



Career Development

Guide to Writing Effective Cover Letters

Why are cover letters important?

A well-written cover letter is highly recommended for every job or internship you apply for, even if it's listed as optional. It gives you the chance to express your enthusiasm for the position, demonstrate that you've researched the organization, and connect your experiences directly to the role.

Your cover letter should complement your resume, not repeat it. Think of it as your opportunity to tell your professional story and highlight why you're a great fit for both the position and the organization.

What is the purpose of a cover letter?

A cover letter should answer three key questions:

1. **Why this role and organization?** Introduce yourself, state the position you're applying for, how you learned about it, and why you're interested.
2. **Why are you a strong fit?** Highlight relevant strengths and experiences, telling the story behind your resume rather than repeating it.
3. **What's next?** Encourage follow-up by expressing interest in an interview and providing contact information.

Cover Letter Formula

Below is a formula that breaks the cover letter into clear sections so you can focus on one section at a time. While every cover letter should be tailored to the job and company, this structure helps ensure your letter remains professional, concise, and compelling.

At the end of this guide, you will find sample cover letters that demonstrate how the formula can be applied in practice.

For extra help creating your cover letter, visit our website to view the "Cover Letter Worksheet," which offers step-by-step instructions to help you build your letter: <https://bit.ly/career-dev-resources>

Cover Letter Formula

Office of Career Development

Building B119

ocs@niu.edu | 773-442-4680

8:30 am to 4:30 pm | after-hours appointments available

Use the structure below as a guide.

Header	Date Hiring Manager's Name (if known) Company Name Company Address City, State ZIP <i>(Note: If you're emailing your cover letter, you do not need to include the address block at the top.)</i>
Greeting	"Dear [Hiring Manager's Name]," or "Dear Hiring Manager," (if name is unknown)
Introduction Paragraph	State the position you're applying for and where you found it <i>(1 sentence)</i> . Add a compelling hook highlighting your interest, skills, or experience <i>(1-2 sentences)</i> . Connect your strengths or interests to the company's mission or values <i>(1 sentence)</i> .
Body Section	The body section explains why you are a good fit for the role. Focus on strengths and qualifications that match the position by using the job description to show how your skills and experiences align with the employer's needs. The body section can be written in one of two ways: a paragraph format or a bullet-point format. <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Paragraph format <i>(1-2 paragraphs)</i>: Highlight one key experience, describing your actions, skills used, and results to show fit for the role- Bullet-point format <i>(3-4 bullets)</i>: List relevant skills or accomplishments in a clear, scannable way
Closing Paragraph	Reaffirm your interest in the position <i>(1 sentence)</i> . Express enthusiasm for next steps or an interview <i>(1-2 sentences)</i> . Thank the employer for their time and consideration and include your contact information <i>(1-2 sentences)</i> .
Signature	"Sincerely, [Your First Name Last Name]"

Additional Tips

- Keep your cover letter to one page.
- Tailor it for each application—use keywords from the job description.
- Use a professional tone but let your genuine interest show.
- Always proofread for spelling, grammar, and formatting before submitting.

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[Example #1: A cover letter using the bullet-point format]

January 16, 2026

Dear [Hiring Manager's Name],

I am excited to apply for the Marketing Intern position at Golden Eagle Organization, which I discovered through my university's career platform. As a marketing student with experience crafting creative campaigns and analyzing audience engagement, I am eager to help develop initiatives that raise brand visibility, connect with diverse communities, and achieve measurable results. [Organization's name]'s work in helping Chicago organizations communicate their impact and connect with audiences resonates with me because I am passionate about creating opportunities for people of all backgrounds to have their voices heard, and I am eager to contribute my skills to campaigns that engage the city's communities.

Through my experiences in marketing, I have consistently applied creative and strategic approaches to engage audiences and drive results. This is demonstrated through the following examples:

- I designed and executed a social media campaign for The Eagles Student Organization, increasing engagement by 35% and boosting event attendance by 20%.
- As part of a classroom marketing project, I conducted market research and developed a campaign proposal, earning the highest score in the class for applied marketing strategy.
- During my internship with [prior job/internship/volunteer work], I supported marketing efforts by drafting promotional copy and assisting with email campaigns, improving audience engagement.
- I created promotional content and managed social media for a [prior job/internship/volunteer work], enhancing online visibility by 40% and maintaining consistent brand messaging.

I am enthusiastic about the opportunity to bring my skills in content creation, campaign development, and audience engagement to your marketing team. I am confident that my experience producing accessible, creative content and connecting with diverse communities aligns well with your organization's goals. I would welcome the opportunity to interview and discuss how I can contribute to your campaigns. I can be reached at goldie@email.com or 123-456-7890. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
[Student Name]

[Example #2: A cover letter using the paragraph format]

January 16, 2026

Dear [Hiring Manager's Name],

I am excited to apply for the Office Aide position with the Office of Career Development at Northeastern Illinois University, which I found through Handshake. As a student with experience in community organizing, customer service, and administrative support, I am eager to contribute my skills to supporting fellow students as they navigate their professional journeys. I admire the Office of Career Development's commitment to empowering NEIU students through career exploration and preparation, and I believe my experience in peer leadership and student-centered support aligns well with your mission.

My experience supporting students in academic and community-based settings has prepared me well for the responsibilities of this role while strengthening my communication, leadership, and facilitation skills. In my role as a peer mentor at [Name of Previous Job/Internship/Volunteer], I was recognized with the [Name of Award/Recognition] from [Organization or Institution] for my involvement in initiatives focused on college access, equity, and student advocacy. Through this work, I facilitated small-group discussions, assisted with workshop planning, and helped develop outreach materials that increased student participation in campus programs. I also demonstrated initiative by coordinating a resource fair for students and assisting with a fundraising campaign that supported student-led programming, experiences that enhanced my ability to engage and support diverse student populations.

In addition to my peer leadership experience, I have developed strong administrative and customer service skills that align with the expectations of the Office Aide position. During my internship at [Organization Name], I assisted with scheduling, maintained databases, and created digital materials using Canva to support outreach efforts. This customer-facing role further strengthened my ability to communicate professionally, manage inquiries, and support daily office operations. These experiences have helped me become organized, detail-oriented, and confident in managing multiple responsibilities in fast-paced environments.

I am excited about the opportunity to contribute my communication, leadership, and organizational skills to the Office of Career Development through peer advising, workshops, and campus outreach. I would welcome the chance to further discuss how my experience and commitment to student support align with your office's goals. I can be reached at goldie@email.com or 123-456-7890. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
[Student Name]