



## Communicating with Employers

# Writing Cover Letters

What is a cover letter? A cover letter is a document submitted with a job application explaining the applicant’s credentials and interest in the open position. Many employers assess a candidate’s professionalism, writing skills, and motivation to work at their organization based on the cover letter submitted. Generic letters (those not tailored to a specific position) are not effective! The tips below will help you to write a letter that is both concise and compelling – one that will prompt the employer to review your resume. Once you have a cover letter drafted, you can schedule an appointment with a Career Coach to get their input on the effectiveness of your letter. To schedule, log into [Handshake](#).



### Applicable Career Communities:

There are three basic types of cover letters. An application letter is used to respond to a job posting. An initiating contact letter is used to put yourself into consideration for an opening that has not been advertised but is likely to occur. A networking letter is used to generate an informational interview. See the [Informational Interviewing tip sheet](#) if you are not familiar with informational interviews.

When constructing your cover letter, be sure to: address it to a specific individual; sound confident, without being arrogant; keep it to one page; and use the “I” pronoun sparingly. (Using “I” and other personal pronouns repetitively can leave the employer with a negative impression — they will question your writing skills, and possibly view you as someone oriented toward self.) And, when preparing application and initiating contact letters, you need to answer the question: “Why should we interview you?”

Sample cover letters are provided at the end of this document. You can also view collections of sample cover letters that provide pointers on adjusting text in relation to industry norms at the following websites:

<https://www.theguardian.com/careers/series/cv-and-cover-letter-examples>

<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/best-cover-letters-a-z-list-of-examples-2060172>

Cover letters are often attached to an e-mail, uploaded with an online application, or pasted into a text box within an online system. Therefore, you can choose to omit a signature and just type your name. If you want to create a digital signature, sign your name on a piece of paper, scan it, and then insert that image into your document. Even though this seems time consuming, if you take the time to do it just once, you’ll be able to use that signature over and over for many different purposes. Stop by Career Success during walk-in hours to have a Peer Career Coach help you create a digital signature.

### Tips Specific to Application and Initiating Contact Letters

To write an effective cover letter you need to 1) claim a key qualification that relates to the employer’s needs, 2) provide details about the qualification you claim to have, and 3) mention other aspects of your background and/or career interests that will help the employer evaluate how you would “fit” with their organization.

**Paragraph One:** Indicate why you are writing and include compelling information. You can achieve this by claiming a qualification that is integral to the position.

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Paragraph Two: Talk about yourself *in a focused way*. Describe your relevant qualifications (e.g., education, experience, skills) and how they relate to the position.

Paragraph Three: Talk about the employer. Show the employer what you know about their company and how your career goals relate to their mission. This paragraph should prompt the employer to think, “This candidate seems like a great fit! Let’s bring him/her in for an interview to learn more.”

Last Paragraph: Make a request that will lead to the employer learning more about your qualifications.

For instance, you can encourage them to review skill endorsements on your LinkedIn profile. If you have an online portfolio you can direct them to the most applicable content. Or, you can always close your letter by requesting an interview. The last paragraph is also used to communicate any required application steps that you have completed.

An important consideration is the tone of your letter. Would you better off striking a casual or professional tone? The idea is to use a tone that syncs with the culture of the organization. If you know an organization has an informal culture, you can incorporate creative elements into your letter. In contrast, if the organization has a formal structure you will want to use traditional phrasing and start your letter with “Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms./Dr. (insert last name)”. Use resources like [Glassdoor](#) when planning your letter. You can also review student reviews of organizations in Handshake.

## Email Etiquette for Cover Letters

Email is the most likely way you will communicate with a potential employer. Email communication needs to be professional and proofread. Emails should also be concise and to the point, ideally just 5-7 sentences in length, providing a brief explanation of your reason for contacting them. Include a description of the documents you’ve attached, your contact information, and acknowledge the time they are taking to review your documents by thanking them. Think like the employer—do you enjoy opening an email that fills your entire screen with text? Neither do they. So, it’s

best to be concise in the email body and attach a full letter.

When attaching a document, it is best to attach a PDF document as it will be universally recognized regardless of the software used by the receiver. An added effect of converting your document to a PDF is that all of the formatting will be saved so that if the reader has a different type of operating system or software than you, the document formatting will not be corrupted.

When communicating with an employer, it is never okay to begin the email with “Hey” or “Jones” (only their last name), or to use “texting language,” abbreviations, or emoticons in the body of the email. Always include a subject on the subject line, and make sure you have a professional email address. It is fine to use your osu.edu or Gmail address that includes your name, such as janemsmith@gmail.com. It is not fine to use email addresses such as prettykitty23, mojo69, or anything that provides the reader an opportunity to judge your character as less than professional. When emailing a prospective employer, begin the email as you do your formal cover letter: (“Dear Mr. Jones,”). Explain why you are contacting him (e.g., inquire about possible internship opportunities, to request a job shadowing session or an informational interview, or to apply for a specific position). Then, briefly provide one or two specific points about your qualifications or goals, whichever is appropriate.

Finally, explain that you’ve attached a cover letter and a resume that provide a more detailed view of your qualifications. Don’t forget to thank them for their time!

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## Follow Instructions and Use Your Best Judgment

There are times when it is not appropriate to include a cover letter when applying to a position or requesting information. If the application instructions specifically mention “No Cover Letters” or “No Attachments” or “No Additional Documentation,” then simply provide only the information requested. If the instructions do not provide guidance on submitting a cover letter, then it is usually fine to include a cover letter without fear of penalty.

If it is your first time contacting an employer and you are strictly requesting information about job shadowing or informational interviews, then a formal letter is not usually necessary. A professional email that requests their time in a respectful way will do the job.

The application letter example on the following page is formatted to be sent as an attachment to an e-mail. Assume that the student, Jane Smith, will also attach her resume to the same email. Examples of email text for submitting an application, initiating contact, and networking letters also follow.

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## Sample Application Letter

Jane Smith

190 West 17th Ave., Columbus, OH 43210 \* smith.00@osu.edu \* 216-555-1234

Mr. Joe Brown  
Director of Communications  
Ohio History Connection  
1982 Velma Avenue  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Mr. Brown:

Looking for an intern that will add dynamic elements to your events? I have a record of suggesting ideas that take events to the next level, and am confident that I could do the same if selected for your Events Management Internship. I am a junior at The Ohio State University and will graduate in May 2021 with a Bachelor of Arts in Communication.

Through my coursework and co-curricular experiences, I have developed the skills needed to successfully plan and manage events. For instance, in my internship at the Make-a-Wish Foundation, I helped plan a recognition banquet for 200 volunteers completing their first year of service. The event incorporated my suggestion to invite family members of Make-A-Wish recipients to the banquet, and my supervisor shared that approach likely helped increase the percentage of volunteers signing on for a second year of service from 18% to 26%. The Make-a-Wish experience helped me learn the steps involved with planning large events - ones that compare in size to those held at the Ohio History Connection. To share another example, when planning a sorority silent auction, I suggested that our group use Instagram to catalog the auction items and then use the number of Likes to determine which items should be included in the final event promo. Participation in the auction increased 14% compared to last year's attendance count.

Growing up in Central Ohio, I have enjoyed numerous exhibitions and events at Ohio History Connection. Participating in an internship would allow me to give back to an organization I have grown to admire and to see as the ultimate source of historical information for the State of Ohio. Given my event planning experiences, ability to work well in a team environment or independently, and desire to see Ohio History Connection continue to grow and prosper, I believe myself to be a promising candidate.

My attached resume provides a more complete account of my qualifications. I would like to discuss this internship opportunity with you, and encourage you to view my online portfolio ([www.janesmithcurated.com](http://www.janesmithcurated.com)) which includes examples of social media promos and planning charts from the events described above. Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

(Insert your digital signature here)

Jane Smith

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## Sample Email Messages

### Application Email

#### Subject: Event Management Internship

Dear Mr. Brown, I am a Communication major at The Ohio State University and am very interested in the Event Management internship advertised on Handshake. As a Columbus native, I have enjoyed numerous Ohio History Connection exhibits and have a great passion for the work of the organization. During an internship with the Make-A-Wish Foundation, I gained experience planning a successful volunteer recognition event and I hope to put that experience to work for Ohio History Connection.

My attached cover letter and resume provide a complete overview of my qualifications. Thank you for considering me for this internship!

Sincerely,

Jane Smith

Smith.00@osu.edu

### Initiating Contact Email

#### Subject: Event Management Internship Inquiry

Dear Mr. Jones,

I am a Communication major at The Ohio State University and my friend Olen Tangy completed an Event Management internship with your organization last summer. He recommended I contact you directly to discuss the possibility of participating in the same internship. I am writing to express my interest in this opportunity, in the hope that it will be offered again this summer. Olen told me about some of the projects he worked on during the internship and they match up with my event management experiences, including an events internship I held last summer with the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

I've attached a cover letter and my resume to provide you with an overview of my skills and experience. I hope to be considered for the opportunity if it is to be offered again!

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jane Smith

Smith.00@osu.edu

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## Sample Email Messages

### Networking Email

**Subject: Event Planning with Ohio History Connection**

Dear Mr. Jones,

I am a Communication major at The Ohio State University and my friend Olen Tangy completed an Event Planning internship with your organization last summer. I am currently exploring career options and Event Planning is something I believe I would enjoy. Olen suggested that I contact you to see if you'd be willing to talk with me, in person or over the phone, about your journey to your current position and possibly give me some insight into the nature of event planning for a large nonprofit organization such as Ohio History Connection.


If you have 20-30 minutes to spare in the coming weeks, I'd gladly meet you at your office or schedule a time to talk over the phone. If this is agreeable to you, please let me know your availability between January 15th and February 1st. I am available Monday, Wednesday and Friday after 11:30 a.m. I hope you'll consider sharing your career story and advice to a college student such as myself.

Thank you,

Jane Smith

614-123-4567

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