

COVER LETTER GUIDE

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A COVER LETTER?

A cover letter is your written pitch to the employer. Not only does a cover letter showcase your writing skills, it allows you to detail your **strengths** and **experiences** that support the reason why you are a leading candidate for a position. The quality of your cover letter gives an employer an *immediate impression* of the strength of your application.

CONSIDERATIONS

Below are several tips to write a strong cover letter. Please read carefully as you edit yours:

- Detail your *motivations* and *qualifications* for the position. It articulates what you can bring to the organization.
 - It should not simply restate your resume. This is a narrative you can use to *tell your Carthage story*.
- It is evidence of your research. Did you take the time to look at the employer’s mission and vision? Do you know that employer’s strategic plan and goals?
- It leaves the reader wanting to know more about who you are and how you are well-qualified for the position.



BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

Self-Reflection

This is a time to self-reflect. As you begin writing your cover letter, it is important to take inventory of the following:

	Identify 3-5 reasons why you are an exceptional candidate for the position by <i>Analyzing the Job Description</i> (see page 2).
	What do you know about the organization and why do you wish to work there? Do your research using the employer’s website, LinkedIn, or your personal contacts.
	What are your core strengths and specialties? How do these qualities fulfill the needs of the position and make you an asset to the employer?

Analyzing the Job Description

A typical job description details the minimum and preferred qualifications along with the responsibilities of the vacant position. Use this document to determine if you are qualified and articulate how you meet and exceed the necessary skills to fulfill the vacancy.

How to read a job description:

Step One: Review the position announcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Carefully</i> read the job description in its <u>entirety</u>. • Highlight all of the <i>required</i> and <i>preferred</i> skills listed of which you have experienced or successfully demonstrated (see Table 1). • If you find your competencies do not match the position, determine how you will market yourself in a captivating manner.
Step Two: Analyze the Duties/Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read <u>all</u> of the job tasks. How do your skills qualify you for this position? • Are these tasks interesting to you? Would you enjoy doing these on a regular basis? Will they challenge you?
Step Three: Conduct Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit the employer's website to review their mission/vision, strategic plan, and goals. Familiarize yourself with their language and culture. • Tap into your professional network (strongly consider using LinkedIn). Connect with previous supervisors, coworkers, classmates, staff and faculty who may be familiar with the employer.

Table 1: Sample of job description analysis

Responsibilities	Experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become ABC Company's expert in your product category. • Analyze market and customer data with speed and passion. • Help source new products and manage the supply chain. • Quickly identify and resolve product quality concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3+ years' experience working in retail and floor set planning. • Familiar with analyzing market data for CBA Retail and translating information to other team members. • Experience planning events around new products to expand the customer base.
Qualifications	Credentials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor's Degree • Proficient in Microsoft Office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B.A. in Marketing from Carthage College • Proficient in Excel, Word, and Publisher

BREAKING DOWN YOUR LETTER:

Header

Your cover letter should match your resume in terms of *font style* and *size*, and the location of the header. Under your full, legal name you will highlight additional information such as: address (optional), phone number and email. Below your information, insert the date of the letter and the employer's contact information.

Sample One:

Carla C. Carthage
(202) 555-1234 | ccarthage@gmail.com

March 4, 2018

Mr. Chris Thomas
Senior Marketing Manager
Uline
12575 Uline Drive
Pleasant Prairie, WI 53158
(262) 222-2244

Dear Mr. Thomas ~

Sample Two:

Carla C. Carthage
1234 Pleasant Lane
Kenosha, WI 53140
(202) 555-1234
ccarthage@gmail.com

March 4, 2018

Mr. Chris Thomas
Senior Marketing Manager
Uline
(262) 222-2244

Dear Mr. Thomas ~

The Introduction (Paragraph One)

Authors of successful novels are masters at **grabbing** the reader's attention. The same for your cover letter. To make a positive and memorable first impression, you must *attract* the employer's attention by demonstrating enthusiasm and knowledge of the organization and position.

If you have a contact within the organization, you will mention his or her name in the first sentence.

What to include in the first paragraph:

- State the position to which you are applying and how you learned of the opportunity.
- If you have a connection with someone who works for that organization, include their name and position, and how you know that person.
- Discuss why you are an *exceptional* candidate for the position and the organization.
 - Detail **2-3 qualifications** you have that will be an asset to that organization. Write these qualifications like you would a thesis statement. You will expand on these in the subsequent paragraphs.
- Anything you include in your resume **should be on your resume**. Do not include anything in your cover letter that is not on your resume.

Sample one:

At the suggestion of our mutual colleague, Professor David Hill, I am writing you today to express my interest in working in the Marketing Department of Wyndham Vacation Ownership. Along with obtaining my Bachelor of Arts degree in marketing from Carthage College in May of 2018, my study abroad and international internship experience will add to Wyndham's goal of inspiring every kind of traveler.

Sample two:

It is with great interest and enthusiasm to write in response to the Communications Intern position that was posted on Indeed.com. I am a junior at Carthage College and am interested in interning at Windy City Events beginning in early June, earning credit for the summer term. An internship at Windy City Events would complement my communications coursework and make me a well-rounded graduate and future member of the workforce.

Body Paragraphs (Paragraph Two and/or Three)

After you captured the employer's attention, you will need to demonstrate *concrete* examples that prove you are the best candidate for the position. Create a personal narrative that details your experiences and skill sets, and how they compare to the needs of the organization.

What to include in the body of your cover letter:

- Highlight in each paragraph targeted qualifications that demonstrate how you are the best match for the position and the organization.
- Give *specific* examples from previous experiences that showcase how you acquired your qualifications and what skill sets you used to achieve results.
- Use this area of your cover letter to tell a story. Avoid listing what you have done.

Sample one (narrative style):

As a student of Carthage College, I received a priceless opportunity to plan the “Campus Carnival, 2007” as the Social Chair of the Residence Life Council. This successful event was an outdoor event that hosted 45 different student organizations that provided games and activities to fundraise community nonprofit funds. This event, the first of its kind at Carthage, attracted over 500 students and raised close to \$10,000. Through this experience of motivating other students, coordinating details with vendors, and publicizing the event, I realized my talent for event planning. I have also been actively involved in other student organizations while effectively balancing my academic work.

Sample two (bullet-point):

As your website indicates, BioTech Advantage seeks hardworking, flexible individuals with exceptional scientific knowledge and problem solving capabilities to serve its clients. As you can see from the attached resume, my particular skills and interests include:

- Summer internship experiences in both Research and Development at Abbott Laboratories and the Medical Lab at St. Luke’s Hospital.
- Advanced lab skills including spectrometry, PCR, Gel Electrophoresis, DNA and RNA, Isolation Techniques, Light and Electron Microscopy.
- Knowledge of laboratory sterilization and safety procedures.
- Strong computer skills including SPSS, HTML, and Java capabilities.
- Excellent communication skills, leadership potential, and the ability to manage my time effectively.

Concluding Paragraph

This paragraph should be the *shortest paragraph* of your cover letter. This paragraph allows you to invite the employer to review your resume and arrange a time to meet with you to further discuss your qualifications. It is important to conclude the cover letter by thanking the employer for his or her time.

What to include in your final paragraph:

- Review your qualifications and how it will benefit the employer if they choose to hire you.
- Express your interest in learning more about the organization and position.
- Provide the employer with your contact information.
- Thank the employer for their time.

Sample one:

My unique combination of skills and experiences would fit well with the demands of the position. I am greatly interested in the field of medical biology and understand that BioTech Advantage is making great strides in the advancement of medical technology. I thank you for your time and consideration. I would be delighted to meet with you, at your convenience, to discuss our mutual goals. Please feel free to contact me via phone or email. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sample two (internship):

I am highly organized, detail-oriented, and creative. My peers would describe me as enthusiastic and hard working. I am eager to learn the different facets of event planning and believe that you would be impressed with my work ethic and interpersonal communication skills. Thank you for your time and consideration. I will be contacting you in early February regarding a possible interview date. Should you have questions prior to that, please feel free to contact me.

Closing

Your closing should include a parting word and your printed name. It is typical to leave three lines between your parting word and name. This is for your handwritten or virtual signature (digital ID).

Sincerely,

John Johnson (Handwritten/digital ID)

John Johnson

