

# UNIVERSITY WRITING PROGRAM

## WRITING EFFECTIVE COVER LETTERS

*Give examples, be concise, and convey authentic interest!*

Each cover letter needs to be tailored to demonstrate how you can meet the employer's needs. Writing a "template" can hurt your application, as these letters measure whether you are really interested in their position. They may also be viewed as writing samples and used to make an easy connection with a qualified applicant. Your cover letter is a story that connects you and the organization and is similar to a persuasive essay demonstrating your qualifications.

### Content and Format

Your cover letter will have three main parts: the Hook (introduction); the Pitch (body), and the Close (conclusion).

#### The Hook

1. Let the reader know from the start that you are a candidate that they want to meet. Make sure that you include these three elements—the order can vary:
2. What is your connection to this employer? While employers understand that the primary objective of many applicants is to get hired, it is important that you convey that you are applying to this job on purpose. Mention something specific about your fit or connection to this employer so they understand that you are applying with sincere intention.
3. Why are you writing? Mention the position for which you are applying.
4. Who are you? Rather than repeat résumé content, such as your major and/or that you are a Brandeis student, it is even better if you include something descriptive that connects you to the job or the industry. For example, an “avid environmentalist” might apply for a job with the EPA. Or a “dedicated problem solver” would appeal to an employer looking to increase efficiency.

Tip: do not begin with “My name is\_\_\_\_\_.”

#### The Pitch

Write one or two paragraphs to highlight skills and experience from your résumé that meet the needs of this position or this employer. You're not repeating your résumé, you're explaining it.

Identify two to four desired qualifications from the job description, and discuss them:

1. Identify the desired qualification
2. Give an example of how you have used or developed this qualification, including courses, achievements, and relevant experiences.
3. Demonstrate that you understand why this qualification is relevant to the position.

### The Close

1. Confirm why you fit with this employer (culture, mission, common interest, etc.)
2. Indicate that your résumé is enclosed (or attached) for their reference.
3. Let them know how they can meet with you: by phone, virtually, and/or in person. If it is not a local position and you know you will be in town during a specific period, share those dates.
4. Mention when are you available to start. (optional)
5. Thank them for their time or for their consideration of your application.

### Sending Cover Letters

If a letter is sent via email, consider attaching the letter (and your résumé) as a PDF file rather than writing the letter in the body of the email. In the body of the email you can let the employer know which position you are applying for, and that your résumé and cover letter is attached.

### Checklist for a Successful Cover Letter

Is your cover letter...

- No more than one page?
- Formatted correctly?
- Free from grammatical and spelling errors?
- Addressed to a specific person? Call or research online to find the appropriate name and title. If no information is available, consider using "Dear Hiring Manager/Internship Coordinator/Selection Committee:"
- Targeted toward a specific employer? Use keywords from the job description or organization's website or mission statement.
- Specific, citing explicit examples to highlighting your skills?
- Written in active voice?
- Focused on your match with the company and what *you* can bring to *them* (rather than the other way around)?
- Consistent with your résumé (i.e., on the same high-quality paper, if printed, and using the same font and contact information)?

Credit: Adapted from Hiatt Career Center, <https://www.brandeis.edu/hiatt/resume-letters/cover-letter.html>.

The Brandeis University Writing Program, including the Writing Center, First-Year Writing, and Writing in the Majors, offers support for writing throughout the community, including undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and staff.

For more information, see [www.brandeis.edu/UWP](http://www.brandeis.edu/UWP) or write to [UWP@brandeis.edu](mailto:UWP@brandeis.edu).