



CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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CONSTRUCTING A COVER LETTER

KEY ELEMENTS

Writing a cover letter is like writing a brief persuasive essay. You make a thesis statement or a claim about something, you back up that claim with evidence and then you draw it to a close. Once again, the key elements are your:

1. *Thesis statement*

In this case, it would be that you are an excellent candidate for a given opportunity (i.e. job description of your choice) because of your specific skills, abilities, experience.

2. *Evidence*

Support your thesis statement with brief, specific examples of relevant skills, abilities or experiences that make you an excellent candidate.

3. *Closing statement*

Affirm your interest in the opportunity, request an interview or say when and how you will follow-up, and thank the employer for considering your application.

Remember that your cover letter builds a bridge between your resume and the opportunity at hand. Focus on the most relevant, strongest skills you bring to the employer.

Both standard and common examples of cover letters are provided on pages three and four of this packet. Good luck and please call **THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER FOR AN APPOINTMENT AT 413-538-2080** if you would like further guidance or feedback.

GUIDELINES

- **Be simple and brief.** Say what you mean without verbosity. Keep it to one page, 3-5 paragraphs long consisting of 2-5 sentences each. You should use terminology and buzzwords of the career field to display your familiarity with the profession, but do not overdo it.
- **Only make statements that can be verified.** You should be able to cite specific examples that demonstrate your skills.
- **Identify yourself as a good solution to the employer's needs.** Relate your strengths to the requirements of the position and explain how you meet the qualifications. Stress what you can contribute to the position, not what you want out of it.
- **Highlight important aspects of your resume.** Use key phrases to bring your reader's attention to the major achievements and talents that make you a good candidate.
- **Research the company before you write.** Review websites, brochures, and conduct an internet search to glean pertinent information that can inform your approach to the letter.

- **Use active, descriptive words.**

adept
 assertive
 ambitious
 analytical
 competent
 conscientious
 creative
 dependable
 diplomatic
 disciplined
 dynamic
 effective
 efficient
 empathetic
 energetic
 enterprising
 extensive

imaginative
 innovative
 instrumental
 logical
 objective
 perceptive
 pioneering
 productive
 realistic
 reliable
 resourceful
 responsible
 responsive
 sensitive
 strong
 tactful
 versatile

MOST COMMON ERRORS

- **Sending a generic letter to all employers.** Tailor each letter to the specific needs and characteristics of each organization. Try to create an industry-specific cover letter that is easily adaptable so you do not have to completely rewrite each time.
- **Neglecting to double (and triple) check that the person/company to whom you have addressed the letter is the same as the person/company to whom you refer in the body of the letter.** Be sure to change all references to match each employer’s name, organization, and type of business or the position involved.
- **Writing to negate your “weaknesses” instead of focusing on your strengths.** Focus on matching your skills to the job description as well as the organization/company’s vision. Avoid beginning sentences with “although.”
- **Stating that you are willing or able to do “any or every job.”** Instead, show that you have direction and are self-aware by being specific in what you want to do and for whom (i.e. the company or organization to which you are applying).
- **Using superficial or flowery terms** such as: “hardworking,” “loyal,” “love,” “perfect,” or “passionate.”
- **Submitting the document with errors and/or typos.** Do not rely solely on the computer’s spell-check function. Proofread and edit thoroughly. Ask a friend, relative or CDC staff member to do the same.
- **Letters sent by email need not be signed.** However, if you are sending a hardcopy or faxed letter, be sure you sign it.