

Cover Letter Writing Guide

INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY CAREER CENTER

An important but often confusing part of the job application 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 move you further in the process. In your cover letter, you emphasize and expand on information provided in your resume. You have 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. Show how you are the perfect fit for the position.

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. Show how you have already used the skills the organization is looking for previously, if possible.

PROPERLY ADDRESS YOUR COVER LETTER

Find out the name and title of the person in charge of hiring for the position. 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 use their proper job title. Beginning your cover letter with "To Whom It May Concern" or other generic phrasing is not recommended. If you are unable to identify the proper contact, use "Dear Hiring Official" or "Dear Search Committee" 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 position you're applying for and where you found the position. Be concise and make your letter easy to read.

DO NOT OVERUSE THE WORD "I"

After completing the first draft of your cover letter, mark every sentence that begins with I to identify if it's been overused. Vary your sentence structures and reduce "I" usage. Read the cover letter 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" be confident and use strong verbs when describing things. 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 in your closing. Be grateful, while showing that you're interested. For instance, "Given the opportunity, I would be pleased to meet with you and discuss my ability to work for Company Y. I can be reached at..." Remember to thank the reader for their time, too.

MAKE IT PERFECT

Spell correctly and watch your grammar. Have multiple people proof your cover letter. Visit the ISU Career Center during Walk Ins (M-F, 10-12 and 1-3) to review the content and format. The ISU Writing Center is available to assist with grammar and sentence structure. 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.

CUSTOMIZE

Every cover letter should be tailored to each company, industry, and position. Showcase your experience as it relates to the specified position.

Remember to connect the company’s needs with your experience. Highlight the key words used in the job description, then include as many key words as appropriate in your examples. Provide details and support when possible to show your skills, as well as highlight how you will be an asset to the company. The example below shows this connection.

Job Description	Examples in Cover Letter (body paragraph)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data management, including coordinating GPS data collection, validation, storage and transfer of observations inventory to Midwest Invasive Species Identification Network and granting agencies • Ensure invasive species treatment is conducted according to best management practices, following the EGLE and MISIN best practices for data collection, and MDARD requirements for CAKE-CISMA’s cost share program. This includes securing landowner permissions and state permits as necessary. 	<p>I developed an interest in invasive species after completing my Bachelor of Science in Biology and interning for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. During my internship, I worked with invasive plant species, identifying, collecting, validating and inventorying data gathered through GPS programs, then removing them in lake, wetland, and beach environments. I became familiar with the role of plants in Great Lakes beach ecosystems, and participated in dune restoration projects like planting dune grass. In addition to hands-on work experience, my internship allowed me to interact with various stakeholders, pursue grant opportunities, and learn about state and county landowner policies and permits.</p>
Job Description	Examples in Cover Letter (body paragraph)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrolled or recently graduated from college or university in marketing, business, communications, or similar field • Any customer service, account management, or marketing experience welcome • Effective communication skills, both written and verbal, as well as a strong command of English required • Helpful to have knowledge or experience in social media including the following: blogging, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Pinterest, Instagram, TikTok, and more • Flexibility and ability to work within tight deadlines • Self-starter, multi-task orientated, and computer literate 	<p>My communication skills and ability to multi-task in a fast-paced environment will fit well with the Graduate Media and Marketing’s social media coordinator internship. With a major in Communications, my educational background has provided me with an understanding of a variety of social media components and the ability to clearly articulate my thoughts and ideas. Additionally, I have gained practical experience as the marketing coordinator for the Sycamore Union Board. Through this experience, I have enhanced my communication skills, in order to effectively lead a team, increase students’ awareness of campus programming, and meet deadlines. While serving in the role, I have increased our social media outlets, including YouTube and Instagram, to market events and honed my ability to manage several projects and events at one time.</p>

COVER LETTER EXAMPLE

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. 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 and why you want to work there!

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. **Do your research!** Mention specific qualifications that make you a good fit for the employer's needs. Use some of the key words they use in the job description. 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

February 10, 2020

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 2020 and found your internship posting through the ISU Career Center. I have had a variety of related experiences, both in and out of the classroom, that have prepared me well and given me knowledge of how to best work with adolescents. Additionally, 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 your organization strives to do the same.

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.

As a Criminal Justice major, I have taken courses on the psychological theories and best practices when working with at risk youth. Additionally, by completing case studies for my coursework, I have been able to read about what practices have proven successful – or not – and how to implement the successful practices when working with youth. The Vigo County Wilderness Challenge fits in line with successful practices I have studied, and I hope to contribute to your work with these juveniles.

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 time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jamie Leaf

Enclosure: Résumé

Cover Letter Rubric



Cover Letter Learning Outcomes

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

Student's Name: _____

	(1) Needs Improvement	(2) Average	(3) Effective	Comments
Opening Paragraph: Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why you are writing • How you learned of the position or company • Why you are interested in this position or company • Your education • Basic information about yourself 	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not identify a specific position, company, and purpose for writing <input type="checkbox"/> Does not describe interest in, nor brief qualifications for, position and/or company being pursued <input type="checkbox"/> Does not use transition sentence to introduce second paragraph	<input type="checkbox"/> Vague in describing position, company, and/or purpose for writing <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequately describes interest in, and brief qualifications for, position and/or company 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 company being pursued <input type="checkbox"/> Tailored specifically to a position or company <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 Must make a connection between your experiences and achievements and the specific position you are applying for	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not discuss any relevant qualifications. <input type="checkbox"/> Does not relate skills to the position	<input type="checkbox"/> Identifies one of your qualifications, but it is not related to the position <input type="checkbox"/> Restates what is on your résumé with minimal additional information	<input type="checkbox"/> Identifies one or two of your strongest qualifications and/or skills and clearly relates how they apply to the position <input type="checkbox"/> Utilizes quantifiable data (#'s, \$, %) to highlight relevant, impactful, and specific achievements	
Closing Paragraph: Express interest in interview, thank them for their time and consideration, include contact information for follow-up	<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 time and consideration for the position <input type="checkbox"/> Expresses interest in a meeting or conversation <input type="checkbox"/> Includes phone number and/or email (contact information)	
Presentation & Format: Visually appealing, proper grammar and spelling, and standardized cover letter format	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not use cover letter format <input type="checkbox"/> Letter is not addressed to a specific person <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 cover letter format, but elements are incorrect such as date, 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: _____

Updated 4.29.2020