

Cover Letters

At Monmouth, the Writing Center and Career Services, which are part of the Center for Student Success, provide help with creating cover letters, resumes, and CVs. Coupled with your resume, the cover letter is your way of marketing your skills to employers. As such, it presents your qualifications and explains how these would be a good fit with employers' human resource needs.

PURPOSE: Your cover letter is an important part of your job application and should accompany every resume. It shows an employer why you're interested in a particular job, how you learned of the opening (which can range from word-of-mouth to online job boards) and the qualifications you would bring to the organization. You should also explain any gaps of time between work experiences. The goal is to show why the company would be interested in you, rather than explain all your achievements and qualifications.

FORMAT: Most cover letters are one page, single-spaced, with double spaces between paragraphs, and margins of one-inch.

What to Include

Whenever possible, find out the exact name, title, and address of the person to whom the application should be directed. Address that person by his or her proper name. "Dear Sir or Madam" may be the only alternative in some cases, but doing some research to find the appropriate contact name shows professionalism.

Your first paragraph should detail the complete title of the open position and the way you found out about it. Include a posting number or reference number if that's requested in the posting—larger companies may ask applicants to reference a posting by a code number.

The second, third, and fourth paragraphs should explain how the credentials fit your employer's needs. Since many such documents are scanned electronically, match your qualifications to words or phrases in the job posting. Narrow down the three or four areas where there is the closest match between your skills/achievements and the requirement of the position. Aim for short, concise sentences. Be upbeat and positive, but don't come across as boasting or arrogant.

If prior work experience solved some pressing problem, saved some employer resource, or improved customer satisfaction, it should be mentioned in the second paragraph. Your leadership experiences, transferable skills or academic qualifications should follow in the third and fourth paragraphs—remember to show how these would be a benefit to the company.

Note: Converting your cover letter from a Word document to a PDF file will ensure proper formatting when emailing or uploading to a prospective employer. If you have questions on how to convert your file to a PDF, you may contact the Writing Center.

The final paragraph should close with a request for an in-person interview and an offer to follow up with a phone call in a week or ten days. Include your name, phone, and e-mail contact information. Follow up with the phone call—not every letter or e-mail reaches its destination.

Common Problems with Cover Letters

- 1.** **Failing to understand the industry or the mission of the organization.** A letter seeking an academic position will look radically different from one seeking a job in an advertising agency. Know the key terms and hot-button issues in the business to which you are applying.
- 2.** **Using the same tired letter over and over.** Employers expect that you have read the job posting, researched the company, and can explain why you are a good fit for their specific needs. At the very least, you should have reviewed the company Web site.
- 3.** **Using vague statements.** “I have extensive experience in managing people” is less impressive than “While at Monmouth University I worked as an admissions representative in the graduate admissions office. I handled more than 30 telephone inquiries each day from applicants seeking information on humanities, health sciences, and business programs.”
- 4.** **Misspelling Words.** They may seem obvious, but some companies get so many cover letters with typos that they post them online as a warning to would-be applicants. Your letter shouldn’t be memorable for all the wrong reasons. Read it over carefully, and seek guidance from the Writing Center or the Placement Office.
- 5.** **Using inappropriate humor.** Unless you are applying for a job as a stand-up comic, leave the jokes for another venue. You will be seen as immature or clueless.
- 6.** **Failing to check for grammar problems like run-on sentences and subject-verb disagreement.** These often happen together. Check every sentence that takes at least two full lines of type; these should be simplified. Complex sentences that are labeled with jargon and lean on meaning will land your application in the “rejects” pile.
- 7.** **Discussing compensation.** The salary or perks may not be clear in the job posting. If not, wait until the matter comes up in an interview. Avoid mentioning salary requirements in your letter.

Other Resources

The OWL at Purdue University

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResumeW/>

The Writing Center at University of Wisconsin

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/CoverLetters.html>

State of New Jersey Employment Information Job Tools Page

<http://www.wnjpin.net/jobseeker/jobtools.html>

At Monmouth University:

Resources for Writers

http://www.monmouth.edu/writing_center

Business Correspondence

<http://www.monmouth.edu/academics/css/placement/jobletters.asp>

Career Services

<http://www.monmouth.edu/careerservices>

Job Search Letters

<http://www.monmouth.edu/academics/css/careerservices/jobletters.asp>

Last modified 02/28/11