

# GUIDE TO WRITING cover letters



ONLINE INTERACTIVE BOOK 



# what is a cover letter?

A cover letter is a one-page document submitted along with your resume when applying for jobs. This is a chance to communicate in an authentic way who you are, the person behind the facts and figures in your resume. A cover letter provides an opportunity to highlight key skills and qualifications, give examples that demonstrate your style or approach, and express your interest in the position and company. In essence, it is a way to elaborate on what makes you uniquely qualified for that position.



# BENEFITS OF WRITING A COVER LETTER

- Show dedication to the job or employer because you took the time to write the letter and personalized it to the company.
- Notify employers if you received a referral for the job or if you talked to someone from the company directly.

## Tip!

See 'Identify your **HOW**' activity on page 7 to identify skills and abilities relevant to this job which can set you apart from other candidates!

## Tip!

See 'Identify your **WHY**' activity on page 5 for a breakdown of how to demonstrate alignment between your interests and values with the company!

- Stand out from other applicants by showcasing how and when you used the skills needed for the job opening.
  - Showcase any research you did on the company's website and/or LinkedIn page by connecting to the company's mission and values.
- Demonstrate your fit with the company by discussing how your professional goals and values align with those of the company.
  - Highlight your writing abilities.
  - Address career changes.
  - Opportunity to address any gaps in employment or potential issues with your application (i.e., poor grades, incarceration) and tell your side of the story, what you learned from the experience, and how you have made positive changes towards your career goals.

**myth:** *"I don't need to write a cover letter if it's not required."*

## truth:

**We highly encourage you to submit a cover letter if you have the option.** Cover letters are a great way to stand out in a pool of applicants because it's another opportunity to showcase your interest in the company, how your skills qualify you for the role, and how your professional goals align with what this position or company has to offer.



# COVER LETTER

## do's vs. don'ts

### Do:

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Address the letter to a specific person whenever possible.

Follow the recommended format for cover letters.

Make it personal to the company and position by identifying how your goals and values align with those of the company.

Give personal examples that demonstrate how you applied a certain skill, the approach you took, and the results you've achieved.

Explain what draws you to this work or position. This may include a compelling personal story or motivation. Just don't take up your entire letter with your background story.

### Don't:

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Use excessive hyperbole and inflated language.

Use passive voice (i.e., "I had written reports" Instead, write as "I wrote reports").

Go over 1 page. This is a good general rule, but you can go up to 2 pages when applying for a higher level position with more duties or qualifications to address.

#### Tip!

See the "**Cover Letter Breakdown**" on **page 9** and the "**General Formatting Guidelines**" on **page 14** for more info on standard cover letter formatting.

**Instructions:** Below are some questions that will help you tailor your cover letter to a specific company. As you formulate your responses to the questions below, look through the company website, LinkedIn page, or job description to gather more information about what they do and why they do it.

## Part 1: Why THIS company?

**What is the organization's mission?**

EX: To provide quality accounting services designed to meet the needs and goals of each individual client at cost-effective and inclusive prices.

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**What are their values?**

EX: Growth, partnership, inclusion, honesty, empowerment

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**What target population and/or community does this organization serve?**

EX: Working individuals, families, and small local companies

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***myth:*** “I can use a general cover letter for all of my applications.”

**truth:** Cover letters should be tailored to each specific position or application. They are intended to be personalized to the position and company as much as possible!

# IDENTIFY YOUR *WHY*

## Part 2: Personal Career Goals and Values

**What are my values?**

EX: Improvement, helping others, honesty, respect

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**What are my professional goals?**

EX: To work for a firm that can use their accounting knowledge to make lives easier for hard-working community members.

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**Think back to how you answered the questions in Part 1. List 2 reasons how your goals and values align with the company you are applying to:**

EX: I hope to work for XYZ Firm because I want to help local community members feel confident and prepared for filing taxes. I am passionate about helping those with financial limitations receive effective accounting services at an affordable rate.

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**Instructions:** The purpose of this activity is to think about experiences you've had that demonstrate your unique skills. Unlike the resume which states your experiences and skills, the cover letter should expand upon a few of those key abilities and demonstrate how you've used them.

## Part 1:

**Identify 2-3 main skills that are relevant to the position you are applying for.**

EX: (1) communication skills and bilingualism (2) time management (3) effective problem-solving skills

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**Why are they relevant to the position?**

EX: I will need to meet with clients from a wide variety of backgrounds and identities to discuss their needs, goals, and my process of providing accounting services. Time management is important to meet demands of a larger workload. Problem solving is necessary to understand and fix discrepancies on tax forms or unique financial circumstances.

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***myth:*** “The more skills I list on my cover letter, the more the hiring manager will be impressed.”

### **truth:**

Instead of just summarizing your resume, pick out 2-3 skills or experiences that are most relevant to the job and go in depth on those. Take this opportunity to show your approach to key duties and give brief examples of how you have used the skills you highlight.

# IDENTIFY YOUR *HOW*

**How might these skills set you apart from other candidates?**

EX: Other candidates might not be able to effectively communicate their work style and have strong listening skills in multiple languages to then be able to meet the exact need of clients. My effective time management strategies allow me to work with a larger caseload of clients at once without deteriorating quality of work.

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## Part 2:

**Identify 1-2 experiences in which you can demonstrate when you used the skills you listed above. Remember, these do not have to be limited to only professional work experience.**

EX: I attended CU Denver as a full-time student while working 30 hours a week as an accounting intern at YYY Firm. With that workload, I strengthened my time management and organizational skills by making lists and carving time into my calendar weeks in advance. This ensured I was always ahead of assignments, rarely fell behind, and made my heavy workload feel manageable.

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# COVER LETTER BREAKDOWN

## A header:

Your header will be located at the top of the page and will include your name, phone number, email address, and the city, state, and zip code where you live. This should match the style and format of your resume header.

## B date:

Add the date that you submit your application. It is optional to add the company address.

## C salutation:

Before beginning your intro paragraph, you will want to address your letter to the hiring manager. If you do not have the name of the hiring manager or hiring authority, you can use 'Hiring Manager' or 'Search Committee'.

## D intro - paragraph 1:

- Open with a “hook”, if you have one, to capture the reader’s attention.
- Identify the position you are applying for (include number and title code for the position, if you can) and where you found the position.
- Express your interest in the position and company.
- Mention any referrals you have.
- State that you are qualified for the position.
- Preview what you will discuss in the rest of the letter.

### Tip!

A “hook” is often a personal experience demonstrating your interest in a particular position or industry. See examples in Jackson and Senepathy cover letters on **pages 11 and 12**.

## E body - 2-3 paragraphs:

- Outline your qualifications and connect them to the company’s values and needs.
- Refer to specific and relevant education, internships, or work experiences.
- Support statements with examples that include a situation, action, and result.
- Express your interest in working for the company. Connect with their mission and values listed on their website.

## F conclusion:

- Summarize your key qualifications and reiterate your interest in the position.
- Thank the reader for their consideration of your application.

## G closing signature:

Use a proper closing, such as “Sincerely” or “Best Regards.”

### Tip!

Refer to the “Identify Your WHY” activity on **page 5** for your body paragraphs.

## Jamie Douglas

J-douglas@ucdenver.edu | (303) 315-4000 | Denver, CO 80207

A

B

Date

C

Dear Christopher Singh,

D

I am excited to apply for the position of Student Assistant, Front Desk Customer Service Administrator in the Dean's Office at the University of Colorado Denver. As a first-generation undergraduate student working towards my Bachelor of Science in Music Business, I am looking for an opportunity to work on campus where I can gain professional experience while focusing on my studies. What excites me about this position is the opportunity to utilize my customer service background to support fellow students at CU Denver.

E

During the past year working as a Barista at Starbucks, I learned a great deal about professional etiquette and what the customer experience should look like through greeting people, answering questions, and working in a fast-paced and positive environment. I strive every day to create a welcoming environment for our clientele and enjoy playing a small part in making their day a success. However, what I enjoy most about working in this position, is the opportunity to serve a diverse community. Being able to adapt quickly and understand each person's needs has raised my awareness of different cultures and been pivotal in helping me develop strong communication and interpersonal skills.

As a student, I gained valuable skills working with technology used in my coursework and projects. I write and edit papers in Microsoft Office, use Excel for basic spreadsheets, and use Outlook daily for college-related email. I am comfortable navigating each system and look forward to learning new ways to use each of them more effectively.

F

As the first person in my family to attend college I have overcome a lot of barriers, from simply figuring out how to navigate a college campus to taking on an increased workload and tougher deadlines. This experience has shown me that I can adapt, learn new skills, and perform well under pressure. I believe that those abilities, coupled with my experience working with a diverse community, exercising strong customer service skills, and applying a hard work ethic, make me a strong candidate for this position. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you soon. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at j-douglas@ucdenver.edu or (303) 315-4000.

G

Sincerely,  
Jamie Douglas

## Jayden Jackson

J303-315-4000 | [j-jackson@cudenver.edu](mailto:j-jackson@cudenver.edu) | Denver, CO | [linkedin.com/jayden-jackson](https://www.linkedin.com/jayden-jackson)

Date

Recruiter / Hiring Contact Name

Employer / Company Name

Address

City, State, Zip

Hiring Manger,

I have wondered whether I could have a career in management since I took my first business course two years ago. Recent face-to-face talks with black professionals during a CU Denver mentorship event allowed me to meet role models and to envision myself in their jobs. When I came across your Management Internship Program posted on Handshake, it sounded like the perfect opportunity to continue working toward my goal.

As a major in Management, with a minor in Marketing, the most attractive element of this internship is how you pattern it after your management trainee program, giving interns experience in customer service, developing marketing strategies, and exposure to supervision and management. This internship would allow me to apply my classroom learning in a real business environment while continuing to learn which direction to take my career.

In a recent project, I created a business plan for a new phone app. I came up with a company, described the product and its function, did a marketing analysis, and developed the initial marketing strategy and budget. This experience showed me how detailed a business plan needs to be to have a chance of success. It provided a great foundation for success in your internship program.

Working with people and connecting with my community are two of my priorities, so I appreciate your company's emphasis on giving back to the community and the requirement that interns take part in, and even propose, a summer community service project. I would like to take part in a mentorship program for youth in underserved areas of Denver.

Being a member of the Black Student Alliance has provided me with more confidence and a sense of community on campus. As a member of the outreach committee, I worked to increase membership and helped bring black professionals to campus as speakers and mentors. I have seen, and experienced, the importance of representation for students today.

Thank you for reviewing my resume and application materials. I look forward to hearing from you and hope to interview for the Management Internship Program.

Respectfully,

Jayden Jackson

**SHIVANI KAKARLA SENAPATHY**

(303) 315-4000 | Denver, CO 80206 | [s-enapathy@ucdenver.edu](mailto:s-enapathy@ucdenver.edu) | [LinkedIn](#)

Date

Dear Hiring Committee,

I am excited to apply for the position of Software Engineering Intern at Trimble. Your recruiter, Cailyn Martinez, told me about this internship during the University of Colorado Denver's recent job fair. The longer we talked, the more certain I became that Trimble is a good fit for me. As a skilled problem solver and dedicated network engineer with more than two years combined experience coding in C++ and Python during classes and a previous internship, I am eager to contribute to Trimble's mission of developing technology that enhances the lives of our local and global communities. As a full-time international student pursuing my Master's in Computer Science, I have balanced my time across rigorous computer science-based coursework and extra-curricular activities, all while maintaining a 3.8 GPA. For my undergraduate capstone project, three teammates and I developed a Language Processing Translator using Python while operating in a Scrum team. This product focuses on medical terminology and eliminates language barriers by translating source language to a target language.

During my time as a System Intern at Oracle, I frequently communicated and collaborated with client hospitals such as Westchester Medical Center and Mason General Hospital to resolve concerns around the backup and antivirus of their servers. These conversations required a wide breadth of problem solving, as they occurred across time zones and required strict confidentiality. Within these conversations I gained customer loyalty by listening to their respective issues and presenting them with feasible solutions that met their desired timeline. As part of my role, I was tasked with writing SQL commands that would streamline the backup process of our various databases and reduced system downtime during backups by 17%.

I am constantly seeking out opportunities to enhance my leadership skills. While at the Siddaganga Institute of Technology (SIT), I volunteered and organized blood donation drives resulting in more than 300 donations. I also served as the Cultural Coordinator for my department's year-end festival. This involved planning and coordinating with current and prospective students, staff, and faculty to design activities that reflected the various backgrounds and identities of our students, including Mandal art and folk dance. The day of the event was an exercise working in a high-pressure, fast-paced environment to make sure every component ran smoothly. At the conclusion, I administered a feedback survey to learn how to better implement the event for future Cultural Coordinators. I am eager to apply these same skills while beta testing solutions at Trimble to gain understanding of how users interact with our products and shape them based upon their input.

With these years of experience problem solving as an intern at Oracle in a professional environment, exercising leadership and collaboration skills at my undergraduate institution, and conducting projects using Python and C++ in my academic courses, I am well prepared to dedicate myself to the high standards of your software engineering internship experience.

Thank you,

Shivani Kakarla Senapathy

## **LORENA RAMIREZ**

(303) 315-4000 | L-Ramirez@gmail.com | Denver, CO 80206

Date

Dear Hiring Committee,

I am excited to apply for the Therapist position with Denver Children's Home as posted on LinkedIn. As a recent graduate from the University of Colorado Denver's M.A. in Counseling, Clinical Mental Health program, I have both conceptual and practical experience in counseling, which has prepared me to utilize trauma-informed care practices to help young children and their families. I believe my formal education in Psychology and teaching experience make me a good fit for this position.

I am drawn to the Therapist position at Denver Children's Home because of your commitment to help our community's youth receive therapeutic and educational services to process traumatic events and experiences. During my time working as an English teacher, I developed strong interpersonal relationships and connected with my students to learn more about what they are experiencing. These conversations weighed on my career choices and were ultimately what drove me to pursue my M.A. in Counseling to become a Licensed Professional Counselor. As a Therapist with DCH, I could play a direct role in transforming the lives of our community's youth and empowering them to take ownership of their treatment.

While working in a private group practice as part of my clinical practicum placement, I provided individual and group mental health counseling. In this role, I honed my counseling skills while working with community resources to provide client care coordination. I learned effective time management as I handled scheduling with my caseload of 12 clients, while simultaneously managing a workload as a full-time graduate student. This role also taught me to handle stress effectively as I helped clients dealing with acute and chronic crisis situations. My role also required marketing abilities using outreach to community partners, website and graphic design skills, and collaboration with the practice's partners to expand recruitment efforts for new professional counselors. These experiences have prepared me for the demands and strict deadlines required for this role as a therapist, as well as the changing demands of client-facing appointments. I am prepared to communicate and build professional relationships with children and staff to provide effective therapeutic and educational services.

In addition, as a middle school English teacher, I learned the power in personalizing program plans and learning modalities to best fit the needs of my students. This personalized approach is reflected in my experience of implementing multi-media tools, including e-readers and interactive gaming programs for grammar and syntax development, which garnered positive feedback from students and improved outcomes on written book reports. Teaching helped refine my skills to clearly communicate thoughts and ideas while allowing space to receive constructive feedback from students, parents, and faculty. My experience as a teacher cemented my passion for youth-oriented work with a larger goal of creating more accessible mental health resources.

I strongly believe my skills, experiences, and career goals align with the Therapist position at Denver Children's Home. I hope to have the opportunity to further expand on my qualifications and interest in this position. Thank you for your time and consideration of my application.

Sincerely,

Lorena Ramirez

# GENERAL FORMATTING GUIDELINES

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## VISUAL STYLE

- Set margins to 0.5-1 inch.
- Use only one font throughout the body except in the case of the header.
- Use black-and-white text only; avoid colored fonts.
- Use standard font types such as Times New Roman, Arial, Cambria, or Calibri.
- Minimize the use of underlining or italics except for publication names/titles.

## FORMAT

- Use single-spacing throughout except between blocks or paragraphs.
- Use an identical header to your resume.
- Include the specific date the cover letter was submitted/sent in.

## WRITING STYLE

- Address the letter to a specific person. If this is not possible, address the letter to “Dear Hiring Committee” or “Dear Human Resources.”
- Write with your audience in mind. Communicate in terms of how you will be an asset to them.
- Include keywords from the job post and demonstrate qualifications they value or require.
- Support statements with evidence or examples.
- Limit the use of “I” and “me.”
- Address why you want to work for the company, if relevant and sincere.
- Use a proper closing, such as “Sincerely” or “Best Regards.”

## TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE WRITING

- Use concise language.
- Use active verbiage.
- Use correct grammar.
- Have someone proofread before submitting.
- Vary your word choices.
- Remember to discuss why your skills and experience make you qualified for the position you are for.





## CONGRATS!

### YOU LEARNED HOW TO FORMAT YOUR COVER LETTER

At LynxConnect, we're here to support you throughout the employment process! Schedule an appointment in Handshake to talk with a professional about your cover letter.

Have some quick questions or would like faster assistance from a peer instead? Choose "LynxConnect - Peer Career Advisor" in Handshake for appointment options.

## NEED MORE HELP?

### CHECK OUT THESE RESOURCES:

#### **CU Denver Career Center**

Tivoli Student Union, Suite 439 | 303-315-4000 | [ucdenver.edu/lynxconnect/career-center](https://ucdenver.edu/lynxconnect/career-center)

#### **CU Denver Writing Center**

Corner of 12th St. & Larimer St. (CU Denver) First Floor  
(303) 315-7355 | [writing.center@ucdenver.edu](mailto:writing.center@ucdenver.edu) | <https://clas.ucdenver.edu/writing-center/>