

# Cover Letter Composition

A cover letter or cover e-mail often serves as your first introduction to a potential employer, giving them a sense of who you are, what your experience is, and how much you know about the job you are seeking.

## An Example Template

*Your name*  
*Mailing address*  
*City, state, and zip*

*Today's date*

*Your addressee's name (Call the company to find out the hiring individual.)*  
*Professional title*  
*Organization name*  
*Mailing address*  
*City, state and zip*

*Dear Mr. or Ms. Last name,*

*Start your letter with a grabber—a statement that establishes a connection with your reader. If you're excited about the potential of working there, say it. Briefly identify what job you are applying for and why you're qualified. Be especially careful to include language from the job announcement (this is important for the first reader who sorts the mail). If you have any experience or special association with the company, be sure to include this as well. Be as explicit as possible while also maintaining brevity.*

*The mid-section of your letter should be one or two short paragraphs that make relevant points about your qualifications. You should not summarize your resume! The resume tends to “tell” the reader; here, you're showing the reader your qualifications. Be authentic about yourself and don't hesitate to integrate some experiences you've had in the field. You may incorporate a column or bullet point format here to highlight significant aspects of your qualifications. Be descriptive and specific in your examples.*

*Your last paragraph should initiate action by explaining what you will do next (such as calling the reader) or asking the reader to contact you to set up an interview. Close by saying “thank you.”*

*Sincerely yours,*

*Your handwritten signature*

*Your name (typed)*

*Enclosure: resume*

## Brainstorming for the Cover Letter

**Consider your strengths.** Think about what others have said about you, or ask them now. Use a thesaurus if need be to integrate professional language. (i.e. My colleagues at Jefferson Elementary have frequently acknowledged my sincere commitment to others. This is realized in my community service work in the Kiwanis...)

**Reflect on your experiences at Antioch University** and describe briefly that academic experience. (Presently, I am completing a two-year accelerated program at Antioch University Seattle designed for para-educators. This program has encouraged my growth in computer technology and diversity education.)

**Think back to your other experiences and how they contribute** to your own life-long learning as well as the strengths that you'll bring to the job. Remember, you are extraordinary! Show it (describe your educational experience and your ambitions).

**Research the position.** Illustrate that knowledge in the letter (know your audience!).

## Writing the Cover Letter

Above all, write your letter in an upbeat voice. Be positive and enthusiastic about applying for the position. Remember the purpose here: you want the reader to acknowledge your credentials and look at the attached resume. Ultimately, though, you want to get an interview!

**Role of the writer:** You're applying for a position. You want to impress so that you're invited for an interview. However, you should exude a confidence about yourself. **YOU DESERVE AN INTERVIEW!**

**Audience(s):** Find out who will be reading your letter and address it to them. If there are multiple people, address it accordingly. Your letter must comply with the institution's expectations so that it's forwarded to the next reader. There may be a hiring committee, or a higher-up who weighs in on decisions. Always, remember your audience's needs: clarity of writing, professional qualifications, polished document.

**Topic:** Show that you're informed about the position you're applying for and the organization or business involved. Share that knowledge in the letter, but be sure it's germane. Do not include a canned statement, and do not simply duplicate elements of the resume. If you've been encouraged to apply by someone you expect is highly regarded, then don't neglect to include that person's name in your letter.

## Format

### Headers

Most word processors let you customize the header for your document.

- Use a larger font for your name or initials.
- Make it polished and professional looking.
- Put your address on the next line and then include your Telephone number(s) and Email address on the third line.
- Do not use an email address that is overtly personal (for example, “autogirl@abcd.com”). If you have to, create a new email address for your job search.
- Match the header of your resume if sending both.

## **On Paper Quality**

People differ about the value of top quality stationery, but most would agree that having a lighter colored stationery is more appropriate, especially when applications are photocopied for multiple readers.

## **For Digital Submission**

*Always* send in your final document as a PDF to preserve formatting and fonts. If you submit a document from a word processor, you run the risk of it looking completely different to the reader.

## **Final Considerations**

- Remember, the cover letter is your opportunity to shine, to share a sense of yourself. Represent your professional self honestly and enthusiastically.
- When you have a draft, read your letter aloud to hear the tone of the wording.
- Share your letter with someone you know. Ask this person if the letter reflects your personality and appropriately impresses the reader of your qualifications.
- Customize letters for the position you're seeking. It might seem very tempting but relying on a boilerplate letter will not impress. Instead, do a little homework and tell your prospective employer a few things you are excited about in their organization or business.
- Use a formal business style in the document. Generally, this means single spacing with double spacing between paragraphs.
- Proofread, proofread, proofread! Errors are damaging and unfortunately create a permanent impression on the reader. Have someone else edit it as well to ensure that it reads smoothly and to spot any errors you overlooked.