

University of Montana

Cover Letters

***Letters are important contacts with employers.
Here's how to make a good impression:***

COVER LETTER OVERVIEW & TIPS

The purpose of this one-page letter is to speak directly to an employer about your interest in a position and how your background relates. Whereas your résumé addresses **WHAT, WHEN, and HOW** you've gained skills and experience, your cover letter demonstrates **WHY** – Why are you drawn to this field? Why are you interested in the position? Why are you interested in working for the employer? Why should they be interested in you?

- The goal is to connect with the reader and pique their interest enough to take a deeper look at your résumé. It is NOT meant to summarize your résumé.
- Your cover letter should speak directly to the needs of the reader, convey your passion and personality, and answer the questions “Why do you want this job?” and “Why are you a good fit for the position?”
- Communicate your alignment with the company's values and mission statement. Show that you care about the same things they do.
- The cover letter serves as a “bridge” between your résumé and the job description. It should draw attention to and expand on the most important information from your résumé, directly relating it to the qualifications.

Should you submit a cover letter?

Follow the application instructions and submit a cover letter if required. If a cover letter is not required, here are some considerations to keep in mind, as every recruiting situation is different:

- A well-written, highly customized letter can set you apart from the candidate pool for competitive positions.
- A generic letter, or one with errors, will often hurt more than it will help your chances.
- Because a job seeker has limited time, it often comes down to how much you want the particular position and whether you are willing to put in the time to develop a highly customized cover letter.

DOS

- Make it clear why you want to work for the employer and why you're a great fit for the position.
- Match format, font, and letterhead to your résumé.
- Keep it clear and concise (1-page).
- Include keywords to fit the job description.
- Follow the job/internship posting prompts, if provided.
- Address it to a specific person or “Hiring Manager” or “Hiring Committee.”
- Focus on the key elements of your background that most closely match the position qualifications.
- Have a Career Professional provide feedback.

DON'TS

- Submit a generic cover letter or templated one.
- Include redundant content from your résumé.
- Include personal information (marital status, age, religious and political affiliations, etc.).
- Overuse “I” or “My,” especially to begin sentences.
- Address your letter “To Whom It May Concern” or the wrong company/position.
- Exceed 1-page.
- Include anything untrue (shine the best light on yourself, but don't exaggerate).

Opening Lines

The opening line is critical. It is your opportunity to pull in the reader and make them curious to learn more about you. Starting your cover letter with any variation of the overused “I am writing to apply for the [position title] at [organization name]” will likely make the reader’s eyes gloss over and prompt them to push your application aside in search of a letter that captures their attention. Here are some ideas/prompts to get you started:

- Mention the name and title of someone in the company who encouraged you to apply or shared information that made you eager to apply.
- Connect yourself to their mission statement right off the bat.
- Mention how you were impacted by something you learned about their mission, product, or service, then connect it to your background.
- Use a friendly, conversational tone that conveys your personality while being considerate of the company and/or industry culture.
- Tell a brief story that illustrates your admiration for the organization or your commitment/passion for the field.
- Shake up the standard cover letter format by showcasing your relevant skills right off the bat.

There’s not one “right” way to write a cover letter. As long as it keeps the reader’s attention and motivates them to continue reading, inspiring them to want to meet with you for an interview, it has done its job.

ADDITIONAL NOTE

Networking Letter

Sometimes, people will send a cover letter to inquire about current or potential vacancies and establish communication with organizations about future employment. Personalize each letter based on your research of the organization(s).

- Use the full name and job title of the reader when possible.
- State your interest in the organization and why you want to work (intern) there.
- Mention your interest in applying should a position exist or open up in the near future.
- Highlight your experience and/or academic accomplishments related to the position.
- Enclose a résumé and offer to provide additional information.

As you begin to create your cover letter, on **ElevateU Online** for more tips on how compelling and targeted:



check out the following learning journeys to design a cover letter that is both

- **Representing Yourself Professionally:**
 - **Directing Your Cover Letter to Your Target Audience**
 - **Draft a Cover Letter**
 - **Polishing Cover Letters**
- **Know Your Skills**
- **Company Research**

COVER LETTER FORMAT

Your Letterhead Matching Your Résumé

Date (when you will send the letter)

Contact Person's Name (Ms. Mr. Mx. First Last)

Their Title

Name of Organization

Street Address

City, State, and Zip Code

Dear Ms., Mr., or Dr. Last Name (Never use "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Sir or Madam." If you absolutely cannot find a person's name, then use the salutation, "Dear Hiring Committee:" or similar).

FIRST PARAGRAPH

Purpose: To grab the reader's attention and answer the question "Why do you want to work for them?"

- Provide an opening 2-3 sentences that entice the reader to continue reading – reflect on the questions below and consider responding to one for your opening sentences.
 - *What drew you to the field? How did you become interested in the industry?*
 - *Did a current employee refer you to the organization? What do you like about the organization or position?*
 - *If applying for a higher-level role, what uniquely qualifies you for the advancement (e.g., internship à job; lower-level position à leadership).*
- Name the job for which you are applying.
- Mention specific knowledge of the company or role to indicate your interest.

SECOND PARAGRAPH

Purpose: To demonstrate your abilities and value to the organization by answering "Why should they hire you?"

- Acknowledge the key qualifications for the position that align with your background and strengths.
 - Do not list all of your qualifications (this information should be included in your resume) but highlight up to 3 that set you apart as a top candidate.
- Give examples of how you have leveraged these skills/strengths to accomplish results. Be sure to integrate keywords from the job description and use numbers when possible. Explain how these skills will transfer to the position.
- Don't repeat what is on your résumé. Your cover letter may discuss similar content, but it should be presented in a way that tells a story and conveys your personality.

FINAL PARAGRAPH

Purpose: To ensure follow-up action and extend your appreciation for being considered.

- Write 1-2 sentences summarizing your unique qualifications for the position.
- Thank them sincerely for their time and consideration of your application.

Sincerely,

Sign your name with signature-type font

Type your name

Enclosures: résumé and professional references

HANNAH CORTLAND

406.123.4567 | hannah.cortland@umontana.edu | Missoula, MT 59801

August 18, 2021

Hiring Committee
AWARE, Inc.
1055 Sussex Avenue
Missoula, MT 59801

Dear Hiring Committee:

Ann McDonald, your Human Resources Director, encouraged me to apply for the Youth Support Specialist role. Last year as an intern, Ann and I worked together on a staff training manual project to improve mental health service delivery at Missoula Youth Homes and AWARE Inc. She recognized my passion for working with at-risk, underserved adolescent populations and knew my career goals mirrored AWARE's philosophy of providing comprehensive, wraparound services.

In addition to earning a bachelor of arts degree in psychology, I took full advantage of my internship to develop essential skills, abilities, and qualities to become a human services professional. As you can see from my résumé, I am uniquely qualified for your Youth Support Specialist role because I am skilled in performing key administrative duties and have proven competency in provision of clinical intervention support.

Currently, as a Mental Health Program Assistant Intern at Missoula Youth Homes, I assist with clinical treatment plans and interventions under a staff therapist's supervision. I am accountable for maintaining detailed records and client treatment plans, and communicating key information to the program management team during staffing meetings. Additionally, my role involves scheduling staff and volunteers and supporting new hire and volunteer training by providing them support to work in difficult client situations. In doing so, I regularly seek professional development opportunities for the staff and myself. My accountabilities mirror those of your Youth Support Specialist role.

Thank you for considering my application for the Youth Support Specialist. I would be a valuable addition to the professional team at AWARE Inc. You may contact me at 406-123-4567 or hannah.cortland@umontana.edu to schedule an interview. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Hannah Cortland

Hannah Cortland

Enclosures: résumé and professional references

First Last

← ↓ Use the same letterhead as on your résumé

Missoula, Montana * 406.123.4567 * firstlast@gmail.com

August 18, 20XX

← Spell-out date. Add 3 blank lines. Use full block style and the same 4 equal margins and font as your résumé

Ms. First Last

Their Title

Company Name

Street Address

City State (spelled out) Zip

← Address Block - spell-out words like Street, Road, Northwest, Suite

Re: Executive Assistant

← (Optional) Reference Line with a colon

Dear Ms. Last:

← Salutation (Mr. Ms.) use a colon and 1 blank line above and below

↓ Intro Paragraph – Grab Attention!
Mention name of someone in company if possible. Connect with company’s mission.

I was excited to discover the position of Executive Assistant to the Vice President of Finance posted on Handshake at the University of Montana after having had an informational interview with Jane Fonda, Senior Manager at Human Rights Group. My professional experience in administrative support and academic background in sociology and organizational communication have prepared me well for this role. The chance to further the Human Rights Group’s commitment to the principles of dignity, equality, and justice in advancing human rights for all appeals to me greatly. My extensive skills in administration and passion for human rights qualify me exceptionally for the Executive Assistant position.

↓ Body, a sales pitch, sell skills with keywords

I am dedicated to the business operations of human rights organizations because when these operations are well-managed, the organization is empowered to do its best work. Through serving for two years as a student administrative assistant in the University of Montana Office of Admissions, I honed my skills in calendar management, meeting coordination, and program planning. Because of my reliable administrative support, admissions counselors were able to spend more time meeting directly with prospective students. My ability to provide organized, accurate, and courteous support in this role will contribute to the mission of the Human Rights group by empowering the VP to focus on high-priority account management, keeping the organization operating smoothly.

↑ Connect past experience to current position.

This position presents an opportunity to combine my administrative excellence with my passion for human rights missions. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

↑ Close, pitch yourself once more, ask for an interview, and thank the reader

Best regards,

← Complimentary Close, followed by 3 blank lines capitalizing only first word

First Last

First Last

← Type your name, followed by 1 blank line

Enclosures: résumé and application

UTILIZING AI FOR YOUR COVER LETTER

Artificial intelligence is a remarkable tool. It equips your computer to analyze data, offer predictions, and expedite decisions when extra support is needed. However, despite AI's intelligence, it sometimes falters in matters of common sense and context. While it excels at producing impressive data, its efficiency is lacking in data-sparse environments. Additionally, AI can display potential bias and limited creativity. As we dive into the landscape of AI integration, we must also consider the concerns of privacy, security and the unforeseen consequences of using this tool.

PROS OF USING CHATGPT FOR A COVER LETTER:

- **Time Efficiency:** ChatGPT can help you quickly generate a well-written cover letter.
- **Language Expertise:** ChatGPT can help you create a letter with sophisticated vocabulary and grammar.
- **Customization:** You can tailor the cover letter by providing specific information about yourself and the job you're applying for, and ChatGPT will incorporate those details into the letter.
- **Inspiration:** ChatGPT can provide you with creative ideas.
- **Editing and Polishing:** ChatGPT can assist in refining your cover letter by suggesting improvements, rephrasing sentences, and ensuring proper formatting

CONS OF USING CHATGPT FOR A COVER LETTER

- **Lack of Personalization:** ChatGPT might not capture your personal voice, experiences and motivations, making the cover letter feel generic.
- **Misinterpretation:** There's the possibility that ChatGPT could misinterpret the information you provide, leading to inaccuracies or inappropriate content in the cover letter.
- **Unpredictable Tone:** The tone and style of the generated content might not align with the desired tone for a cover letter, which should be professional and sincere.
- **Overreliance:** Depending too heavily on ChatGPT could hinder your own writing and communication skills.
- **Limited Context:** ChatGPT lacks real-world context and current events beyond its last knowledge update, potentially leading to outdated or irrelevant information.

Keep in mind, your results will only be as good as the quality of the information you feed it, and the extent to which you edit the information using your own writing style, creativity, and sound judgment.

STRATEGIES FOR GETTING BEST RESULTS

- **Apply the 60/40 Rule:** Begin by crafting your resume, cover letter or personal content on your own, focusing on the key points you want to convey. Allocate 60% of the effort to your initial writing.
- **Content Generation:** After writing, input your content into ChatGPT and ask it to rewrite and enhance your material. Prompt it to add specific examples, quantify achievements, improve language, etc.
- **Review and Polish:** Review the generated text, make necessary edits, and ensure it aligns with your personal style and voice. Add any finishing touches, ensuring a well-polished final version.

AI PROMPTS TO USE FOR YOUR COVER LETTER

Cover Letter Reviews: Upload your cover letters for review and feedback. ChatGPT will suggest improvements, identify areas for enhancement, and offer guidance on how to make a strong impression.

- How can I improve my cover letter (paste cover letter text) in application for this job (paste job posting text)?
- Review the cover letter for grammar and style improvements.
- Help me write an engaging introduction for a cover letter.
- Describe my relevant skills and experiences for this job.
- Explain why I may be a good fit for this role.
- Highlight my ability to contribute positively to the company culture.
- Rewrite my closing paragraph so that it expresses my enthusiasm.
- Add qualities like adaptability, problem-solving, or leadership to the cover letter.
- Help me finalize the contact details and signature at the end of the cover letter.