

Greeting: Get the Employer's Name

Receiving a letter that reads, "To Whom It May Concern" feels too generic – the last thing you want is a cover letter that looks like it could be sent to everybody and their mother. Acknowledge that there is another human being reading your letter: research your employer or an HR manager (a simple Google search should do the trick) to make a good connection right off the bat.

If you can't find the right person, make sure you address your letter to the specific department. For example, if you're applying for a job in marketing at Company X, write, "To the Company X Marketing Team."

First Paragraph: Start With a Story

Toss the overused intro, "My name is _____, and I would love to work for your company." Employers will already know this the minute your cover letter appears in their inbox. Instead, start with a captivating story that shows off your best career qualities. Think about your past work experience or your extracurriculars in college. Have you ever been in a situation where people were relying on you to make a decision? Did you discover an innovative way of handling a crisis? Highlight the story in about 3-4 sentences, then end the paragraph stating how the qualities you displayed make you the best candidate for the position (this should only take 1 sentence).

Second Paragraph: Don't just praise the company – show that you've been following them.

Google News, the company's Facebook or Twitter — one of these should point you to a recent and noteworthy accomplishment. (The more recent the accomplishment, the better.) Think about the qualities that enabled the company to achieve a particular milestone — was it ambition? Innovation? Fearlessness? Mentioning the accomplishment and the qualities necessary to achieve it will not only help you to specifically articulate why you're applying, but also show that you're paying close attention to the company's formula for success.

Third Paragraph: State a follow-up time.

Thank your potential employer for taking the time to read your cover letter, and restate your enthusiasm about the position. Then determine a follow-up time in the event that you don't receive a response (we recommend 10 business days). Writing a sentence like, "If I do not hear back from you within 10 business days, I will send a follow-up email," shows the company that you're determined to be considered as a candidate. After all, you won't get the position you want without being persistent.

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