Cover letters

Any time you send a resume or application to an employer, you should include a cover letter. Whenever you’re not face-to-face with an employer, your cover letter is your introduction.

**The overview**

- Write a separate cover letter for every position. *The best letters are customized* for the employer receiving them.
- Since your resume talks about you, use your cover letter to demonstrate you’ve done your research and *show an employer how you’re the best candidate for them*. This means talking about them and how you’re a fit for what they need.
- Demonstrate a *professional, clear, and direct writing style* while also expressing your interest and excitement.
- As with your resume, your cover letter is a writing sample. Proofreading for grammatical and spelling errors, typos, and content/style is just as important. *Mistakes can wreck your chances* of moving forward.
- Think of your cover letter like a response to a personal ad—you’re connecting your interests and experiences with the other person — *being genuine, conveying interest, showing that you understand what’s important to them, and sharing their values*. You don’t have to tell them your life story—you’re telling them enough to convince them to invite you to an interview to learn more.

**The details**

- Your resume and cover letter should match in both style and appearance.
- Fold them together and mail in a matching envelope or, because employers are scanning resumes, send your cover letter and resume unfolded in a large envelope.
- If you’re emailing your resume as an attachment, it’s not necessary to also attach a cover letter. The email message itself serves as a cover letter. Write it accordingly.
- If you’re applying online, don’t forget to include a cover letter, even if it’s optional.
- Address the letter to a specific individual. You may need to do some extra research, but it makes a big difference.

**A helpful tip**

If you are having difficulty getting the tone of your cover letter right, you’re not alone. Many job seekers struggle with cover letters that sound artificial or too impersonal. If you find yourself in that situation, try this:

- Write a letter to someone you know well—a parent, friend, advisor, professor, former teacher. Tell them about the position you are applying for, how you found it, why you are interested/excited, why you think you would be a good candidate, what parts of the job you would especially enjoy, and what you know and like about the employer.
- Now that you have a letter that sounds like you, put it into cover letter format, fill in any pieces that are missing, and edit the language to make it a little more professional/formal if needed. It’s much easier to make something informal sound more formal than the other way around.
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April 2, 2015

Cameron Sullivan
National Events Manager
Crohn’s & Colitis Foundation of America
386 Park Avenue South
17th Floor
New York, NY 10016

Dear Ms. Sullivan,

I am writing regarding the Take Steps Walk Manager position located in Detroit, MI. As a psychology major, I am attracted to a career where I can use my strong communication skills to directly help people. This position would allow me to coordinate with many people in order to plan successful Walks, supporting the CCFA’s goal of improving Crohn’s & Colitis patients’ lives through research. Being very familiar with your organization personally and in networking with the Gastrointestinal Student Group that I lead at Michigan State University, I was excited to see the listing for this position on idealist.org.

This opportunity would be an excellent fit for both my personality and skills. As reflected on my resume, in my recent internship at NorthWest Initiative, I had the opportunity to plan a neighborhood conference from the ground up, which involved honing many important event planning skills such as those you are seeking in a Walk Manager: developing a promotional plan to publicize the event, working within budgets and timelines, mobilizing local business leaders and residents to volunteer their time and money, and maintaining current databases to track and record the progress of the event. I learned first-hand many challenges that nonprofits face, and also how vital meaningful relationships with individuals and other groups are to making an organization sustainable.

Of particular relevance to CCFA, I also currently serve as Social Chair of MSU GISI (Gastrointestinal Student Initiative) where I plan regular social and educational meetings for students with Crohn’s and Colitis. As with the Walk Manager position, this role requires heavy reliance on networking among and outside of the group. When we participated in the Take Steps Walk at Camp Dearborn last year, I was Team Captain for MSU GISI, and I am looking forward to the event again this year.

Thank you for your time and attention to my application. I look forward to scheduling an interview with you to discuss the position, as well as my qualifications and commitment to your cause. An opportunity to contribute to an organization whose mission I already support would be an excellent next step in my career path.

Sincerely,

Avery Black

Enclosure