. These small steps show you've done your research and care about details.

If you've scoured the internet and can't find a name, just start with "Dear [Name of Company] Recruiting Team."

DO NOT say "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Sir or Ma'am." It comes off as very insincere, old-fashioned, and templated.

TONE + PERSONALITY

Your resume won't show much personality, but your cover letter can showcase your individuality… to an extent. Hopefully you've already done some research and you have an idea of the company's culture and brand voice. You want to be yourself, but still convey respect.

Are you applying to a more conservative medical supply company? Keep it formal and professional.

Are you applying to a fun start-up with a lot of jokes on their website? Be light-hearted in your cover letter!*

*Light-hearted is great, but this is still a professional material. Avoid any offensive jokes or coming off too casual. Even if you're applying to a surf shop, it is never appropriate to say "Hey dude."

HOOK
1-3 sentences

Attention-Grabber
A "hook" is a sentence that grabs the reader's attention. In a cover letter, a hook says "don't ignore me! I promise I'm not a boring cover letter!" Try to think of something relevant to the company that will keep them reading. Remember to stay relevant and professional, you don't want a hook that grabs their attention for the wrong reason

> When I was 8, I learned the hard way that Banana Republic does not sell bananas. Luckily, you do sell beautifully classic pieces that I consider the treasures of my wardrobe.
>
> *EXAMPLE 1*

> I'm proud to say I've watched every Star Wars film in one sitting. As an expert on movie marathons, I can attest that Netflix is the best for these impressive feats. With over 500 hours of Netflix-ing under my belt, I'm confident I would be a great and deeply empathetic User Experience Designer at Netflix.
>
> *EXAMPLE 2*

INTRODUCTION
1-3 sentences

Company Research
Transition from your interesting hook to what position you want to apply for. Discuss why you're interested in working for this company, and make sure your reason shows you've done company research. "I'm inspired by your company" or "I like Apple products" are not compelling reasons for applying to Apple.

Easy on the Adjectives
Avoid an overly formal tone with lots of adjectives. "It is my greatest honor to apply for this position." Is it? It sounds odd and it is unlikely this is how you speak in real life. Be professional in tone, but not overly formal.

BODY 4-8 sentences

SKILLS
A good place to start is identifying your top skills. For this exercise focus more on your interpersonal and character skills, such as teamwork, leadership, critical-thinking, adaptability etc. These are also called "soft skills." Remember your "hard skills" (Photoshop, Sketching, etc) will be on your resume, so we don't need to go into those here.

Make a list of *your* 5 top skills.

EXAMPLE
My top skills are:
1. Good Problem Solver
2. Creative Thinker
3. Leader
4. Good at Conflict Resolution
5. Fast Learner

TOP 5 SKILLS EMPLOYERS SEEK IN RECENT GRADUATES
in order of importance

1. Ability to work in a team structure
2. Ability to make decisions
3. Ability to solve problems
4. Ability to communicate
5. Ability to plan, organize and prioritize work

Source: https://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2014/11/12/the-10-skills-employers-most-want-in-2015-graduate

An anecdote is "a short and amusing or interesting story about a real incident or person."

"We remember stories. Don't waste this precious space telling me you're just like everyone else. Tell a story with your cover letter of how you are already awesome at this job." - Nathan Kontny, CEO of Highrise

Reference the 5 skills you identified. You can't just *tell* me you're a great problem solver, you have to prove it. Think of a time you exemplified each of those 5 identified skills. Write it down! Don't worry about making it sound good or editing it yet; just write it down.

"WE REMEMBER STORIES."

- Nathan Kontny, CEO of Highrise

EXAMPLE
Creative Thinker:
"I was asked to design a product with at least 12 separate parts for class. Beyond that, we were free to do whatever we wanted. While most of my classmates designed complex consumer electronics, I saw an opportunity to combine my love of design with my interest in oceanography. After extensive research, I designed a toy of 14 interlocking pieces to represent the importance of a complete ecosystem! Take away even the smallest brine shrimp, and the environment crumbles. I loved the chance to think creatively about the problem at hand."

Leader:
"I've always been the kid in class that shoots my hand up to volunteer or the first kid to venture into the scary basement. I like to take charge and help guide my team to greatness. As captain of the soccer team at SCAD, I have to help new teammates feel included. I organized a special pancake breakfast last year to welcome our new players to the team."

Good at conflict resolution:
"I have 3 brothers, so I grew up constantly negotiating between volatile parties. Once they were fighting because Tim ate the last of Henry's Halloween candy. I sat them both down and we talked through the problem and how it made everyone feel. Tim ended up feeling horrible when he realized he had eaten the candy Henry had been saving for last, and apologized. He used his allowance to buy Henry a big Snicker's bar. Conflict, resolved."

I'm boring and don't have any good stories.
Nonsense! A good story can come from anywhere. The examples above aren't exactly climbing Mt. Everest, but they convey personality and valuable skills.

Work with your Career Adviser and the Writing Center if you need help editing your stories down. Aim to edit each story down to 3-5 sentences.

Now you have 5 great stories about yourself. You'll be able to reference one or two of these in your cover letter. Don't try to fit all five! That would be too long. The goal of the cover letter is to leave a positive impression on your reader, not convey absolutely everything about yourself.

Read through the job posting you want to apply for, twice. Which of your 5 skills do you think would be most relevant for this position?

WORD CLOUD

If you're struggling to identify what a job posting is looking for, try making a word cloud. A word cloud analyzes a large amount of text (like a job posting), and makes the words frequently repeated larger. It can help visualize the job posting's focus.

For example, here is a Word Cloud from an Amazon UX design internship posting. Of course "Amazon, "design," and "work" are large, but notice that "leadership" and "independently" are also prominent. I would want to use a story focusing on my leadership abilities in my cover letter, and try to use these words in my resume.
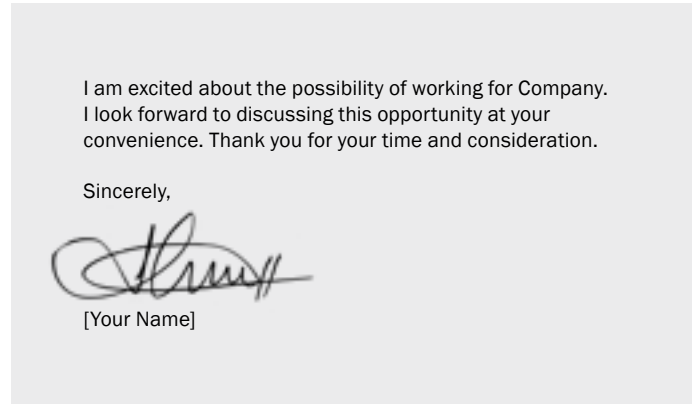

Created at wordle.net

CONCLUSION 1-2 sentences	Now thank your reader for their time and offer up your availability for an interview. This is a very standard conclusion and can be same for all of your cover letters (but remember to change the company's name!!) End your letter with "Sincerely," and sign your letter. Include your name typed as well, since your signature is most likely difficult to read. Remember to leave space for your signature.

I am excited about the possibility of working for Company. I look forward to discussing this opportunity at your convenience. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

EXAMPLE

DESIGN + *SPELLING*	**Branding** Your cover letter part of your professional branding. Your resume, cover letter, and portfolio should all have related elements and branding. Use the same fonts and header/logo from your resume on your cover letter. Unlike your resume, your cover letter should be size 10 - 12 pt font. A 1" - 1.5" margin is appropriate.

SPELL CHECK!

A misspelled word is a red flag to employers that you don't care. It's very important everything be spelled correctly. Spell check is available in InDesign, Illustrator, and Photoshop!

In InDesign
Edit > Spelling > Check Spelling

In Illustrator and Photoshop
Edit > Check Spelling

THE GOOD

DO brag! Now is not the time to be humble and downplay your strengths. Speak about yourself confidently. Be sincere, and don't exaggerate. Are you truly the world's great designer of all time? You can boast as long as you have the evidence to back it up.

DO keep it short. A cover letter should be under 300 words (about half a page).

DO have someone else read it. You may have missed something or your tone is not coming off as you intended. Your Career Adviser is a good resource for reading cover letters.

DO make it interesting. Remember your cover letter will be read by a real person, and a person that probably reads *a lot* of cover letters. Ask yourself, "Would I want to read this?"

THE BAD

DON'T apologize for a lack of qualifications. Always keep it positive. If the position asks for five years experience and you only have three? Highlight how much responsibility you were given during those three years and how much you've grown.

DON'T repeat your resume. They've seen your resume, what else do you have to offer? Remember to be specific to the position and use ancedotes.

DON'T be overally formal. You want to be respectful; think of how you'd talk to a professor. Don't use formal words you would never use. Bad: "It is my greatest honor to extend my application to your esteemed company."

CAREER AND ALUMNI SUCCESS

Questions?
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