

Definition of genre

A cover letter is a letter that accompanies your resume and introduces you and your qualifications to a potential employer. In the cover letter, you should state which position you are applying for and why you are qualified for the job. The cover letter is particularly important because it enables you to draw specific qualifications in your resume to your reader's attention.

Questions to ask

- Why am I qualified for this position?
- How can I prove I'm qualified for this position?
- What have I done that sets me apart from other candidates?

Actions to take

- Tailor your letter to specific job announcements.
- Learn as much as possible about what the company is looking for. If you know people who work at the company, contact them and ask them about the company and the particular unit in which you are interested.
- Ask yourself what skills you have gained during your past employment and educational experiences and choose the ones most closely related to the job announcement. Think of specific examples to demonstrate these skills.

Specifics

Organization

A cover letter has four parts: heading, introduction, argument, and closing.

- **Heading:** includes your contact information and the address of the company to which you are applying.
- **Introduction:** includes the greeting ("Dear Mr. Smith"), a statement of who you are and the position to which you are applying.
- **Argument:** describes your qualifications and why they are ideally suited to the position.

- Closing: informs your readers when you will contact them, provides your phone number and email, and thanks the readers for their consideration.

Formatting

- Single-space your cover letter.
- Leave a space between each paragraph.
- Leave three (3) spaces between your salutation (e.g. “Sincerely”) and your typed name.
- Sign your name in ink between the salutation and typed name.
- Use standard margins for your cover letter, such as 1-inch margins on all sides of the document.
- Either align all paragraphs to the left of the page, or indent the first line of each paragraph.

This handout was adapted from the OWL Cover Letter handouts at Purdue University (see below)

Helpful Links

Duke University’s Career Center

<http://www.studentaffairs.duke.edu/career>

Virginia Tech’s Career Services

<http://www.career.vt.edu/JobSearchGuide/CoverLetterSamples.html>

Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/550/01> (preparing to write a cover letter)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/549/01> (cover letter quick tips)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/527/01> (writing your cover letter)