

Cover Letter Writing Guide

INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY CAREER CENTER

An important but often misunderstood part of the job search process is the cover letter. Your résumé tells employers about your qualifications, education, and experiences, but it is your cover letter that piques their interest enough to read your résumé. Your cover letter lets you emphasize information you want the reader to notice in your résumé. It also gives you the opportunity to personalize and tailor your message and to highlight your written communication skills.

SELL YOURSELF

Get the reader interested in you and your experiences.

MEET THE EMPLOYER'S NEEDS

Many companies will do key word searches of your cover letter and résumé to filter the candidates that most closely match their job description. Speak to the requirements of the job and use the correct industry language and buzzwords. Also tell the employer not just how you will do the duties of the job, but how you will add value to the organization. Provide at least one concise example of how you have applied an important skill in a previous position or school project.

PROPERLY ADDRESS YOUR COVER LETTER

Find out the name and title of the person to whom you should send your cover letter. If you cannot get this information online, you may have to call the employer to find out. Make sure to spell their name correctly and do not confuse their job title. Beginning your cover letter with "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Sir or Madam" is strongly not recommended. If you are unable to identify the proper contact, use "Dear Hiring Official" in your greeting. If you are sending your résumé via e-mail, in many cases the e-mail message becomes your cover letter.

GET TO THE POINT

Brevity is key. Employers do not have time to read long cover letters. Keep it to one page. In the first sentence of your cover letter, explain what the letter is about and why you are writing it. Be concise and make your letter easy to read.

DO NOT OVERUSE THE WORD "I"

After completing the first draft of your cover letter, take a pencil and circle every sentence that begins with I. Vary sentence structure and use compound sentences to reduce the number of sentences that begin with I. Read the cover letter out loud to yourself to ensure it flows well and sounds professional.

CONVEY THE RIGHT IMAGE

Never be negative or speak poorly about a previous employer. Make sure your language conveys a confident tone. Instead of saying "I feel" and "I think", try saying "I know." It leaves the reader with a much more positive impression.

BE ASSERTIVE

If the purpose of sending your cover letter is to get an application or arrange an interview, say so. Many candidates write sentence after sentence without getting to the point in their cover letters. When closing, mention what you will do to follow up with the employer and when. Then do not forget to call.

MAKE IT PERFECT

Spell correctly and watch your grammar. Have multiple people proof your résumé. The ISU Career Center has Walk-In hours every weekday for quick 15-minute appointments to have your document reviewed. Save a copy of your document as a PDF to ensure un-altered formatting.

MATCH YOUR RÉSUMÉ

Make sure to use the same paper, color, and font style as your résumé if you print it out to send.

CUSTOMIZE

Every cover letter should be tailored to each company, industry, and position. Research the company ahead of time and use industry language so they know how interested you are in their company.

COVER LETTER TEMPLATE

Your Street Address
City, State Zip Code
Telephone Number
Indiana State University Email Address

Month Day, Year

Mr./Ms./Dr./First Name Last Name
Title
Name of Organization
Street or P.O Box Address
City, State Zip Code

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

Opening paragraph: This is your introduction paragraph. State why you are writing the letter, the specific position or type of work you are applying for, and how you learned of the organization or position (Career Center, name of publication or website, friend, employment service, etc.). Additionally, you may choose to include basic information about yourself, such as your education background. This is where you also would mention why you are interested in this employer and **this** specific position, brag about them!

Body Paragraph(s): (One to two paragraphs) In this section, demonstrate that you know enough about the employer or position to relate your background to the employer or position. Mention specific qualifications that make you a good fit for the employer's needs. This is also an opportunity to explain in more detail relevant items in your résumé. If possible, describe how you have used important skills in at least one specific accomplishment or project. Do not restate full sections of your résumé, but rather give **concrete examples** of how you possess specific qualities and skills. Examples will indicate to the employer the type of work you will perform for them in the future.

Conclusion Paragraph: In the closing paragraph, indicate that you would like the opportunity to interview for the position. Repeat your contact information and offer any assistance that will help promote a speedy response and that you would be glad to provide the employer with any additional information needed. State that you would be glad to provide the employer with any additional information needed. Thank the employer for his/her consideration.

Sincerely,

(Your handwritten signature [on hard copy])

Your name typed

Enclosure(s) (refers to résumé, portfolio, demo etc.)

SAMPLE COVER LETTER (BASIC)

234 Locust Street
Terre Haute, IN 47809
(812) 122-3334
jleaf@sycamores.indstate.edu

October 24, 2018

Mr. Joe Smith
Special Programs Assistant
Vigo County Wilderness Challenge
432 Margaret Ave.
Terre Haute, IN 47802

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am a sophomore at Indiana State University working toward my bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice. I am seeking an internship for the summer 2019, and found your internship posting through the ISU Career Center. I have had a variety of related experiences that have prepared me well and given me an understanding of working with the adolescent community. I know the Vigo County Wilderness Challenge works to rehabilitate and educate juvenile offenders so they can contribute positively to society. I feel strongly about giving teens a second chance, and I know I will be a good fit for your internship.

My related experiences include volunteering 10 hours a week as a hotline assistant for a local intervention center. After a 50 hour training program, I counseled teenagers about personal concerns and referred them, when necessary, to appropriate professional services for additional help. My experience as a residence hall assistant also lends itself to this opportunity. This role requires me to establish rapport with 50 residents and advise them on personal matters as well as University policies. In addition, I developed social and educational programs and activities each semester for up to 200 participants.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my qualifications in greater detail. Please feel free to contact me at 812-122-3334 or jleaf@sycamores.indstate.edu. If not contacted sooner, I will follow up in two weeks to see where you are in the process. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jamie Leaf

Enclosure: Résumé

Cover Letter Rubric

Cover Letter Learning Outcomes

- Produce a compelling cover letter that summarizes interest and qualifications for a position in a particular organization.
- Career Competency Addressed: Oral/Written Communication
- Career Competency Obtained: Career Management .



Student's Name: _____

	1-Needs Improvement	3-Average	5-Effective	Comments
Opening Paragraph State why you are writing, how you learned of the organization or position, why you are interested in this position or company, and your education and basic information about yourself.	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not identify a specific position, organization and purpose for writing <input type="checkbox"/> Does not describe interest in, nor brief qualifications for, position and/or organization being pursued <input type="checkbox"/> Does not use transition sentence to introduce second paragraph	<input type="checkbox"/> Vague in describing position, organization and/or purpose for writing <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequately describes interest in, and brief qualifications for, position and/or organization being pursued <input type="checkbox"/> Weak transition into second paragraph	<input type="checkbox"/> Identifies positions, organization and purpose <input type="checkbox"/> Describes interest in, and brief qualifications for, position and organization being pursued <input type="checkbox"/> Tailored specifically to a position or organization. <input type="checkbox"/> Uses a transition sentence to effectively introduce second paragraph	
Middle Paragraph(s) Present relevant qualifications, experience and skills related to the position/organizations. Must make a connection between your experiences and achievements and the specific job/opportunity you are applying for.	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not discuss any relevant qualifications. Have not related your skills to the position applied for. <input type="checkbox"/> Does not state why interested in the position, company, and/or location.	<input type="checkbox"/> Identifies one of your qualifications, but it is not related to the position at hand. <input type="checkbox"/> Restates what is on your résumé with minimal additional information. <input type="checkbox"/> Explains why you are interested in the position but are too vague	<input type="checkbox"/> Identifies one or two of your strongest qualifications and/or skills and clearly relates how these apply to the job at hand. <input type="checkbox"/> Explains specifically why you are interested in the position and this type of job, company, and/or location.	
Closing Paragraph Wrap-up/action	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not thank reader <input type="checkbox"/> Does not express interest in a meeting or conversation	<input type="checkbox"/> Thank you statement and/or expression of interest for a meeting or conversation needs editing	<input type="checkbox"/> Thanks reader for considering him/her <input type="checkbox"/> Expresses interest in a meeting or conversation <input type="checkbox"/> Includes phone number and/or email (contact information)	
Presentation and Format: Visually appealing, proper grammar and spelling, and standardized cover letter format	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not use business letter format <input type="checkbox"/> Letter is not addressed properly <input type="checkbox"/> Contact information does not match résumé <input type="checkbox"/> Does not use appropriate language/grammar for the position <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple grammatical and/or spelling error <input type="checkbox"/> Visually unappealing	<input type="checkbox"/> Uses business letter format, but elements are incorrect with date and/or addresses and signature section <input type="checkbox"/> Uses a greeting and addresses a person, but some elements need editing <input type="checkbox"/> Name and contact information are included at top of letter. <input type="checkbox"/> Some of the language and grammar is inappropriate for the position and needs editing <input type="checkbox"/> A few errors <input type="checkbox"/> Some parts are visually appealing, but other parts can be enhanced	<input type="checkbox"/> Uses correct business letter format with date and addresses at the top and job seeker signature <input type="checkbox"/> Uses an appropriate greeting and addresses the correct person and department <input type="checkbox"/> Uses industry specific language from the job description <input type="checkbox"/> Is well written and utilizes professional grammar for the position <input type="checkbox"/> Error free <input type="checkbox"/> Visually appealing	

This rubric was created using guidelines from the NACE (National Association of Colleges and Employers) community. NACE is a consortium of more than 3,000 university relations, recruiting professionals and business affiliates. It is the leading source of information on the employment of the college educated, and forecasts hiring and trends in the job market; tracks starting salaries, recruiting and hiring practices, and student attitudes and outcomes; and identifies best practices and benchmarks.

Career Center Staff Signature: _____

Date: _____