

COVER LETTER GUIDELINES

A cover letter is a one-page business style document that accompanies most resumes when applying for jobs and internships. Not all employers ask for one, but if they do, do not underestimate the amount of time required to complete it. In fact, this letter is one of the more challenging documents to write as it can be quite difficult to articulate why you are the most qualified candidate for the job without sounding self-indulgent. A great way to accomplish this is to explain sincerely and directly how your career goals and values match the company's, and how your previous experience has prepared you to fulfill the job requirements. If written well, your letter will not only pique the prospective employer's interest, but also, it will encourage him or her to read your resume carefully.

If you don't know if a position exists, or if there are any openings, write a "Letter of Inquiry" identifying the type of position you'd like, and expressing interest. Since you will not be certain what the organization is seeking, it is imperative to conduct thorough research so that you can highlight experiences and skillsets that you feel are most relevant to the company's current needs.

LAYOUT & FORMAT

- Length: Cover letters should be no longer than one page
- Appearance: Be consistent. Adapt the same formatting approach as your resume. Both documents should be clean and easy to read. Please do not use templates to create and modify cover letters!
 - Margins: 0.5" – 1"
 - Font: Calibri, Garamond, Cambria, and Times New Roman are great choices.
 - Size: 10-12 point is the norm. Your name and section headings can be larger, specifically 13-16. Use the same header on your cover letter and resume for consistency.
 - Abbreviations: only states. If you write "Los Angeles, CA" in your first paragraph, do not write: "LA, California" in the second. *Note:* Do not abbreviate words (e.g., pres. for president; dept. for department; intl. for international).

HOW TO WRITE A STAND OUT COVER LETTER

1. **Take a personal approach:** Employers do not look favorably upon cover letters that appear mass produced. It is critical to personalize and tailor your letter to the position you're seeking. This means: it should be addressed to a specific individual (Dear Mr./Ms. Pattinson), and should demonstrate that you have taken the time to understand the organization's needs. *Note:* If you cannot find a specific name after a Google search, and/or by calling the company and asking for the receptionist in the department you wish to work in, "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Recruiting Team" are acceptable salutations.
2. **Present your skills, interests, and intentions clearly:** Be direct about your interest in the organization and what you can offer; every word counts. As with your resume, be prepared to back up any information you include in the letter. If you make claims, support them with evidence.
3. **Express yourself:** While a formal document, the style does not need to be stiff. Allow your personality to shine through! Ask yourself: how am I different? (i.e., more qualified than other applicants). How has my unique experience prepared me for this position? A great cover letter reveals your writing style (with perfect grammar and spelling, of course), excellent communication skills, and demonstrates your enthusiasm. Avoid the temptation to turn your cover letter into an extensive autobiography.
4. **Be professional:** Your cover letter should follow a traditional business letter format (see "Suggested Format"). Use paper that matches your resume in quality and color, standard (8.5 x 11) bond.
5. **Know your audience and their needs:** Research the employer thoroughly (scour their website and LinkedIn page; read news and press articles in which they are featured). If you are impressed by certain aspects of the organization,

mention it. Finally, explain how and why this particular position and this company are a good fit with your goals, values, and interests (especially important when applying for positions in fields unrelated to your studies at Price). Develop your resume and cover letter as if you are presenting a solution to the employer—you are the right candidate for the position!

6. **Describe your experiences and accomplishments as related to the company requirements:** Do not draw attention to weaknesses, nor apologize for experiences/skillsets that you do not yet have (i.e., “Even though I have not used STATA since last year...”). Instead, use your resume as a guide to writing your cover letter, and think about your past work, research, and service experiences. Consider what your responsibilities were, how you did the work, and how the results of your work impacted the organization.
7. **Following up and keeping records:** Keep a copy of all your cover letters, and make notes outlining further correspondence between you and the employer. It can be both confusing and embarrassing to receive a reply from an organization and not be certain of what you sent them. If you do not receive a response to your cover letter/resume within a reasonable amount of time (generally two weeks to one month), feel free to follow up by email, letter, or telephone. A follow-up email or letter should:
 - a. Inquire about the status of your application;
 - b. Reiterate your interest in the position; and
 - c. Offer to provide additional information that may aid in the evaluation of your qualifications.

LETTER CONTENT

Opening paragraph: Introduces you, and lets the employer know why you are writing. To capture the employer's interest, this paragraph should be well organized, concise, and specific. State your reason for writing. For example: "I am writing to express my sincere interest in learning more about Clifford Beers, and to submit my resume for your consideration." Mention how you heard of the organization and state the position title. If you've already spoken to the person to whom you are sending the letter, or, if you have a connection to the company, indicate it in your introduction: "I appreciate you taking the time to talk to me about the communications role at the Price Career Fair this past September. Our conversation inspired me to..."

Middle paragraph(s): Your chance to shine. Typically you will have one to two middle paragraphs. Summarize a few key aspects of your education, experience, and/or interests that are relevant to the employer, and convey your sincere interest in the position. Explain what you can do for the company. Expand on the information in your resume and highlight your qualifications by discussing the contributions you can make.

Closing paragraph: Should pave the way for the interview. You may express your interest in an interview (though do not state a specific time or day), or suggest that you will follow-up with a phone call/email: "I am excited to submit my application to you today, and would love the opportunity to hear more about this position." OR "I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the fall internship position at your convenience. Thank you for your consideration."

NEED ADDITIONAL HELP?

Schedule an appointment with the Office of Career Services by stopping by VKC, Suite 382, calling 213-740-0546, or emailing price.careers@usc.edu. We can help you with all phases of the process, from figuring out how to write your first cover letter, to proofreading your final copy.

SAMPLE LAYOUT

YOUR NAME

Address: 325 W Adams Blvd, Apt. 315, Los Angeles, CA 90007

Phone: (123) 456-7890 • **E-mail:** Your.Name@usc.edu

Your Cover Letter header should be the same/ match your resume header

Today's Date

The date and salutation should be laid out in the following format

Contact Name

His/Her Title

Organization

Address

City, State, Zip

Dear Ms./Mr./Dr. Last Name:

Opening paragraph: introduces you, and lets the employer know why you are writing.

To capture the employer's interest, this paragraph should be well organized, concise, and specific. *State your reason for writing.* For example: "I am writing to express my sincere interest in the Communications Internship II and to submit my resume for your consideration." Mention how you heard of the organization and state the position title. *If you've already talked to the person to whom you are sending the letter, or, if you have a connection to the company, indicate it in your introduction:* "I appreciate you taking the time to talk to me about the program management position at Price School Career Fair this past September. Our conversation inspired me to..."

Middle paragraph(s): your chance to shine.

Typically you will have one to two middle paragraphs. Summarize a few key aspects of your education, experience, and/or interests that are relevant to the employer, and convey your sincere interest in the position. *Explain what you can do for the company. Expand on the information in your resume and highlight your qualifications by discussing the contributions you can make.*

Closing paragraph: should pave the way for the interview.

You may express your interest in an interview (though do not state a specific time or day). "I am excited to submit my application to you today, and would love the opportunity to hear more about this position." OR "I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the fall internship position at your convenience." Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely/Warm Regards/Respectfully,



If you're able, make a digital copy of your signature so you can copy it into your cover letter. It is not required but can be a nice addition. If you do, be sure to also type out your name below your signature.

Your Name