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  imaginative  
  assertive  innovative  
  ambitious  instrumental  
  analytical  logical  
  competent  objective  
  conscientious  perceptive  
  creative  pioneering  
  dependable  productive  
  diplomatic  realistic  
  disciplined  reliable  
  dynamic  resourceful  
  effective  responsible  
  efficient  responsive  
  empathetic  sensitive  
  energetic  strong  
  enterprising  tactful  
  extensive  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.
FORMAL EXAMPLE

Your name

Current Address
City, State, Zipcode

Date

Mr./Ms./Dr. Name
Title
Organization/Company Name
Street Address
City, State, Zipcode

Dear Ms./Mr./Dr. Last Name:

1st Paragraph- State why you are writing. Name the position or the type of work for which you are applying. Mention how you heard about the job opening. Make a claim as to why you are an excellent candidate for the position (Hint: This is your thesis statement for the letter).

2nd Paragraph or 2nd and 3rd Paragraph- This is where you will elaborate on your thesis. Do not directly repeat information from your resume. Highlight the skills or areas of expertise you will bring to the position, i.e., your educational credentials, employment experience, and personal attributes that qualify you for the position by including specific examples from your experiences. Also, think about who the reader is: what skills are valued in this particular field? What are some of the issues or trends this employer might be facing? How can you make a contribution to this organization? If you’ve “done your homework” you’ll already be aware of some of the answers as well as some terminology of the field. Reflect this awareness and knowledge in your letter.

Closing paragraph- Refer the reader to the enclosed resume. State that additional information concerning your background and interests will gladly be furnished upon request (this includes your references). State that you will contact them (usually in a week) to see if you might set up a mutually convenient time to meet, or that you may be contacted at either your email address or phone. Include both your phone number and email address because neither appears above. In the event of an on-campus interview or previously agreed upon action, state that you look forward to talking with the employer about the opportunity in the near future. Thank the reader for their time and consideration of your application.

Sincerely,

(Space for your signature)

Typed Name

Enclosure

Make a phone call or two to find out the correct name, spelling, and title, of the individual you should contact if it is unclear in the job posting to whom you should address the letter. If no name is provided, use Human Resources, Search Committee, or Hiring Manager.

If you are asked to send your resume and cover letter via U.S. Mail, please use quality stationary and envelopes that match as well as heavier paper such as cardstock. Presentation will be critical in setting yourself apart from the rest of the candidates.
COMMON EXAMPLE

Your Name
Current Address, City, State, Zipcode
Email address and Phone Number

Date

Mr./Ms./Dr. Name
Title
Organization/Company Name
Street Address
City, State, Zipcode

Dear Ms./Mr./Dr. Last Name:

1st Paragraph- State why you are writing. Name the position or the type of work for which you are applying. Mention how you heard about the job opening. Make a claim as to why you are an excellent candidate for the position (Hint: This is your thesis statement for the letter).

2nd Paragraph or 2nd and 3rd Paragraph- This is where you will elaborate on your thesis. Do not directly repeat information from your resume. Highlight the skills or areas of expertise you will bring to the position, i.e., your educational credentials, employment experience, and personal attributes that qualify you for the position by including specific examples from your experiences. Some significant skills employers always seek are leadership, decision-making, and communication. Include these if you have the experience to support such claims. Also, think about who the reader is: what skills are valued in this particular field? What are some of the issues or trends this employer might be facing? How can you make a contribution to this organization? If you’ve “done your homework” you’ll already be aware of some of the answers as well as some terminology of the field of choice. Reflect this awareness and knowledge in your letter. This paragraph is the key to differentiating yourself from the next candidate.

Closing paragraph- Refer the reader to the enclosed resume. State that additional information concerning your background and interests will gladly be furnished upon request (this includes your references). State that you will contact them (usually in a week) to see if you might set up a mutually convenient time to meet, or that you may be contacted at either your email address or phone. Include both your phone number and email address because neither appears above. In the event of an on-campus interview or previously agreed upon action, state that you look forward to talking with the employer about the opportunity in the near future. Thank the reader for their time and consideration of your application.

Sincerely,

(Space for your signature)
Typed Name

This format mimics that of your resume. If you are sending this cover letter via email, placing your name at the top in the same format as your resume (such as the one used in this example) helps the employer keep all of your documents together during the hiring process. It also looks more professional and organized.

Remember to make a phone call or two to find out the correct name, spelling, and title, of the individual you should contact if it is unclear in the job posting to whom you should address the letter. If no name is provided, use Human Resources, Search Committee, or Hiring Manager.