Why are cover letters important?

Your resume details your education and experiences. The cover letter is your opportunity to make the connection between your experiences and a specific position. You are demonstrating that you are a great fit for the specific position, that you can communicate clearly, and that you have researched the organization. You are differentiating yourself from other applicants who may have similar qualifications.

What is the purpose of a cover letter?

1. To introduce you to the employer and clarify the position being applied for; when, where, or how you learned about the position and/or the organization; and why you are applying for the position.
2. To highlight your strengths and qualifications for the position. This is not a repeat of the resume, but a select review of specific areas from your background that are relevant to the particular position.
3. To encourage the next step in the application process: e.g. "I will contact you in a week or so" "I trust we can arrange for a mutual time to meet and discuss in detail my qualifications." "I can be reached at (773) 555-7656."

What should the overall structure be?

Section One (a brief paragraph):
Tell who you are, how you learned about the position, why you have an interest in the position and the organization. Be sure to indicate the specific position for which you are applying, as an employer may have several positions open at the same time. Additionally, if you have networked and have a personal contact within the organization, this is the point at which that individual's name should be mentioned, if you have that person's permission. Follow with a brief statement that you feel you are a strong candidate.

Section Two (text alone, or preferably some combination of text with a bulleted list or a table):
Describe your strengths and qualifications as they specifically relate to this particular position. Use the job description to identify exactly what qualifications they seek, and then describe how you are a good fit because you have many of those qualifications. Talk about what you know about the organization to enhance your argument that you are a good fit.

Section Three (a brief paragraph):
"Let's get together" is the goal of the final paragraph. Be sure to actively pursue the next, appropriate step; i.e. offer to telephone, leave your telephone number(s) and times or methods of reaching you, ask for an interview. Remember, the primary purpose of the resume and cover letter is to obtain an interview.

Remember to accomplish these three things in your cover letter:

1. Demonstrate your interest in the specific position and organization – why do you want to work there?
2. Highlight two or three strengths related to the position and reflect your unique experiences.
3. Express your enthusiasm for the position and organization!