

The Pain-Free Cover Letter

A Step-by-Step Guide From

themuse

STEP ONE: Gather Your Materials

To write a stellar cover letter, you'll need:

- The job listing
- Your resume
- Coffee, tea, or whatever fuel keeps you going
- A get-stuff-done attitude
- About 45-60 minutes

MUSE TIP

Spending five or 10 minutes reading over the company website before you get started can be a great way to get in the right mindset for writing your cover letter. You'll get a sense for the company's tone, language, and culture—all things you'll want to mirror in your own cover letter.

Learn More: [How to Show You Get the Company Culture in Your Cover Letter](#)

STEP TWO: List the Qualifications

First, write down the major required and desired qualifications for the position (e.g., 5 years of management experience, strong sales record, etc.)

Then, identify the less tangible characteristics that the company may be looking for, like an ability to work independently, creativity, or an entrepreneurial spirit. **(Pro tip: Drop the job description into a word cloud generator and see which keywords stand out.)**

STEP THREE: Write Down Your Roles and Experiences

For each qualification or characteristic you've just put down, look at your resume and brainstorm ways your experience proves that you have these things.

Just remember: You don't have to include everything you've done—just pick the biggest, most relevant achievements. Your resume is a list of your experiences—your cover letter is the place to tell a story about why you're the perfect candidate.



MUSE TIP

When it comes to proving your worth, numbers are often more powerful than words. As you're jotting down your experiences, think carefully about places you can include numbers to support what you're saying, and jot those down in your notes.

Learn More: [*Resume Revamp: How to Turn Your Duties Into Accomplishments*](#)

STEP FOUR: Play Favorites

Now, it's time to really bite the bullet and narrow down what you'll squeeze into this short letter.

Look over your list of experiences, and choose two or three that you think really tell a lot about why you're ideal for the job. Specifically pay attention to experiences where you achieved the biggest results, ones that demonstrate similar work to the role you're applying to, or those that generally make you stand out.

Then, check out what remains on your list. Are there other things you definitely want to make sure to bring to the hiring manager's attention? Choose three to five secondary experiences to include. Cross out the rest—ain't nobody got time (or space) for that.

STEP FIVE: Write it Out

We're going to start with the body paragraphs while all that brainstorming is fresh in your mind. Don't sweat—we'll get back to writing an attention-grabbing opener and deal-sealing closer shortly.

Body Paragraph One: Describe an Experience

Choose one of the main experiences from step three, and explain to the hiring manager why this experience makes you the person for the job. What skills or characteristics did you demonstrate that relate to the job? What impressive feat did you accomplish? What did you learn that you could bring to the position?

Muse Tip

When writing each paragraph, think short and sweet (your entire cover letter should be no more than one page!). You just need a topic sentence—"For seven years, I've been building my sales expertise across the tech and IT sectors."—and then two or three short supporting sentences.

Learn More: [*Want a Better Cover Letter? Avoid These Extremes*](#)

Body Paragraph Two: Describe Another Experience

Do the same as you did in paragraph one, except using a different experience to show the hiring manager different things about you. For example, if you used the first paragraph to prove your ability to drive massive revenue and innovate, use this one to demonstrate your leadership qualities.

Muse Tip

Try to end these paragraphs with a reminder of how your qualifications will benefit the company directly. For example, if you've spent a paragraph explaining how you built a former company's social following, you could remind the hiring manager, "I'm sure I'd be able to use my knowledge to grow [Company's] digital presence as well."

Body Paragraph Three: Choose Your Own Adventure

For this paragraph you've got some options, and what you choose will depend on the company you're applying to and the information you still need to get across:

- If you're applying to a company that clearly values its brand or culture, this can be a great place to explain why you believe in the brand or why you'd be a great fit.
- If you had a handful of secondary experiences you circled above, you can use this paragraph to bring them all together (just make sure that they feel like a cohesive set of skills, not a random laundry list).
- If you had another major experience you really wanted to include, you can use this paragraph in a similar manner as the first two.

STEP SIX: Nail the Opening

How you open your cover letter could be the difference between a hiring manager unenthusiastically skimming your information or dying to know more. (i.e., Don't start along the lines of, "I am writing because I am interested in X position...")

Instead, think of a way to stand out and grab the hiring manager's attention from the start. Here are two of our favorite approaches:

- Tell a story to demonstrate why you were drawn to the position, what you love about the company, or why you would be a perfect fit for the team. In a sea of generic cover letters, one that starts by painting an interesting picture—or maybe even making the hiring manager smile—is sure to perk people up.
- Call out the most important thing you want the hiring manager to know about you right at the beginning—think leadership positions, relevant awards, or advanced skill sets. For example, "My experience securing international media coverage for high-profile tech clients makes me the perfect match for the Communications Manager position."

Choose one of these approaches and write out your attention-grabbing intro below. And remember—keep it short and snappy, no longer than three sentences.

Muse Tip

Not sure which approach to take? Think about the company you're applying to. If it's a more high-profile position or at a more corporate company, strutting your most stand-out achievements may be best. But if it's a smaller company or one that clearly values culture, starting with a little personality could put you ahead.

Learn More: [*Bad Pick-Up Lines: They Don't Work in Bars, They Don't Work in Cover Letters*](#)

STEP SEVEN: Wrap it Up

You've made it to the easiest part! In fact, your final paragraph probably won't change much from cover letter to cover letter. There's no need to end with a bang—if you've written the rest of the letter right, by this point the hiring manager will just be itching to know how to get you in for an interview.

So, in this paragraph, simply lay out how you can be reached. Try something like this:

If you need more information or have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at [insert email] or [insert phone number]. I hope to hear back from you soon!

STEP EIGHT: Final Details

How should I address it?

We know, it's tempting to start your letter "Dear Hiring Manager," but we'd advise against it. It sounds impersonal and a little awkward. If at all possible, find the hiring manager's name so you can address it to him or her directly. Do a little digging if you have to—try the company's staff page or a LinkedIn search.

And if you've done your due diligence and there's no name to be found? Well, "Dear Hiring Team," "Dear [Company Name] Team," or even just "Dear [Company]" can be a fall-back option.

What should I put in the header? The footer?

When you're putting your cover letter in the body of an email, don't worry about a header—just go right into the letter. Then add an email signature with your name, email, phone number, LinkedIn profile, and any other profiles you want to show off. Attach a PDF copy to the email so that the hiring manager can save it to his or her computer easily.

If you're just sending it as a PDF, make the header identical to your resume, making sure it includes all the identifying information above.

STEP TEN: Send it Off!

Congrats! You've successfully written a cover letter that's sure to grab some attention. Pair it with your resume, send it off, and then get ready for the phone to ring. Oh, and get yourself interview-ready!

READ NEXT

*5 Ways Your Cover Letter
Lost You the Job*



*35 Surefire Ways to Stand
Out During Your Job Search*



*How to Convince Employers
You're the One (When You're
Not Convinced Yourself)*



*Your All-in-One Interview
Prep Guide*



STEP NINE: Proofread

Even if your cover letter is stellar in every other way, a misspelled word or grammatical error could leave the hiring manager with a bad taste in his or her mouth.

So don't skip this step.

Editing your own writing can be hard—especially since you've already been staring at this document for a while—so try these tips:

- Read it out loud to yourself. This will force you to read it a little more slowly and will make it easier to detect misplaced words or awkward phrasing.
- Change your medium. If you've been typing, print your cover letter out and edit it on paper. If you've been handwriting, type it up to try to catch any mistakes.
- Read it backward, starting with the last sentence, then the second-to-last sentence, and so forth. When the "flow" of the paragraph is broken up, you're more likely to notice if one of those sentences actually contains an error.

And, of course, getting someone else to look over it is always a good idea.