



SALISH KOOTENAI COLLEGE
CAREER SERVICES

COVER LETTER GUIDE

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WHAT IS A COVER LETTER?

The cover letter is a tool to help introduce yourself in a memorable and personal way during a job application.

Your resume is intended to lay out the facts, but your cover letter is meant to convey your personality. The cover letter is your first introduction to the person who may hire you, and its goal should be to make you as memorable as possible. That means writing a unique cover letter for every job you apply to. The format and content of your cover letter should also match the company and the industry you're applying to.

Make sure you customize the letter to highlight the achievements most relevant for each position. Most importantly, don't send an obviously-generic letter that has not been customized for the company/position.

SECTIONS TO INCLUDE ON THE COVER LETTER

Your contact information

There are two ways to list contact information on your cover letter, depending on whether you're providing a digital or hard copy.

As with many standard business letters, you should include a few pieces of information at the top of your cover letter. Some people might center their name and address at the top of the page, mirroring the way it looks on their resume. For example:

Julie Sherdin
555 Orchard Lane, Pablo, MT | (406) 268-4000 | juliesherdin@email.com

Otherwise, you might decide to simply list each piece of information on a new line oriented to the left-hand side of the page. For example:

Julie Sherdin
555 Orchard Lane
Pablo, MT
(406) 268-4000
juliesherdin@email.com

If you're submitting a digital copy online, leave off your specific address and just use your city and state, phone number, and email—and leave off the company and hiring manager's contact information altogether.

Date

Next, include the date of the day you are sending the letter. The date line should be separated from your address and the recipient's address.

Recipient's name and address

After the date, list the recipient's name and contact information. If you can, find out the name of the supervisor or hiring manager for the role you're applying for. Reread the job description to see if it's listed there or check the company website. It's also an option to call the company and ask for the hiring manager's name. Explain that you are applying for a job and would like to address your cover letter to the correct person.

The top part of your letter should look like this:

Julie Sherdin
555 Orchard Lane
Pablo, MT
(406) 268-4000
juliesherdin@email.com

May 5, 20XX

Terry Washington
Revolve Inc.
123 Vineyard Drive
Ronan, MT

Salutation

Start by introducing your letter with a standard greeting like "Dear," or "Hello." It's not necessary to add Mr., Mrs. or Ms. since it may require some guesswork about gender and marital status on your part. Just use their first and last name: "Dear Alex Johnson."

If you can't find the hiring manager's name, stick with "Dear Hiring Manager." Avoid outdated greetings, such as "Dear Sir/Madam" or "To Whom It May Concern."

Opening paragraph

The opening paragraph is your chance to catch the hiring manager's attention, introduce yourself, and enthusiastically tell the employer why you're applying for the job. You'll want to make this paragraph specific to each job listing you apply for. Include why you're excited about the job and the company, and how the job lines up with your career goals. Avoid making this paragraph sound formulaic by including keywords from the job posting and matching your skills to the employer's requirements.

Your background and qualifications

Now that you've introduced yourself and established your enthusiasm, it's time to dig into your most relevant experience and talk about the specific qualifications and skills that make you the perfect candidate. In one or two paragraphs, make the connection between your previous accomplishments

and your readiness for this new role. Think of these paragraphs as a way to pitch yourself as the ideal match for the role. Employers will likely have read your resume already, so avoid repeating the bullet points. Instead, include details that more deeply illustrate those highlights.

Include key achievements, skills, and specialties that make you particularly suited to perform well in the position. Focus on one or two and provide specific details about your success including measurable impacts you made.

Pay close attention to keywords listed in the job description and include those that you identify within the body of your cover letter. You should only include information about your most recent one or two professional experiences.

Closing paragraph

Your last paragraph should recap the reasons you are applying for the role and why you would be a great fit. You also have the option of making any clarifications. For example, you can justify any major gaps in your employment history. Keep the closing conclusion brief and explain that you look forward to hearing from the employer and ask for a meeting with the hiring manager. The main goal of your closing paragraph is to thank the employer for their time and consideration.

Complimentary closing and signature

Choose a complimentary closing that is friendly yet formal, followed by your first and last name. Closings you might consider include:

- Sincerely
- Regards
- Best
- Respectfully
- Thank you
- Thank you for your consideration

Avoid closings like Cheers, Warm regards, Thanks a ton or Yours truly, as these may be considered too casual or affectionate. If you're providing a hard copy of your cover letter, make sure to handwrite your signature, plus your full typed name.

FORMATTING TIPS

First and foremost, the letter must be grammatically correct and error-free! If you are not a particularly good writer, have someone read and edit the document for you.

Font

Keep it simple and professional. Choose a basic, clear font like Arial, Calibri, Verdana, or something similar. Avoid using fancy or decorative fonts. Many employers use applicant tracking systems—software that allows automated sorting of job applications based on specific keywords, skills, job titles, or other fields. Complicated fonts can make it harder for the software to read your letter, which might prevent your application from moving forward.

Use 10- and 12-point size for easy reading. Anything smaller will leave the hiring manager squinting, and anything larger will make your letter look unprofessional. In general, you should use the same font and font size that you used in your resume.

Spacing

Good spacing is essential for your cover letter—whitespace in the right places will make it easier for the hiring manager to read quickly. Follow these guidelines:

- Make your cover letter single-spaced.
- Add a space between each section: contact information, salutation, opening paragraph, middle paragraph, closing paragraph, and complimentary closing. (There's no need to indent any of your paragraphs.)

Length

Keep your cover letter to a single page made up of three paragraphs. You can add an extra middle paragraph if absolutely necessary. Before doing this, however, always ask yourself if you can communicate the essential information in fewer words.

If printed, the letter should be one page maximum. The letter should also be printed on high-quality paper just like your resume. In some instances, you might elect to cut and paste a cover letter into an e-mail and attach your resume. If so, you want the cover letter to be easily read with minimal scrolling. So get to the point and be succinct.

Margins and alignment

Align your text to the left and use standard 1-inch margins all the way around. If your letter is spilling off onto a second page, first reread it and see if there's anything you can cut. If you can't cut anything, you can consider shrinking the margins to $\frac{3}{4}$ " or $\frac{1}{2}$ ", but avoid going smaller than that so your cover letter doesn't look squished on the page.

File format

Since an applicant tracking system may be parsing your cover letter, make sure you save your document in a compatible file format—either .doc or PDF. It's also a good idea to rename your file to something specific, especially since hiring managers can see the file name of your online submission. Follow the format of First Name-Last Name-Cover-Letter (e.g. Jade-Young-cover-letter.doc) to make it more convenient for the person downloading it.

COVER LETTER EXAMPLE

Cecilia Burns
893 12 Ave W
Ronan, MT
406-555-1234
ceciliaburns@student.skc.edu

October 28, 2020

Dawn Jenkins
Crane & Jenkins
254 Main Street
Polson, MT

Dear Dawn Jenkins,

I am applying for the Social Media Marketing Intern position at Crane & Jenkins. As a current sophomore in the Salish Kootenai College Digital Media Design program, I am eager to gain hands-on social media marketing experience. I am creative and tech-savvy, and I live for creating content that not only reaches a wide audience but sticks with them as well. I am efficient, can meet deadlines, and quickly create content. Using my social media and organizational skills, I am excited about the idea of assisting Crane & Jenkins, a place that helps young people live fulfilling lives.

I was recently the Social Media Assistant for the SKC Student Senate, where I managed content calendars, wrote and edited posts, and moderated comments on social media channels. In addition, I served as the voice of the Student Senate, interacting with students virtually. I scheduled when content was going to be posted, utilizing my organizational and critical thinking skills to publish shareable content. Through my efforts, I attracted 72 new visitors and kept over 120 students engaged.

I have experience with both pitching ideas and taking instruction, and I can seamlessly transition from writing for one platform to another. I am passionate about blending visual elements with text and can incorporate both into posts. With a goal to increase the Student Senate's engagement on social media, I created a new social media strategy. It increased Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook activity by 70% in a month.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you, in addition to learning more about the Social Media Marketing Intern position and working for Crane & Jenkins. Varied experiences are essential to my growth, and interning at Crane & Jenkins will give me opportunities to apply my skills, help the team spread its message, and grow as a young professional.

Sincerely,

Sofia Flores

THE MUST-HAVE COVER LETTER CHECKLIST

Introduction

- Does your cover letter have a strong **opening paragraph**, communicating your job target and key strengths within the first few lines of text?
- Does your cover letter conform to a standard business letter format? Is your cover letter addressed to a specific individual, if the name is available?

The body

- Does your cover letter express how you would benefit the employer if you were hired?
- Do you avoid starting every sentence with “I” or “my” so you can focus more on the employer’s requirements and not your own?
- Do you demonstrate your expertise by using industry-specific language?
- Do you include examples of **your accomplishments** so employers can see you have a proven track record?
- Is the cover letter content unique? Did you avoid copying text from your resume verbatim?
- Is the content engaging and **relevant to the job description**?
- Is the cover letter succinct, containing just enough information to entice the reader to review your resume?
- Did you include all information that was requested, such as a job reference number, employment availability date, and salary requirements?
- Does your cover letter sound genuine? Does it reflect your personality and make you seem likable and approachable?
- Did you proofread your cover letter to ensure that it’s free of spelling, grammar, syntax, and formatting errors?
- Do the writing style and design coordinate with the resume, such as by using the same font and layout style?

Closing paragraph

- Did you provide an easy way for employers to contact you, such as a direct phone line and email address?
- Does your **cover letter end** with a call to action, confidently requesting an interview?
- Did you remember to sign your letter if you’re mailing a hard copy?

REFERENCES

Cover Letter Advice & Examples, <https://skc.biginterview.com/members/essentials/7/100>
How to Write A Cover Letter, <https://www.glassdoor.com/blog/guide/how-to-write-a-cover-letter/>
Intern Cover Letter Sample, <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/cover-letter-samples/intern>
The must-have cover letter checklist,
<https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/cover-letter-checklist>
Writing a Cover Letter: Tips and Examples,
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