

How to Write a Cover Letter

If well-written, your resume will detail your skills and accomplishments in a thorough way that speaks to the requirements in the job posting. The cover letter should complement the resume by telling the employer **specifically why you want to work for THEM!** It should:

- Expand upon the facts listed on your resume by showing the potential employer that you understand their organization's mission and goals (sleuth their social media), what they need in the position you are applying for, and how the skills and qualities you possess are ready to meet that need
- Demonstrate that you possess great written communication skills (a quality that ranks anywhere from #1 to #3 on annual surveys of skills employer seek)
- Present a narrative that tells them how you want them to feel/think about you
- Begin with a thesis statement that will guide how you structure the rest of the letter. In order to come up with the thesis statement, you must analyze the job posting to identify the employer's needs and organizational goals and the language they use to describe the work they do
- *Never duplicate, resume information.* It should draw clear connections between the needs of the organization/ position, your passion for the organization/position, and your ability to do the job
- Ideally, all text is left justified in block format. Put a single space between each paragraph

IMPORTANT NOTES:

1. The cover letter should **always** be tailored to a specific position/organization – one size does *not* fit all
2. There is one key piece of information that you **must** include in your cover letter: Demonstrate what you know about the employer; their mission, business model, recent achievements, etc... and tie that knowledge into your own skills and achievements relevant to doing the job.

Who should it be addressed to? If the name of the contact person is not given in the job listing (or if you are sending an "unsolicited" letter of inquiry), here are strategies for finding a name of an appropriate individual:

- Call company/agency HR department directly and ask for a contact person for the position
- Check Handshake for contact information for companies who recruit at UW Madison
- If you cannot find any name to whom to address the cover letter, use "Dear Hiring Manager."

Tips for electronic delivery: Send your resume and cover letter as PDF attachments to preserve formatting unless otherwise instructed. If completing an online application which asks you to upload your resume, save the cover letter and resume as a single document and upload them as one attachment. If sending an email, you may include the cover letter in the body of the email as well as an attachment, or consider sending a shorter, introductory email referring to the attached resume and cover letter. *"Attached please find my resume and cover letter...."*

Addressing "Difficult" Issues

Difficult issues can be anything from the need for a certain start or end date, to a disability requiring accommodations, to why an employer should hire a candidate who needs to move from central Wisconsin to Washington DC. Basically, difficult issues are anything that make you worried that the employer might exclude you from the candidate pool before you even get a chance to present yourself in person if not addressed in some way at this stage of the hiring process.

- *To address or not to address?* – Obviously you'd much rather explain these things in person during an interview, but if you are worried you may never get an interview unless you explain them first, check with a career advisor
- *Be succinct* – If you do address something, don't spend more than 1-2 sentences on it. You are merely trying to be proactive, not giving the employer your life story
- *Where should they be mentioned?* – Difficult items should only be brought-up in the final paragraph of the cover letter
- *Salary Requirements* - Applicants are sometimes asked to include salary requirements. If you must address this in the cover letter, the final paragraph is the place to do it. Here are a few key tips to keep in mind if asked about this:
 - Try to never give a specific dollar amount, but instead list a range if possible (e.g \$45,000-\$65,000)
 - Let your prospective employer know that salary isn't the only criteria by which you judge a job offer (benefits!)
 - Research salary information for comparable positions on www.salary.com or www.glassdoor.com

Your street address (notice your name is not here)

Your City, State and Zip Code (no phone number or email address)

Date

Contact's name

Title (if known)

Organization Name

Street Address (if known)

City, State and Zip Code (if known)

SALUTATION: "Dear Mr. Smith:" or "Dear Ms. Jones:" or simply "Dear Hiring Manager:" or "Dear Hiring Committee:"

INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH (Thesis Statement)

Start with a "grabber" statement that shows your excitement and interest. This is your chance to tell the employer how you heard about the position and/or mention a personal connection you have with the organization if you have one. You should also tell them why their organization and its work appeals to you. Then add your thesis statement to tell the employer why you and the they belong together. It should be direct and confident without being arrogant or dry. You have the skills/abilities they need and you are going to prove that to them in this letter. **Ex: "Brian Jenkins, director of your Environmental Policy office, recently told me about the Management Analyst position at XYZ. I'd like to show how the research, environmental policy analysis, and project management skills I have gained during my time at the La Follette School of Public Affairs make me an excellent candidate for this position."**

BODY PARAGRAPHS (Proof Statements)

Body paragraphs should demonstrate two things: *Why you are a good fit for the job, and why you want to work for this specific employer.* They are usually 3-6 sentences long and can be longer or shorter depending on relevant content but never just one sentence. The Body of the cover letter is the place where you support your Thesis Statement from the Intro Paragraph by making connections for the employer between your skills and the needs of their business.

- In the example above, research skills were listed first, so you would begin by discussing your research experience: **Ex: "Throughout my work and academic experiences, I developed strong research abilities...."**
 - Follow that statement with some examples which illustrate your research skills (work, volunteer opportunities, class projects, etc...)
 - Show how your experiences tie into the employer's mission, and/or business model, and/or the specific job you're applying for
- Move onto the next skill listed in your Thesis Statement (in this example "environmental policy analysis") and complete steps 1-3 for that skill and finally do the same thing with "project management."

CONCLUSION PARAGRAPH

Start with a restatement of your thesis that ties the letter together. This is also the place to mention any "difficult issues" and to include closing thoughts such as: "I look forward to learning more about this position." It should end with you thanking them for their time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Steps to Make Your Cover Letter REALLY Stand Out*

Paragraph 1: Tell A Story

In the first paragraph of your disruptive cover letter, you need to establish a connection between you and the employer. How do you do that? Well, you need to [tell a story](#).

The surest way to stand out to employers is to tell a story about why you feel connected to their company.

Don't just reiterate what you say in your resume in the very first paragraph of your cover letter. Explain what you admire about the company you're applying to. Do they sell a product or provide a service that's had a big impact on your life? Do they support causes you are passionate about? Why do you feel connected to their mission? Ultimately, you want to tell a story about what drew you to the company, and the important role it has played in your life.

Paragraph 2: Dig Deeper and Get Them Excited About What Comes Next

The second paragraph must provide the hiring manager with some added context about your unique background, and set the stage for some career highlights that, to quote an old saying, "puts your money where your mouth is." Blend language from the job description together with nuggets of information that are unique to you. Set the stage for [how you are qualified](#) for the role you are applying to. But, don't overdo it. Continue your story and relate it to the position, all while emphasizing that connection.

Paragraph 3: Hard Hitting Highlights

Select a couple examples from your resume that you believe will impress recruiters and hiring managers. Rather than a complete cut and paste, reword these achievements and frame it in a way that shows the employers what you can do for them. In many cases, numbers resonate more so than words, so be sure to include [quantifiable examples](#) wherever possible.

Paragraph 4: Say Goodbye While Refreshing Their Memory

In this fourth and last paragraph, be sure to thank the hiring manager for taking the time to read it (remember that not all managers do!) Next, use this last bit of space to help the reader connect the dots to show them why you are a great [job candidate](#), a business-of-one who can provide a service they need, with a personal connection to the company that is invaluable. Remember: You never get a second chance to make a first impression. Make yours count with an impactful and disruptive cover letter that separates you from the competition.

SAMPLE COVER LETTER

1234 University Ave
Madison, WI 53703

February xx, 20xx

Jane Smith
President and CEO
DAIS Madison
123 S. State St., Madison, WI 53706

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am excited to apply for the Chief of Staff position at DAIS. DAIS serves a critically important role in our community and I would be proud to be part of your team. My strong, personal commitment to your organization's mission and services will make me a stalwart advocate of the organization and a dedicated employee, and my skills in data and personnel management, and familiarity with progressing an organization's policy agenda will fit in well with the needs of the position.

I believe in the importance of DAIS's work to protect and educate domestic violence survivors and their families. I am passionate about addressing the failings of our criminal justice system and empowering those affected by domestic violence to advocate for social change through the tools of support, education, and outreach. DAIS has been a pillar of the Madison community since its founding and I am eager to be a part of continuing your work into the 21st century; perhaps even innovating new ways to connect with clients and families and the local community. My undergraduate studies in Gender and Women's Issues coupled with my graduate studies in Policy and the five years I worked with a Chicago area group home for women recovering from drug and alcohol abuse have well equipped me to take on this leadership role. While I enjoy working to build a better American health care system in my current role, I miss the tremendous amount of personal fulfillment that came from being part of an organization making people's lives better in the present.

As I mentioned, I also recognize and support the importance of providing honest and accurate information about domestic violence to both youth and adults; recognizing that abuse is not a single gender issue, but one that affects all of us. DAIS's educational work in our community is critical to counteracting inaccurate beliefs and disinformation that can prevent domestic violence victims from seeking safety from physical and emotional harm. Education has played a central role in my career for years. I know the power of public and community education to move hearts and minds toward empathy and support for policies and programs. As part of the DAIS team, I would leverage my professional and academic experience in support of this educational work.

The advancement of our shared worldview and values requires more than individual and community education. At a time of social distancing when many violence victims may have no alternative but to remain trapped in silence with their abuser, DAIS can be the voice that convinces someone that even now, there is somewhere to go, someone who cares, and help. I will continue to advocate for strong public policies and programs that support and protect victims and families and educate the public on the need. While we need leaders on the inside of government who share our values and priorities, we also need effective and tireless advocates on the outside, pushing our leaders to do what is right. DAIS's work to hold government leaders accountable to our community is invaluable. I would be thrilled to utilize my years of experience in government policymaking and administration, policy analysis, and issue advocacy in support of your public affairs work.

I hope you will agree that my professional experience and commitment to DAIS's services will make me a valuable and effective member of the DAIS team. I welcome the opportunity learn more about the Chief of Staff position and to discuss my qualifications. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide you with any further information. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Roberta La Follette