

COVER LETTER GUIDE

IN A NUTSHELL:

A cover letter provides the reader with a filter or interpretive framework for reading your resume. It says, "In a minute you are going to read my resume. Here are the most important aspects of my experience, and how they apply to this opportunity."

WHY ARE COVER LETTERS IMPORTANT

- Cover letters convey a personal sense of your *professional identity*, as well as your passion and motivation for the job and company. They also map out connections between past experiences and the position you are applying for.
- Many candidates neglect to submit cover letters but a cover letter can provide you with an opportunity to stand out and show you are serious about the position.
- *Even if a cover letter is not requested, there is value in providing one!*

WHAT MAKES A COVER LETTER PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE?

- It is free of grammatical errors and typos.
- It is tailored specifically to the job or internship.
- It is not a restatement of information from the resume. Rather, it demonstrates how your experiences are relevant to the position in question.
- It is the result of background research and networking, as well as a thoughtful writing process.

LAYOUT, FORMATTING, AND BASIC GUIDELINES

- Career Services typically recommends a *one-page, three-paragraph* cover letter.
 - **Introduction:** Who you are, what position you are interested in, where you heard about it, and why you are interested.
 - **Middle:** A series of connections between your experiences and the demands of the position. Try to synthesize the information into two or three useful themes that the employer has stated they are looking for in an applicant.
 - **Wrap-up/Thank-you:** Summarize your qualifications, offer contact information, and thank the reader for their time/consideration.
- Aim for the body of the letter to be *less than 2/3 of a page*.
- Use standard, *business letter formatting*.
- *Try to get the appropriate addressee's name.* It is worth going the extra mile to track down the hiring/department/HR manager's name. If you cannot locate this information reliably, use "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Hiring Committee" (if appropriate). Avoid addressing your cover letter "To whom it may concern."
- If you are directed to paste a cover letter in a text box, remove the address information and start with the greeting. Retain the traditional formatting if you upload it as a PDF document.

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1ST PARAGRAPH: WHO ARE YOU?

- In this paragraph, you will convey *who you are*, *what position you are interested in*, and *where you heard about it*.
- Be sure to *specify the position* (or at least the role) that you are interested in – use the organization’s own job title.
- *Explain how you have come to know about the opportunity* – if you were referred by an employee or other person significantly related to the organization or field; this is the place to mention it.
- *Express your interest and enthusiasm* in the position and organization but *be genuine* – explain why you chose to apply for *this* particular opportunity. An alternative is to use the final sentence to outline some of your *strongest qualifications* for the position. If you do list skills here, be sure to demonstrate them later in the letter.

2ND PARAGRAPH: WHAT MAKES YOU SO SPECIAL?

- *Draw parallels between your experiences and the needs of the organization* you are applying to.
- Scan the job description (and the organization’s website) for key requirements and desired qualifications – these are your primary clues for tailoring your cover letter.
- *Demonstrate* how your experiences (or groups of experiences) relate to the position – connect roles/skills you have used in the past with the employer’s needs
- You don’t have to respond to every bullet point in a job post and *you should not discuss every experience on your resume* – you are highlighting what is most pertinent to this opportunity specifically.
- You don’t have to address your experiences in chronological order – try to *highlight the most relevant aspects of your experience first*.

MAPPING IT OUT

Group an employer's needs into categories - they might be *specified technical skills/qualifications*, or *key transferrable skills*, such as: communication, organization, time management, leadership, and analytical skills.

Consider how your experiences connect with these categories. Imagine the perspective of the reader - what is the most easily understandable way to bring your experiences and skills together? Here are some examples:

- "My internship experiences with ___ and ___ allowed me to develop leadership and project planning skills that will help me successfully coordinate events in this position."
- "In my work with ___, I collaborated constantly with other team members to ensure..."
- "Beyond my ___ coursework, my experience with ___ allowed me to further develop my capabilities in ___."

3RD PARAGRAPH: THE CONCLUSION

- Restate your *interest* in the organization and/or job and summarize what you have to offer.
- Provide or reference your *contact information* (in the text of the final paragraph) and indicate any next steps you wish to pursue (For example, "I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss my qualifications with you.")
- Finally, *thank the reader* for their time and consideration.

FINAL CHECK

- Make sure there are no spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors.
- The letter should be clear and concise. If someone spoke it aloud to you, would it make sense?
- The letter should make specific connections between your experiences and the needs of the organization.
- Match the font style and size of your resume and use proper business letter layout.
- Read it out loud – you will be surprised at the typos and awkward grammar that this practice uncovers

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SAMPLE: COVER LETTER

6525 N. Sheridan Road
Gina Gilbert
1300 W. Loyola Avenue
Chicago, IL 60660

June 23, 2018

Mr. Robert Cohen
Human Resources
NorthShore University Health System
9200 Ridge Road
Evanston, IL 60201

Dear Mr. Cohen:

I was excited to learn about the Communications Intern position advertised on your website and have enclosed my resume for your consideration. I am a junior at Loyola University Chicago majoring in Health Systems Management and have become increasingly interested in exploring communications roles in the healthcare field.

I believe my interpersonal and organizational skills, as well as my recent efforts developing the online presence for my university's Career Development Center, make me a strong candidate for the position. As a student worker at the Career Development Center, I continue to hone my communication skills and attention to detail by assessing student needs and scheduling them with one of 12 career advisors. This past semester, I took initiative to expand the office's online presence using social media platforms. My bi-weekly posts to the center's blog and my contributions to the center's Facebook page have increased its visibility with current students and alumni considerably. I was also recognized for my creative contributions to the center's recent marketing contest.

I know that NorthShore enjoys an excellent reputation among health care providers and patients, and I believe that I would be a valuable asset to your organization. I can be contacted at ggilb2@luc.edu or (773) 555-1212 to further discuss my application.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Gina Gilbert

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SAMPLE: COVER LETTER

Lilly Ledbetter
123 Main Street
Chicago, IL 60660

May 29, 2018

Ms. Ann Hopkins
Executive Director, Greater Employment Opportunities
123 Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60603

Dear Ms. Hopkins:

Following up on our recent conversation, I am submitting my resume to apply for the position of Policy Director. I look forward to contributing to the important work you do, specifically to promote women's access to and success in post-secondary education and training.

The focus of my career as a union organizer has been to improve the lives of low-wage workers. In my union, Serenity Now, the workforce has been predominantly women working in the service industry. My ten years in the labor movement have provided me the opportunity to work in a variety of roles. Beginning as a field organizer, visiting workers in their homes and running union meetings developed my strong interpersonal and relationship-building skills. After working on multiple successful campaigns, I was recruited to work in the education department of our international union to promote its Human Fund. The learning curve was steep —shifting the focus of my work to research and strategy while continuing to rely on my solid communication skills. After successfully mounting a campaign at one of the state's largest clothing manufacturers, I was promoted to the position of organizing director. In this role, my responsibilities have included recruiting and developing a team of organizers, running multiple internship programs, designing campaign structure and making final strategy decisions.

I recognize that the work of this position may be new to me, but my entire career with the union has been a series of challenges that have required me to adapt to new environments and acquire new skills. I have succeeded each time because I am a quick learner, a good listener, and an activist with the ability to see broadly, think strategically and act decisively. I am confident that if I become Policy Director that I can motivate your staff to work hard toward creating fundamental policy change in support of GEO's mission. Thank you for considering me for the position. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Lilly Ledbetter

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Lilly Ledbetter
123 Main Street
Chicago, IL 60660

May 29, 2018

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Executive Director, Greater Employment Opportunities
123 Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60603

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Sincerely,
Lilly Ledbetter

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SAMPLE: COVER LETTER

Clarence Darrow
6300 N. Winthrop Avenue
Chicago, IL 60626

May 7, 2018

Ms. Tami Taylor
Human Resources Manager
McDermott Will & Emery LLP
227 W. Monroe
Chicago, IL 60606

Dear Ms. Taylor:

I am writing to apply for the Practice Development assistant position you recently advertised on Loyola University Chicago's RamblerLink website. I will be graduating this May with degrees in Political Science and International Studies, and have a strong interest in attending law school in the future. Through my internship with your firm's Rome office, I learned firsthand about McDermott's commitment to excellence and, in particular, its focus on building a strong firm culture across its practice groups.

My past work experiences would serve me well in a position that requires someone with knowledge of the legal field and solid organizational and administrative skills. During the fall of 2017, I completed a semester-long internship at McDermott's Rome office while also enrolled at Loyola's John Felice Rome Center. There I used my language skills to translate documents from Italian into English and draft correspondence for members of one of the firm's trial teams, integrating myself quickly and smoothly with the firm's support staff. Since returning from Rome, I have continued to pursue my interest in the law with two internships through the Circuit Court of Cook County. At these positions, I have demonstrated my attention to detail and my thoroughness while preparing trial packets and transcribing subject interviews for a wide variety of cases, skills I believe would be invaluable to your Practice Development team.

I would be proud to be associated with your firm, and would appreciate the opportunity to discuss my qualifications with you at your convenience. Enclosed is my resume for your review. Please feel to contact me at cdarrow@luc.edu or (773) 555-1212 if you have any further questions. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Clarence Darrow