



## Building a Cover Letter

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### **What is a Cover Letter?**

It's a 1 to 1.5 page *letter* that includes an introduction, 2-3 body paragraphs, and a concluding statement. It is addressed to a recipient, including their mailing address, and has your signature at the bottom. It should include your personalized header at the top of the page detailing your name and contact information (no physical mailing addresses, just email and phone number).

### **What is its Purpose?**

Cover letters are sent with job applications to inform employers why you are suited for a position. *They do not explain everything from your resume.* Instead, they highlight 2-3 related experiences you want employers to notice. Connect the dots for your readers so it is easy to understand how your experiences are related to the position.

### **When is a Cover Letter Needed?**

For almost every job! Sometimes it is specially asked for and sometimes it's just assumed you will send one in with your resume. When in doubt, submit one. *Note: Most performance-based auditions do not request a cover letter. Instead a simple email with a performance resume is expected.*

### **Steps to Writing a Cover Letter**

#### **Step 1: Read sample cover letters**

Read sample cover letters to better understand the format, examples of experiences, depth of describing these experiences, and tone.

#### **Step 2: Find and Assess the Job Posting**

It is impossible to complete a cover letter without having a specific job listing. Job postings will describe what they are looking for in a candidate. The most important and relevant of these experiences must be directly highlighted in the cover letter. If they are not, the reader will assume you are not a good fit and will stop reviewing your application.

#### **Step 3: Research the Organization**

Explore multiple sources to learn more about the organization. Review their website, recent news articles, or social media accounts to discover what the institution is about. It can help you understand what they prioritize and help you make a direct connection to them in your cover letter. When researching, identify a person to whom you address the letter (i.e. the head of the committee or the supervisor of the position). Avoid using "To Whom it May Concern" and try to find a specific name of a person(s) who will be reading your materials.

Eastman School of Music  
Institute for Music Leadership

<https://iml.esm.rochester.edu/prepare/resume-and-cv/>

#### Step 4: Identify Your Themes

Each body paragraph should have one theme. It could be a skill set (communication, arranging), an experience (internship, student position), or project (school related or personal). Theming makes it easier for readers to comprehend. If you are applying to similar types of positions, these themes are likely to reappear. Draft a few paragraphs (6-7) addressing these common themes and keep them in a separate document. Then, when applying to a new role, pick the best ones for the position and copy them into your cover letter template. You will still need to tweak and edit the paragraphs to tailor to the organization, but that way you are not starting from scratch each time.

#### Step 5: Identify Appropriate Examples

Once you know your themes, determine the specific example(s) you will use to demonstrate your experiences. Don't just say you have classroom management skill, show your abilities through an example. The example should include the who, what, when, where, how, and why! Avoid lists - this is what the resume is for. Instead spend most of the time describing things in detail. If you REALLY wish to list a few other notable things (i.e. competitions/awards/publications), list a maximum of 3 items.

#### Step 6: Have Someone Read It

We know what we want to say, but sometimes it doesn't come across that way. Having a friend or colleague read over your materials can help you identify areas of confusion or any mistakes. *Note: A most common mistake is forgetting to change the name of the organization in the address or in the introduction paragraph. Be sure you double check before sending it out!*

#### Formatting Details

Header	Always put your name, email, and phone number at the top of the 1st page in larger font
Margins	1 inch margins
Font Size/Style	11pt – 12pt in legible fonts
Formatting	Single spaced
File Type	Save as a PDF, title it <i>YourName_Job Position_Cover Letter</i>

#### Final Tips

Remember, writing a solid cover letter will take time, but it is a crucial part of the application process. To ensure the best product is created, remember these tips:

- ✓ Incorporate words and concepts directly from the job description
- ✓ Do not make assumptions about what the readers know (i.e. no abbreviations!)
- ✓ If for a job (not a student worker position or internship), present your *professional identity* first. For instance, don't start off describing yourself as being a senior in college.
- ✓ Keep the language objective and to the point - avoid phrases like "I believe," "I think that I..," "I hope" which come across as less confident.