Cover Letters

When you are applying for a job, how you format your cover letter from a presentation and content perspective is very important. A cover letter that is formatted incorrectly or is difficult to read will result in your elimination from the candidate pool.

Cover letters follow the format of a formal business letter. The letter is written in paragraph form and includes a formal salutation, closing and signature. Not sure how to set-up a formal business letter? There are many resources online to assist you – just search "formal business letter format" or Buff Cover Letter example.

Your cover letter should not be a repeat of your resume. This letter should provide specific evidence of what you will bring to the company. Choose two to three skills or abilities you want to highlight. Then add examples of how you demonstrated these traits. Construct this information to tell a story of when you were particularly successful. Whenever possible, include numbers to demonstrate how you added value in the examples provided.

If you are a recent graduate, you can highlight your career readiness by focusing on the development of career competencies. Provide evidence from projects, classes, undergraduate research, internships, volunteer work, etc. that demonstrate that you have these skills. Customize your cover letter for every job application matching your skills to the job requirements.

Your cover letter should be one page and be three to four paragraphs.

1. **Begin your letter with a formal salutation**
   Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name,
   If you do not have a contact name, you can skip the salutation entirely. Or, you can use Dear Hiring Manager, or To Whom It May Concern. Ideally, you will be able to address your cover letter to a specific person. Doing research can help you figure out who is the most appropriate person to receive the letter. Note: If you do not know the gender of your contact, you can write out the person's full name, e.g., "Dear Taylor Smith" or "Dear Jordan Green."
2. **Body of Cover Letter**
   The body of your cover letter lets the employer know what position you are applying for, why the employer should select you for an interview, and how you will follow-up. Organize the body of your cover letter into the following paragraphs:
   A. **First Paragraph**
      The first paragraph of your letter should include information on why you are writing. Mention the position you are applying for and where you found the job listing. Include the name of a mutual contact, if you have one.
   B. **Middle Paragraph(s)**
      The next section of your cover letter should describe what you have to offer the employer. Mention specifically how your qualifications match the job you are applying for. Think of this section of the cover letter as where you're making a pitch for your fit as an employee and show what makes you a great candidate.
      Keep in mind that employers will be more interested in what you can do for them over a list of your work experience.

C. **Final Paragraph**
   Conclude your cover letter by thanking the employer for considering you for the position. Include information on how you will follow-up. Optionally, you can briefly restate why you would be a good fit for the position.

3. **Complimentary Close**
   Examples of closings are “Respectfully yours,” or “Sincerely” or “ Regards”

Proofread and edit your letter. Read through your letter looking for any spelling or grammar errors. Then read it again- backwards- focusing on the word not the content. Then ask a friend to read the letter.

If a job posting does not request a cover letter, should I still include the letter? The answer to this question is yes.

Finally, follow the directions in the job posting for submitting your materials.