

COVER LETTER TIPS

WHAT IS A COVER LETTER?

You send a cover letter with your curriculum vitae (CV) to a potential employer. It is your opportunity to go beyond the CV and focus the employer's attention on the experience and skills you possess, which are directly related to the position available. A cover letter is like a sales pitch: it promotes your abilities and caters to a potential employer's interests.

SHOULD YOU WRITE A COVER LETTER TO GO WITH YOUR CV WHEN APPLYING FOR A POSITION?

Absolutely! Your cover letter is a necessary companion and will be almost as important as your CV. It will introduce you to a potential employer and summarize your specific qualifications for a given position. It is also a chance for the potential employer to inspect your writing skills.

The potential employer will use your cover letter to answer the following questions to determine if you deserve consideration for their position:

- Why is this person writing?
- Does the writer have the qualifications needed for this position?
- How will the writer's skills and experiences contribute to my organization?

CAN YOU USE THE SAME COVER LETTER FOR ALL OF THE CVs YOU SEND OUT?

No. You should always customize the letter as much as possible to the needs of each employer. Customizing requires pre-work before writing your cover letter. Research the organization, its patients, and the work you see yourself doing. Imagine yourself in the position and the situations you would be facing. Then, figure out your abilities and traits necessary for success in this position. Do not neglect reading the position description; it will help you identify keywords and phrases to incorporate into your cover letter. Use examples and stories from your academic and work experiences to explain how you have demonstrated each skill or qualification.

For any position, there are two types of skills: (1) core skills, which any employer will expect a serious candidate to have, and (2) a much broader range of skills that would be useful to the employer but go beyond the basic requirements. Spend some time thinking about both types of skills. Having the first kind will get you considered; having the second kind will make you stand out from the competition. For example, all pharmacy interns can (and will!) perform basic drug distribution, which is considered a core skill. A manager of a busy pharmacy will also be interested in an intern with previous work experience as a waiter or receptionist, as these jobs require good customer service and communication skills and involve a busy environment. The intern who emphasizes these broader, transferrable skills to a potential employer will stand out from those interns presenting only core skills.

HOW SHOULD YOU ORGANIZE YOUR COVER LETTER?

Your cover letter should have the following parts:

Salutation (greeting)

Your letter should be addressed to a specific person using a formal greeting, when possible. You should always address the person using the correct title (e.g., Dr., Professor) and follow the name with a colon (e.g., Dear Dr. Smith:).

If the position's posting does not list the person's name or title, you may be able to find this if you do research online or call the organization to ask. If you are unable to obtain a person's name, acceptable ways to address the letter include:

- Dear Pharmacy Manager:
- Dear Hiring/Recruiting Manager:
- Members of the Search Committee:
- To Whom it May Concern:

Never guess at gender identity. If you do not know, simply address the letter using the person's full name.

Opening (first paragraph)

Identify the position for which you are applying, state where you learned about the opening, and provide an transition statement summarizing the qualifications you possess and will highlight in more detail below.

Education, Skills, and Experience (second paragraph)

Briefly and specifically identify the reasons you are uniquely qualified for the position. Outline previous education or work experiences, special degree or certificate programs, or other experiences that make you a good fit for the job, but do not use the exact wording of your CV. Describing how the potential organization works and how you believe you could contribute to the success of that operation will raise the employer's opinion of you, as you have taken the time to find out more about the position and organization.

To write an eye-catching second paragraph summarizing your relevant skills and background, take your cues from the position posting. Look carefully at the posting and the requirements for the position, then construct three to five sentences that show how your experience matches the specific criteria the employer is seeking. This will be somewhat easy if the posting contains detailed information about the desired qualifications of the pharmacist or intern. It will be more difficult with a brief posting since you will not have much of a job description to address. In this case, it is best to contact the employer and obtain more details.

Instead of the traditional paragraph format, you may structure this section using 2-3 bulleted paragraphs. For example:

- **Skill/Qualification 1:** Example (2-3 sentences) detailing how you have demonstrated that skill or qualification in a previous experience.
- **Skill/Qualification 2:** Example (2-3 sentences) detailing how you have demonstrated that skill or qualification in a previous experience.

- **Skill/Qualification 3:** Example (2-3 sentences) detailing how you have demonstrated that skill or qualification in a previous experience.

Additional Information (optional paragraph)

You may list other qualifications that, though not specifically necessary for this position, may enhance your chances of job success. Examples of such qualifications may include non-pharmacy jobs that have given you transferable skills or professional association/volunteer work that illustrates your ability to be a problem-solver or work within a group.

Another use for this paragraph might be to show the employer your enthusiasm for the position. If this is your “dream job,” let them know! This extra interest might get you the interview. This approach will not work if the appropriate enthusiasm is not there, so try this only if you are sincere.

Conclusion

Reiterate your interest in and your fit for the position and organization. You may request an interview to discuss your qualifications further. Thanking a person for their consideration or time puts a positive and clear end to the letter.

Complimentary Closing

End with a complimentary closing. Then, skip four lines and type your name. Spell your name as it appears in your formal signature and letterhead. Sign your letter between the closing and your name. Typical complimentary closings in business correspondences include:

- Respectfully,
- Best regards,
- Sincerely,
- Thank you,

HOW SHOULD YOU FORMAT YOUR COVER LETTER?

Use a standard business letter style to format your cover letter. The most used business letter styles include block, modified block, and modified semi-block formats. The block style is the most common format for healthcare professionals, which is used in the example below.

Your cover letter and CV should look similar since you will send them together.

- Use the same font used on your CV. Use size 10- to 12-point font.
- Use the same letterhead used on your CV.
- Left, right, top, and bottom margins should never be less than 1". Do not shorten the margins to squeeze your letter onto a single page. Either edit out some material or go onto a second page. Remember, be brief but detailed.
- Paragraphs should be separated by a space rather than an indent. Including white space in your letter makes it easier to read.
- If sending your letter electronically, save it as a PDF file with a clear title (e.g., B. Badger Cover Letter) to avoid unpredictable formatting changes.
- If printing your letter, use the same paper you used for your CV.

The organization and format information outlined above is reiterated more concisely on the next page.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD YOU DO WHEN COMPOSING A COVER LETTER?

Cover letters are more casual and personal than CVs. You want to sound genuine and sincere yet maintain professionalism. Below are a few more tips that may help:

- Use personal pronouns (e.g., I, you).
- Avoid vague statements. Quantify what you can.
- Strive to portray yourself and your skills in a positive tone without sounding boastful.
- Never refer negatively to past or current positions.
- Keep your letter to one page in length whenever possible.
- Keep paragraphs concise. Vary the sentence length.
- Be a real person – show some personality and enthusiasm.
- Check (and double-check) for typos and grammatical errors – ask someone else to proofread!

LETTERHEAD

DATELINE

ADDRESS

SALUTATION:

OPENING PARAGRAPH: State why you are writing, naming the specific position for which you are applying. If you are writing a solicited letter of application, explain how you found out about the opening. Using the position posting as a guide, write an transition statement summarizing the qualifications you possess and will later highlight in more in the body paragraphs.

SECOND PARAGRAPH: Tell the employer what you can uniquely offer them. Demonstrate how your skills, experience, and education will meet their needs. Use action verbs to emphasize your capabilities (e.g., planned, organized, designed). Use brief examples or stories to highlight skills or accomplishments relevant to the job for which you are applying. Identify at least one unique skill or aspect that makes you the best candidate to fill the position's and organization's needs.

If you are responding to a position posting, be sure to address all the requirements the employer stipulated.

THIRD PARAGRAPH: Include additional relevant information and explain why this organization and position interests you. Be specific – why do you want to work for this organization?

CLOSING PARAGRAPH: Reiterate your interest in the position. Open the door for an interview. Thank the person for their consideration. Be confident!

COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE,

SIGNATURE BLOCK