

Cover Letter Guide



LUTHER COLLEGE®

CAREER CENTER

WHAT IS A COVER LETTER?

A cover letter is a document that accompanies your resume. It brings an opportunity to emphasize your excitement and the value that you can bring to the hiring organization. Traditionally, the cover letter was mailed on top of ("covering") the resume. Now, cover letters are used to expand on your resume in a way that catches the interest of the employer. This improves your chances of being invited to an interview.

What do I write about in a cover letter?

A strong cover letter will communicate your potential contributions to the hiring company and the ways in which you are a “good fit” for the job role. To do so, highlight key life/work experiences that shape your interest, understanding, and abilities. Use your knowledge of the company to connect yourself to the organization’s mission and position needs.

Key Tips:

- ★ **Tailor the letter** for each position you apply.
 - Review the job description, using key words from the posting to describe your accomplishments
- ★ **Research** the company
 - Be sure to connect the company’s mission/history to your own personal values/experiences
- ★ **Share specific examples** of your experiences that align directly with the job description

COVER LETTER VS. RESUME

★ **Specific Audience:**
Cover letters are written to a specific organization about a specific opportunity

★ **Paragraph Format:**
Cover letters demonstrate writing ability

★ **Focus on Future:** Cover letters explain how past experiences prepared you for the new experience you're applying for

★ **The “How”:** Cover letters show how you will benefit the organization

★ **General Audience:**
Resumes introduce your experiences to a general audience

★ **Bullet Format:** Resumes are brief and concise

★ **Focus on Past:** Resumes list qualifications and previous experiences

★ **The “What”:** Resumes tell what you have done in the past

GETTING STARTED



Is a cover letter required?

It depends! Some job applications, especially on platforms with “quick apply” features, don’t require a cover letter. But don’t skip it if you have the chance to include one. Many employers still appreciate cover letters because they show you’re serious about the job. Plus, when so many people use “quick apply,” writing a cover letter can help you stand out by showing you’re willing to go the extra mile.

Who do I address it to?

Whenever possible, address your letter to a specific person by name and title. If you don’t know who that is, try looking it up online or reach out to the organization to ask. If you still can’t find a name, it’s okay to use a general title like “Hiring Manager” or “Director of Human Resources.”

Proofread, proofread, proofread!

A well-written cover letter can demonstrate your writing skills and impress the hiring team. A cover letter with grammatical errors and disorganization that lacks customized details can have a negative effect on interview selection. Be sure to read it out loud and have others help you look it over.



COVER LETTER STRUCTURE

Introductory Paragraph

Clearly state the position you're applying for and how you found the opportunity. This helps employers immediately understand your intent. Take this chance to express why you're excited about the organization—it shows that you've done your research and share their values or mission.

Body or Middle Paragraph(s)

Use the middle paragraphs to highlight what makes you a strong candidate. Focus on specific qualifications that align with the job requirements, such as work experience, extracurricular involvement, coursework, or personal achievements. Explain how these experiences have helped you develop relevant skills and why they make you a great fit for the position. Be confident and use this section to show the employer that you're motivated and prepared to excel in the role!

Closing Paragraph

Thank the reader for their time and consideration. Reiterate your enthusiasm for the position and your interest in discussing how you can contribute to the organization. Include your phone number and email address, and invite them to contact you to schedule an interview. A polite closing statement, such as, "I look forward to the opportunity to speak with you further," is a great way to wrap up.



PRINTED FORMAT

FONT: Something simple and easy to read. We recommend using the same font as your resume.

SUGGESTED FONTS:

★ Arial

★ Times New Roman

★ Calibri

FONT SIZE: 11-12

MARGINS: 1”

LENGTH: No longer than 1 full page, 250-400 words

Make Sure to Include:

- ★ **Heading with contact information:** use the heading from your resume
- ★ **Date line:** the date (month, day, and year) on which the letter is typed
- ★ **Inside address:** the name and address of the person to whom you are writing
- ★ **Salutation:** an opening greeting like “Dear Lisa Morales,”
- ★ **Message:** the body of the letter, single-spaced paragraphs (no indentations)
- ★ **Complimentary closing:** a parting phrase such as “Sincerely,”
- ★ **Your full name:** your typed name

FORMATTING EXAMPLE

Your Name

Email Address | Phone Number | LinkedIn URL | Portfolio/GitHub (if applicable)

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Today's Date

¶

Name of Hiring Manager (First and Last)

Street Address of Company

City, State Zip Code

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Dear Name of Hiring Manager (First and Last),

¶

Purpose: Immediately come to the point. Reveal interest (why you are writing). Identify the position (title of position) you are applying for and your source of information (how you found out about the opening). Outline your goals or learning objectives and describe your interest in the organization and demonstrate “why them/why now.”

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Connect Self to Job: In this section, make explicit connections between you and the job itself. Tell them “what sets you apart.” Highlight an experience (internship, work-study, part-time job, research, etc.) you feel relates to the position you are applying for. Even if the experience does not directly relate to the job, try to recognize skills/knowledge gained from your experience that are essential for your desired position. Describe your role through a detailed example in a way that **shows** the employer you have the qualities and skills to perform the job well. **Tip:** use the job description to include keywords and phrases when describing your personal experience.

Connect Self to Organization: In this section, make explicit connections between you and the organization. Here, you show how you are a good fit. Describe a separate experience demonstrating who you are (drive, motivations, values, etc.). Again, use a specific example.

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Appreciation and Contact: Show appreciation to the reader for their time and consideration. Indicate your phone number and email address where you can be reached. Express your excitement to hear from them soon/to get to the next phase of the application process.

¶

Sincerely,

Optional signature (in a computer application)

¶

¶

Your full name (typed)

EMAIL FORMAT

New Message

Recipients

Subject

Sam Norse - Marketing Internship

Dear Ms. Smith,

Best Regards,
Sam Norse
sam.norse@gmail.com
576-370-XXXX
linkedin.com/in/sam-norse

Sam Norse Resume.pdf (1,011K)

Send

A

- ★ Include your contact information in the signature
- ★ Send your resume as a PDF attachment
- ★ Rename attached files to include your name

START UP EXERCISES

Are you stuck? Try these writing exercises!

1. Write several (4–5) opening sentences and then select your favorite.
2. List three skills that the job you are applying for will require. Then list examples of accomplishments that demonstrate your ability to meet each skill. Turn this list of examples into sentence format.
3. Feeling self-doubt? Ask current or past coworkers, professors, or close friends why they think you'd be a quality candidate.
4. Outline why this organization would want to hire you. What do you have to offer the organization that would make you the best candidate?
5. Describe what you know about an organization: background, size, products and services, community involvement, growth, etc. Use bits and pieces of this information to personalize your cover letter.



Sam Norse

sam.norse@gmail.com | 576-370-XXXX | linkedin.com/in/sam-norse

February 18, 2025

Fastenal Company
2001 Theurer Blvd
Winona, MN 55987

Dear Hiring Manager,

I am excited to apply for the Marketing Strategist position at Fastenal. With hands-on marketing experience and a strong entrepreneurial mindset, I believe my background aligns well with Fastenal's commitment to innovative solutions and customer-centered service.

In the summer of 2024, I interned at Sparkle Marketing, where I utilized data collection and analysis within a five-person team to create targeted marketing strategies for a client in the retail industry. By assessing the efficacy of past campaigns using key performance metrics, I collaborated with my team to adjust our approach, which increased client engagement by 15%. This experience sharpened my ability to connect marketing data with current trends and create tailored strategies that drive measurable outcomes—skills I am eager to bring to Fastenal.

As a resident assistant at Luther College, I designed a tutoring program that drew participation from over 30 students, fostering collaboration and engagement within my community. This initiative gave me firsthand experience in developing creative solutions that connect people with resources—a skill I can apply to crafting marketing strategies that build customer loyalty. Fastenal's commitment to empowering employees to innovate within their roles inspires me, and I am motivated to contribute my creativity and problem-solving skills to support your mission.

I am eager to bring my passion for data-driven marketing and innovative energy to Fastenal. Joining a community driven by excellence and service excites and inspires me. I welcome the opportunity to discuss how my skills and experiences align with your team's goals. Please feel free to contact me at 576-370-XXXX to arrange an interview. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sam Norse

Taylor Norse

taylor.norse@gmail.com | 576-370-XXXX | linkedin.com/in/taylor-norse

Poppy Popplington
Garden Center Theatre Company
302 Marigold Lane
Leafree, CO 12345

Dear Poppy Popplington,

After reviewing the Globe Center Theatre Company's marketing internship listing on your website, I am excited to submit my resume for consideration. Beyond providing me with an opportunity to incorporate my love of performing arts into my career, I believe that this position would allow me to gain practical experience in this industry, while also enabling me to contribute my writing, organization, and strategic planning skills. The Theatre's mission to inspire audiences and artists to dream and discover aligns with my desire to work for an organization that embraces creativity and imaginative thinking.

I am currently a senior at Luther College involved in Performing Arts. I believe that my proficient communication skills and ability to multi-task in a fast-paced environment will fit well with the Theatre's marketing position. With a minor in Marketing, my educational background has provided me with an understanding of media components and the ability to clearly articulate my thoughts and ideas. Additionally, I have gained practical skills in my work as a Media Intern with Top Banana, a student-organized comedy improv troupe. Through this experience, I have learned to effectively facilitate meetings, develop promotional materials, and engage in program planning featuring students with all sorts of talents. I have also had two years of event planning and marketing experience through my previous work with the Ticket Office at Luther College. In that role, I updated website content and developed concepts for events. These experiences taught me how to effectively manage my time while working under tight deadlines.

I am very enthusiastic about the possibility of working for the Theatre and have enclosed my resume for review. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity for an interview. For further details, please contact me at (123)-456-7890 or taylornorse@luther.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Taylor Norse

Joe Norse

joe.norse@gmail.com | 576-370-XXXX | linkedin.com/in/joe-norse

February 1, 2025

Max Power
For the Kids Foundation
7154 Inspire Rd.
San Bernardino, CA 12345

Dear Max Power,

As someone dedicated to creating inclusive environments where children can thrive, I am excited to apply for the Program Coordinator position at For The Kids Foundation. With a passion for community engagement and a commitment to fostering resilience in youth, I believe my skills and experiences align with your organization's mission.

In May 2025, I will graduate from Luther College with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. My academic coursework, combined with hands-on experience as a youth care intern, have prepared me to support and empower children in meaningful ways. During my internship, I collaborated with a team of professionals to design and implement individualized strategies that helped clients develop independence and achieve their personal goals. This experience taught me the importance of empathy, adaptability, and teamwork in addressing diverse needs.

I have cultivated skills in organization, leadership, and collaboration through group projects and campus involvement. As a student leader, I successfully balanced a strong academic record with responsibilities that required initiative and interpersonal communication. These experiences have equipped me to contribute effectively to a dynamic team and advance For The Kids Foundation's mission of providing care and support to youth.

I'm eager to bring my dedication and skills to For the Kids Foundation as a Program Coordinator. Please feel free to contact me at 319-399-0XXX or joenorse@luther.edu with any questions. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Joe Norse

COVER LETTER VS. PERSONAL STATEMENT

★ **Formal:** Cover letters should be written in a professional tone and format

★ **Written for job applications:** Cover letters are written to a specific organization about a specific job opportunity

★ **Less formal:** Personal statements tell your story, express your motivations for pursuing this opportunity, and highlight how you will uniquely contribute to the program, community, and field more broadly

★ **Written for graduate school:** Personal statements are most common as supplemental materials when applying for graduate or medical school programs

★ **Guidelines provided:** Read the guidelines closely for a specific prompt or word count



GENERATIVE AI

Use it, don't abuse it.



AI is a powerful tool that can help you develop an organized, compelling cover letter. There are many sites available for you to use, including ChatGPT. **Never upload your contact information to an AI resource. Many generative AI tools will intake and save uploaded information.**

Helpful Prompts:

- ★ Customize this cover letter *[insert your draft minus your contact information]* for this job description *[insert text]*
- ★ Turn this experience on my resume *[insert text]* into a paragraph for a cover letter
- ★ *[Paste your resume minus your personal contact information into the AI program]* Please write a cover letter draft that highlights my skills in this resume
- ★ Tell me what skills and expertise are important for *[insert a job role]* in *[insert industry]*
- ★ Show me examples of how I can effectively convey the following skills *[insert skills from resume]* in my cover letter to interest a hiring manager
- ★ Create a list of things that are unnecessary to include in a cover letter so that I can edit mine

GENERATIVE AI

More Helpful Prompts:

- ★ Compose a professional cover letter demonstrating how my abilities *[attach resume]* align with the requirements for the *[position]* at *[company]*
- ★ *[Include cover letter]* Please proofread this cover letter for grammatical and formatting errors
- ★ Help me to better convey my interest and excitement *[include cover letter]* for this position *[include job description]*

Key Tips:

★ Use AI for inspiration

- Don't rely on AI to do all the heavy lifting; adding in your creativity and your own specific details will personalize your cover letter

★ Be specific with AI prompts

- The more specific you can be, the more relevant and efficient the results will be

★ Review, review, review

- Check to be sure that any details, punctuation, and grammar given by AI are accurate - AI can make mistakes

Supporting your self-awareness
and confidence as you design your life.

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CAREER CENTER

Ways to connect with the Career Center

- ★ Schedule a 1:1 Coaching Appointment via Handshake
- ★ Drop-In for a Career Lab, Union, 2nd Floor
- ★ Visit [Luther.edu/Career](https://luther.edu/Career)
- ★ Email Career@Luther.edu
- ★ Follow us on social @LCCareer

