



VCU School of Engineering

Cover Letter Guide

Three levels of cover letters are offered in this guide:

1. **Beginner** for those seeking a traditional format;
2. **Advanced** for the more savvy job seeker; and
3. **Expert** for those who want their letter to set them apart.

You can select any level depending on your comfort in communicating with employers, the strength of your writing skills, and your understanding of implied meaning and tone. You don't have to be a certain year group at VCU or have work experience to jump straight to expert.

So, what is the purpose of a cover letter?

- To highlight your skills and abilities as they match those desired for the job.
- To tell the rest of the story (your interests, enthusiasm) & to differentiate you.
- To be invited to interview.

Cover Letter Basics: The Traditional Format

- 1) State what job you are applying for & a brief statement about yourself.
- 2) Share what you know about that organization and why you are interested in them.
- 3) Describe how your experience, knowledge, skills or abilities match the job described.
- 4) Call your reader to action: ask them for the interview.

A detailed format guide is available on the next page.

Resources to Help

The Vault – Has example cover letters. Most are pretty basic and conventional, which can be helpful as a resource for how to phrase your words. Access this subscription-based site for free through [HireVCURams](#), under “Additional Resources” then “The Vault.” Once in The Vault site, go to “Career Resources” then “Cover Letters.”

Copy & paste your name & contact info from your resume so it is consistent on both documents.

Name

5678 Street • City, VA Zip • (000)000-0000
Email Address • LinkedIn Address or Portfolio Page

Today's Date

Employer's Name

Title

Company Address

City, State Zip Code

A physical address is not absolutely required, but put the company name at a minimum.

(It's always best to use a name, but if you don't have one, these salutations work.)

Dear Hiring Manager: or Dear Company Name Team:

In the first paragraph, write what position you are applying for and where you found the position (newspaper, website, etc.). Next comes what your degree is in and when you graduate(d). Also, add any unique traits in summary that you have that would make you the best fit for the position.

In the second paragraph, this is your chance to tell the organization why you're interested. Show that you've done your research on the company by referencing the specific aspects of their company that impress you.

Next, take the position description and for each skill/quality they want, list why you have that or how you've done that in the past. The more your cover letter mirrors the position description and the company's needs, the better. Let's say the position description requires someone with excellent interpersonal skills, experience in customer service, and initiative. Give examples that illustrate how you have developed or used each of those skills or qualities before. Don't just say you have them - - - prove it with examples!

In the last paragraph, you want to reiterate your interest, give your contact information and explain how you will follow up. Ask for the interview!

Sincerely/Warmest regards/Cordially/Yours truly,

Virginia C. Student

Skip four lines here & DON'T FORGET TO SIGN YOUR NAME! If you are e-mailing your cover letter, skip only one line and type your name instead of skipping four lines for a signature.

- The cover letter should be ½ to ¾ page in length. Keep it short and powerful.
- The goal is to convince the reviewer to interview you. Show how your skills & abilities match what the ad asks for and tell your story so that they see you as a real person (not just another piece of paper!).

Cover Letter - Advanced

Looking for a more interesting way to write a cover letter?

Be Brief & Start with a Hook. Engage the reader by drawing them in with an interesting start.

How? Here are some options:

- Start with a question.
- Focus on the company and solving their problems.
- Emphasize Your Connection to the company in one of these ways:
 - Name someone you know who works there (ask that person first).
 - Are you a loyal Customer of this company? Tell them.
 - Did you Intern there? That should always be in the first paragraph.
 - Did you read about the company? Quote the article you read.
 - Love the Mission/Vision? Tell them how or why.
 - Start out with a quote from a supervisor that uniquely describes you.

Examples of opening with a hook:

Dear Ms. Davidson:

I am applying for the position of Mechanical Engineer at the recommendation of Jennifer Clark, Project Engineer with your company and my former professor. She indicated that my excellent academic background, combined with my SolidWorks skills would make me a valuable employee in the engineering design department of Smith Engineering.

Dear Mr. Lang:

Are you looking for an intern who can offer initiative, diversity, and versatility to your team?

Dear Mr. Talmadge:

People say that I can fix anything. While that might not be exactly true, I do have a wide range of skills and experience that can help keep your equipment and your facility running smoothly and safely.

Dear Mr. Sanderson:

"We're always looking for employees who have a good attitude and a great work ethic."

- Curtis Sanderson, Connecticut Business Journal 11/19/xx

When I read this quote from your recent interview, I knew that I had what you are looking for - - the qualities you seek in your best employees, plus skills that are a great fit for your growing Middletown distribution center.

Source of examples: Kursmark, Louise. Same Day Resume. JIST Works, 2012, and NACE self-study guide to The Art of Writing Job Search Letters.

Resources to help:

Article by [the muse](#) - 31 Tips about How to Write a Cover Letter

Article on [Glassdoor](#) - 6 Unconventional Ways to Start a Cover Letter

Cover Letter - Expert

Tell a story - - relate it back to the job

1. Open by placing the reader in the story
2. Provide concrete details & specifics
3. Tell how the story applies to the job

Examples:

Dear Mr. Johnson:

We were on the verge of completing three months of experiments that would prove our thesis, when two of our team members began to have conflicts with each other that were bringing our work to a stop. Suddenly our project looked aimed toward failure. I took the initiative to pull each of my feuding peers aside, encouraged them to talk through their concerns and to look for areas of agreement. We then bonded over lattes and donuts at the local coffee shop.

With that friction resolved, we worked together to salvage the experiment and we succeeded in completing the project on time and to quality standards. It took dedication, communication, and lots of team work to bring about this positive end. As you can see, I have the drive and focus to bring major projects to successful and timely conclusions.

Please take a moment to review my attached resume. I believe I can put my skills and strengths to good use benefiting both myself and my employer. I look forward to hearing from you.

Dear Ms. Green:

I stood at the front of my high school homeroom and heard the teacher introduce me. She sounded to me like the teacher in a Charlie Brown cartoon. As she continued to talk, I could only understand a few words of what she said, and quietly took my seat at her signal. Starting at a new school, mid-year, with limited English proficiency was challenging. I was determined to succeed and spent my high school years studying English three hours a day, in addition to the usual homework.

I have lived in the USA now for six years and in that time I have become fluent in English, supported myself independently, completed two of my four years of studies toward my Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering at VCU, and have become a permanent resident.

I am applying for your account manager position, which I found on HireVCURams. As a person with a strong interest in sales and a determination to succeed, I would be very excited to have the chance of being part of a team like yours.

Resources to help:

Article on [UptoWork](#) – Gives a detailed explanation of how a creative cover letter can be an asset. Gives examples.

Book – *Wait, How Do I Write This Email?* By Danny Rubin – Has a section on writing a cover letter that includes a story.