Writing a Cover Letter

Everyone will have to write a cover letter at some point, as most job applications require cover letters. Often, a bad cover letter means that the rest of the application is never glanced at. So how do you write a cover letter that gets you that look at your application? This handout discusses the content of a cover letter. For sample cover letters and further help, visit the UTD Career Center.

Quick Tips
- Tailor your cover letter to the position. Write a new cover letter for every job. Generic parts of the cover letter, such as the opening and closing paragraphs, can follow a similar format and be reused, but it shows if you recycle too much of a cover letter.
- Keep it simple and short. A concise cover letter can be impactful.
- Always revise and proofread carefully.
- Avoid gimmicks and clichés.
- Pay attention to format, even when applying online.
- Above all, be professional.

Typical Cover Letter

The typical cover letter has a few sections: an opening, a body, and a conclusion. Keep in mind that the entire purpose of a cover letter is to convince a potential employer to look at your résumé.

Opening paragraph
Tell your reader why you are writing. Don't make your reader guess; be as specific as possible. State which job you are applying for and how you heard about the position. If applicable, mention the name of someone that works or worked at that company and has a good rapport with you and the company. Give your reader a brief idea of who you are. Tell them where your past experiences come from, what skills you have, and why you want to apply to this job.

Body (1 – 2 paragraphs)
The body serves to "sell" you to the reader and explain how your experiences make you a worthy candidate for the position. Apply your résumé rather than restate it. You don't want the cover letter to just be a paragraph form of your résumé; you want it to explain the characteristics and skills you possess. The point of the body is to make the reader excited to look at your résumé. Keep it interesting and concise.

If you're writing one body paragraph: Talk about how you would be a good fit for the company culture in a sentence or two. Then spend the rest of the paragraph showing how you would benefit the company in this position.
If you're writing two body paragraphs: Focus one paragraph on the company and another paragraph on the job. In that first paragraph, reference things the company does: projects, major contracts, what they stand for, their mission statement, etc. Include how those relate to you. This can show the employer why you would be a good fit in their company culture. Tie in relevant experience, skills, and attributes.

The second paragraph should focus on the specific job you're applying for. You need to show what you can offer to this company in this position. Why are you more uniquely qualified for the position than any other candidate? Be as precise as possible and make sure to reference your experience. One or two examples should be fine.

**Conclusion**

In the conclusion, request an interview and include your contact information. Thank your reader for his/her time and leave on a confident note. Keep the conclusion short and concise; remember that a cover letter should only be a page in length.

**Contact**

Once you are confident that your cover letter accurately says everything you want it to, it is a good idea to have someone else look it over. Drop by or use the information below to contact us and set up an appointment.

(972) 883-6736  WritingCenter@UTDallas.edu
www.UTDallas.edu/StudentSuccess/Writing