

# How to Format a Cover Letter

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Learning with Tess

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# How to Format a Cover Letter?

When you're applying for a job, it's common for employers to request both a resume and a cover letter. In around three paragraphs, your cover letter should highlight what makes you a great fit for the job and motivate the hiring manager to set up an interview. Learning how to format a cover letter ensures you include all of the information the hiring manager needs. In this article, we review how to format a cover letter and provide an example.

## *What is a Cover Letter?*

### Cover letter format

Here's how you can format your cover letter by section:

- **Header**
- **Salutation**
- **Opening paragraph**
- **Middle paragraphs**
- **Closing paragraph**
- **Complimentary close and signature**

### Header

If you're sending a paper copy of your cover letter, include the following on the top left-hand side:

Date

Your name

Address

Phone number

Email address

Hiring manager's name

Company name

Company address

If you're submitting a digital copy online, feel free to only use your city and state, phone number and email. You also don't need to add the hiring manager's information. Here's what a header should look like for a digital cover letter:

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Date  
Your name  
City, province  
Phone number  
Email address

### Salutation

Start your cover letter by addressing the hiring manager. Try to find the name of the hiring manager for the role you're applying for. Reread the job description, or check the company website. If you can't find it in the job description or on the website, you can call the company's human resources department and explain your purpose.

If you can't find the hiring manager's name, use "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Hiring Team." Avoid outdated greetings, such as "Dear Sir/Madam" or "To Whom It May Concern." When you can, use their full name in your salutation, for example, "Dear Alex Johnson." If you're sure of their title, you can use that instead, such as, "Dear Dr. Boykin."

### Opening paragraph

The opening paragraph is your chance to get the hiring manager's attention, introduce yourself and tell them why you're applying for the job. Make this paragraph specific to each job you apply for. Include why you're excited about the job and the company and how the job lines up with your career goals.

If you were referred to this job by someone who knows the hiring manager or already works at this company, mention this referral in your opening paragraph. It can help get the hiring manager's attention and more quickly form a connection.

### Middle paragraphs

After you've introduced yourself and established your enthusiasm, describe your most relevant experience, skills and qualifications that make you right for the role. In one or two paragraphs, describe how all of your previous work history and education have prepared you for the role. Instead of repeating bullet points from your resume, take this opportunity to elaborate on what makes you uniquely qualified for the job.

### Closing paragraph

In your closing paragraph thank the hiring manager for taking the time to read your letter. You also have the option of making any clarifications. For example, you can justify any major gaps in your employment history or explain your plans for relocating to the city in which the company is located.

Your closing is also a good opportunity for a call to action, which invites the hiring manager to take the next steps. You can invite the recipient to call you should they have any questions about your resume or cover letter, and express your enthusiasm for moving forward in the hiring process. A call to action is a good way to express your enthusiasm for the job while encouraging the hiring manager to continue the conversation.

### Complimentary close and signature

Choose a formal complimentary close, followed by your first and last name. Some ideal closings include:

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

Avoid casual closings that could make your letter seem informal, like "Cheers" or "Thanks a lot."

If you're providing a hard copy of your cover letter, make sure to write your signature, plus your full typed name. For emails or electronic cover letters, you can add an electronic signature or omit it.

### Font and spacing

When it comes to font, keep it simple and professional. Choose a basic font like Arial, Calibri, Verdana or Times New Roman. Avoid using fancy or decorative fonts that could distract from your qualifications.

Use 10- and 12-point size for easy reading. Anything smaller might be difficult for the hiring manager to read, and anything larger could make your letter look unprofessional. In general, you should use the same font and font size that you used in your resume.

Good spacing is essential for your cover letter—whitespace in the right places will make it easier for the hiring manager to read quickly. Ensure you add an extra space in between your header, each paragraph and complimentary close.

### Margins and alignment

Align your text to the left, and use standard 2.5-cm margins all the way around. If your letter is two pages, first reread it and see if there's anything you can remove, such as extra accomplishments or indirect sentences that don't contribute much. 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 still looks professional.

### File format

The right file format ensures the hiring manager can access it easily, so use 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 to make it more convenient for the person downloading it. For example, "Jane-Smith-cover-letter." You can also include the name of the role you're applying for.

### Length

Keep your cover letter to a single page with three or four paragraphs. You can add an extra middle paragraph if absolutely necessary. For example, if you're moving to a new city, you may need an extra paragraph to give more details about your relocation. Make sure your letter conveys precisely what you want to say without filler. You can save additional details for your phone screen or interview.

### Cover letter example:

Here's an example of a properly formatted cover letter that you can review:

*Jane Simmons  
1234 Main Street,  
Barry's Bay, ON  
K0J 1B0  
123-456-7890  
jane.simmons@email.ca  
23 January 2021*

*Dear Hiring Manager,*

*I'm excited to apply for the **Web Developer** position at Craft Pages. I've been programming websites and using CSS to create user-friendly experiences since I was in middle school, so it's always been a passion of mine. I've also been intrigued by your company ever since it won Most Innovative at the National Web Development Awards two years ago. I strive to stay on the cutting-edge of web design and development, so when I saw this job posting, I knew I had to apply.*

*At my current role with Road Runner Ltd., I constructed a brand new website from the beginning for a start-up business, both within budget and ahead of the scheduled release. I spent plenty of time meeting with the client and performing user research to make sure I delivered the perfect product. My new website was responsive, lightning-fast and included the latest e-commerce features.*

*One of the factors that really attracted me to this role is that Craft Pages values giving back to the community. In my spare time, I run free web development workshops for at-risk youths. In these workshops, I teach them the basics of HTML/CSS and JavaScript and serve as a mentor. As I grow in my career, applying my skills to help others and make an impact on the world becomes more important—I believe this role would give me that opportunity.*

*Thank you for your consideration and time. I'm looking forward to learning more details about the position and company. If you have any questions about my qualifications, please feel free to call or email me.*

*Sincerely,*

*Jane Simmons*