What is a Cover Letter?

A cover letter is a document that introduces you to a prospective employer. Your cover letter (along with your résumé, references, and other additional documents) is a vital component of your application correspondence. Unless explicitly told not to send a cover letter, consider sending one to strengthen your application.

Cover Letter Fundamentals

1. Tailor:
   - An effective cover letter is tailored to a particular position to which you are applying
   - Write a unique cover letter for each position - this requires researching the organization for the position you are applying
   - The cover letter should clarify for the employer why you are the right person for the position
   - If you're applying for a mission-based or non-profit organization consider explaining in your cover letter why you support the mission of the organization with possible examples

2. Specify:
   - Use the cover letter to highlight a few things about your experience and background that speak to your interest in and qualification for this position
   - Highlight 2-3 qualities the employer is seeking and address these qualities and experience in your cover letter
   - Provide specific examples that reflect what the employer is seeking

3. Tone:
   - The tone of the letter should be professional
   - Don’t be afraid to show your enthusiasm about this position and the organization
   - Don’t just focus on what you can gain from this position, but also talk about what you can contribute

4. Writing Style:
   - When writing your cover letter make sure that you have varied your sentence structure; for example, do not start all your sentences with “I”
   - Make sure that there are no typos or errors
Cover Letter Structure

Your Contact Information:

• Your contact information should be listed at the top of the page
• Be sure to include your email address and phone number, you may also include your address, city, state, and zip if you choose
• After your contact info, leave one blank line, and then type the date

Employer’s Contact Information:

• Following the date, leave another blank line, and then type the employer’s contact information
• Include: name, title, organization, name, and address of the employer

Salutation:

• Address your letter to a specific individual, if at all possible
• If not obviously listed, try looking at the employer’s website to find the proper contact person or call the organization to find out who to address it to
• Use the appropriate title (i.e. “Ms.”, “Mr.”, “Dr.”). If known use the individuals full name (i.e. “Dear Chris Smith”)
• If finding the specific individual proves impossible, use a more generic salutation (i.e. “Dear Hiring Manager” or “Dear Hiring Committee”)

First Paragraph:

• Use the first paragraph to introduce yourself and explain why you are writing
• Make it clear what position you’re applying for, and state how you learned of the opening, and include a specific connection you wish to highlight
• Convey enthusiasm about the organization and the position, sharing any particular reasons that you are excited about the organizations

Example sentence in first paragraph:

“I will graduate from Carleton College with a major in art history in June, and am eager to apply my education and arts management experience as I begin my career in the arts.”
Middle Paragraph(s):

• Use this space to go into more depth regarding a few highlights from your résumé most relevant to the position in which you are applying
• Make the case of why you are the best person for this position
• Reference qualities listed in the position description, explain how you have demonstrated and developed these qualities yourself
• Point to any particular achievements or accomplishments of yours that are particularly applicable to the position
• Feel free to include academic training that has prepared you for the position (i.e. comprehensive senior thesis, independent research, lab work, etc)
• When applying to a non profit organization, you should be sure to explain how your background coincides with the organization’s mission

Example sentence(s) in middle paragraph:

“This experience gave me the opportunity to learn about the complexities of managing traveling art exhibits. I developed my skills in coordinating flexible travel details, communicating information through social media, and organizing discussions among public audiences and artists.”

Closing Paragraph:

• Reiterate your interest in the organization/position, and thank the reader for considering your application

Example sentence in closing paragraph:

“My combination of work and volunteer experience, academic research and education, and strong communication skills, will allow me to make a meaningful contribution to the Minnesota Art Museum.”

Signature:

• It is most common to close with “Sincerely” followed by your name
• If you are printing and sending a hard copy of your résumé, leave three or four blank lines and then type your name after “Sincerely”
• If you’re sending an electronic copy of your résumé, simply type your name without leaving extra blank space
Dr. Ranger Park  
Spatial Analysis Center  
Mammoth Hot Springs  
Yellowstone National Park, WY 98765

January 21, 2022

Dear Dr. Park:

I was very excited to learn of your summer GIS internship. Mapping thermal features in Yellowstone is exactly what I would love to do this summer. Having spent time in Yellowstone, I have a deep appreciation for the environmental and geological features of the park. I would welcome the opportunity to apply my GIS skills to create a database that can serve future researchers as they study this area.

As a geology major at Carleton College, I have had the opportunity to develop both technical and field skills that would enable me to be successful in this internship. My experience with GIS using ArcView includes importing, rectifying, digitizing, and registering maps; writing metadata; and doing analysis with both vector and raster data. I have experience with post-processed differential GPS (using Trimble GeoExplorers and the accompanying Pathfinder Office software), and I have the background knowledge of datums and coordinate systems that is necessary for interfacing GPS data with a GIS, as well as for viewing layers together within a GIS. Through a variety of field research projects—including an extensive research project on the Bighorn Mountains, an ecological project in Costa Rica, and a geology off-campus studies program in Italy, I have gained experience making relevant field observations and taking thorough field notes. Furthermore, I am an avid photographer, and my experience includes some work combining photography with GIS using ArcView.

Finally, I am familiar with Yellowstone, having worked for two summers at Roosevelt Lodge. As a food and beverage payroll clerk, I became good at rapid and accurate data entry. More importantly I had the opportunity to explore Yellowstone by hiking and backpacking on the weekends. These summers in the park fostered in me a deep love for Yellowstone. I can think of nothing more satisfying than returning to Yellowstone this summer and applying my technical skills to contribute to the knowledge base about this very special place.

I know that I would make a valuable contribution to your team this summer. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this internship position with you, and look forward to learning more.

Sincerely,
Gia Logy
300 North College Street  
Northfield, MN 55057  

February 12, 2022  

Ms. Lucy Laws  
Davis Polk & Wardwell  
Corporate Legal Assistants Group  
123 Lexington Avenue  
New York, NY 12345  

Dear Ms. Laws,  

I was delighted to learn about the legal assistant position openings at Davis Polk & Wardwell. The prospect of assisting in the Corporate Mergers and Acquisitions Group sounds like the perfect opportunity for me to contribute my skills in an area that is deeply interesting to me. In speaking with Carla Carlgrad, a current legal assistant on your staff, I have learned that Davis Polk is a friendly and diligent community of professionals who push themselves to use their skills and experience to the fullest capacity. I am drawn to this type of environment, and I am confident that your firm will find my educational background, personality, experience, and skills to be an excellent match for the legal assistant position in the Corporate Mergers and Acquisitions Group.  

As an East Asian Studies major with a focus on history and political science, I have taken full advantage of numerous opportunities to develop my research, writing, and analytical skills. For example, I have independently conducted several research projects on the evolution of the Chinese legal system. I spent a trimester in Beijing, where I conducted in-depth research on China’s foreign trade sector, and on the socioeconomic and political implications of China’s entry into the World Trade Organization. I also actively participated in a two-week intensive simulation analyzing reforms and budget allocations for China’s various economic sectors.  

Throughout my years at Carleton, I have been active in numerous clubs and organizations that have honed my leadership and management skills. I serve on the student senate budget committee, and work with a small group of peers to allocate approximately $350,000 to over eighty student organizations and club sports. Moreover, my ability to plan and coordinate community service projects resulted in my being awarded a scholarship for community service.  

I am very interested in discussing the legal assistant position with you in further detail. I plan to travel to New York in the next few weeks, and hope to have the opportunity to meet with you then. I will call to follow up with you and to inquire about a meeting time. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to talking with you and learning more about the legal assistant positions at Davis Polk & Wardwell.  

Sincerely,  
A. Spiring Lawyer
March 25, 2022

Hiring Committee
Minnesota Art Museum
234 Main Street
St. Paul MN 12345

Dear Hiring Committee,

I am excited to apply for the open Program Coordinator position with the Education and Community Programs Department at the Minnesota Art Museum. I will graduate from Carleton College with a major in art history in June, and am eager to apply my education and arts management experience as I begin my career in the arts. This position is especially exciting to me, as I grew up in Minnesota, and have enjoyed the collections and programs at the Minnesota Art Museum throughout my life.

Last year, I spent a trimester in Turkey studying art history and interning in art galleries. This experience gave me the opportunity to learn about the complexities of managing traveling art exhibits. I developed my skills in coordinating flexible travel details, communicating information through social media, and organizing discussions among public audiences and artists. I also had the opportunity to travel throughout the country interviewing female artists. By building these relationships, I was able to coordinate a discussion and workshop among fellow students and local artists at a newly established gallery. My research, and the subsequent publication and presentation of my work, expanded my written and verbal skills, while simultaneously deepening my knowledge of artists from underrepresented identities.

As a tutor at Northfield Elementary School, I work with academically at-risk students to improve literacy and implement classroom programs that engage students in art activities. This position has helped increase my awareness of the need for art education for young people. My most recent project entailed developing lessons to teach students about the role of art in community building. I created a series of experiential modules, and have developed variations of the lessons for different grade levels. Through this work, I have seen students embrace arts education, and begin to develop what I hope will be a life-long love of art.

My combination of work and volunteer experience, academic research and education, and strong communication skills, will allow me to make a meaningful contribution to the Minnesota Art Museum. I am eager to meet with you to discuss how my qualifications and experience can contribute to the Education and Community Programs Department.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Art Student
January 31, 2022

Mr. Simon Sez
Hiring Manager
Sightlines, Inc.
221 2nd Ave.
Minneapolis, MN 55408

Dear Mr. Sez,

I was very excited to learn about the opening for a Facilities Asset Analyst at Sightlines. I will be graduating from Carleton College in June with a major in economics, and am committed to pursuing a career in financial analysis and consulting. The position at Sightlines seems perfect for me.

During my four years at Carleton, I have taken courses in not only economic principles and econometrics, but also applied courses in managerial economics, where I learned how economic principles could be applied in the business world. My coursework has introduced me to basic accounting principles and to the use of quantitative spreadsheet analysis in making business decisions. I am currently researching a senior thesis about the impact of big box stores on the prices of consumer goods, which has involved collecting over 90,000 data points on prices in 212 cities around the country. As a part of this research, I am combining data management techniques in Microsoft Excel with econometric analysis.

Outside of academics, my internship last summer at the United States Embassy in Paris allowed me to hone my communication and research skills. I was responsible for gathering information from several government agencies and the French press in order to draft regular communications to Washington, D.C. I have also had experience working independently and as a team member. For the past three years, my on-campus work as piano accompanist for the choral program has required me to learn large amounts of music in a short time period while also collaborating with the choir director and section leaders to make each rehearsal and performance a success. This position, as well as my frequent performances as a solo pianist, requires me to perform well under pressure.

I would welcome the opportunity to become a member of your team, and would be delighted to discuss the Facilities Asset Analyst position with you. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Carl Grad
March 6, 2022

Ms. Antonia Grant
Carleton College Career Center
300 North College Street
Northfield, MN 55057

Dear Ms. Grant:

I was delighted to learn about the Student Career Assistant position at the Carleton Career Center. Working in the Career Center and helping students take advantage of opportunities resonates with me because I want to encourage and assist students in finding amazing summer and post-graduate opportunities.

GROW is a college outreach organization that helps students from under-resourced and under-represented backgrounds apply to top-tier colleges and universities in the nation. Within the program, mentors schedule workshops to help students in a variety of ways. While some workshops focus on writing proficiency, standardized tests, and resume building, others focus on researching and applying to summer opportunities. Through this program, I was able to participate in a range of research opportunities that aligned with my interests in medicine. Some examples of these opportunities include a tissue-engineering project at Columbia University that developed extracellular matrices for the treatment of burns, and a research project at UCLA College of Medicine that studied the effects of triglyceride levels on the development of malign conditions like non-alcoholic fatty liver disease.

Though I have graduated from the GROW program as a fellow, I continue to apply to opportunities that will enhance my college experience by using the resources available through the Carleton Career Center. For example, last winter I externed in the Chicago Nasal and Sinus Center with Dr. Jacquelynne Corey, an otolaryngology specialist and a Carleton alumna. This short experience allowed me to shadow Dr. Corey and perform clinical research on pain management medications, but it also allowed me to do many more things outside the professional circle like exploring the cultural brownstones in the city of Chicago.

As a Student Career Assistant, I want to help my fellow Carleton peers take advantage of the opportunities that are available to us. I hope you find my background a good fit for this role. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Fatima Firstyear