

# PREPARING A COVER LETTER

## HEADING & GREETING

- Create your letterhead by copying and pasting your designed contact info from your résumé.
- The heading includes your contact info, the date, and the contact info of the person you are contacting.
- Find the name of the person who will read your cover letter – If not listed, it is appropriate to call the employer and ask who to direct your info to. LinkedIn can also be used as a tool to find who to contact.
- If you do not have a contact name, you may address the letter: “Dear (Insert Company) Hiring Manager”
- Use “Dear Mr./Ms./Dr.” to address the individual, followed by a comma (,).

## INTRODUCTION

This paragraph is to indicate the specific position you are applying for, how you found out about the position, and to attract the employer’s attention. If you have any personal contact(s) within the company who helped you find the opening - and you have permission to use his or her name - this would be the paragraph to mention the individual(s). This may also be a good place to mention something that impressed you about the organization, based on your research.

## ARGUMENT

Use this paragraph to relate your skills, knowledge, passions, and experiences to the needs of the employer. Use the job description and research you have completed on the organization to connect your relevant education, work experience, skills or other characteristics that meet the needs of the employer. Use similar language from this description or from the organization in your cover letter. This is your chance to highlight your qualifications and demonstrate knowledge of the organization. Refer the reader to your résumé. Focus on how you can be an asset to the employer. Use specific examples.

## CLOSING

Thank the reader for his or her time and consideration regarding your application. Indicate when and how you are going to contact the person to discuss your status for this opportunity. Provide a phone number and/or email address where you can be reached. End with a positive statement! For example, indicate that you are looking forward to hearing from them or excited about the possibility to be a part of the organization.

## SIGNATURE

End your cover letter with a salutation (Sincerely, Kind regards, Respectfully, etc). For mailed letters, use a handwritten signature. For info on electronic signatures, see page 4.

## EXAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION

- 1 Nordstrom is looking for a Design Intern in Chicago. We are seeking an individual who will be an active part of our team by doing their part to keep the department “runway ready,” which includes stocking, remerchandising, display, price markdowns, merchandise transfers and light cleaning. Gain hands-on experience while spending the majority of the internship working on our sales floor and learning business and management skills in a variety of settings.
- 2 Qualifications:
  - Graduating from college in 2015 or 2016
  - 3.0 GPA or above average student
- 3 Desired Skills:
  - Eager to put your retail fashion career on the fast track to a management role
  - Can keep a calm head when dealing with customer concerns
  - Thrive in a fast-paced environment
  - Organizational skills and the ability to quickly learn new processes and procedures
  - Demonstrates outstanding verbal and written communication

## EXAMPLE COVER LETTER

4 Anna Smith

123 East 1st Street | Holland, MI 49423  
(616) 123-4567 | anna.smith@gmail.com

5 March 8, 2015

6 Mr. Thomas Bond  
Nordstrom  
55 E Grand Ave  
Chicago, IL 60611

7 Dear Mr. Bond, 8

9 As a Hope College junior, I have had the opportunity to study communications and design. I found the Design Internship on your website and I have enclosed a copy of my résumé for your consideration. My friend, Jim Banks, worked at Nordstrom for 41 years and he encouraged my application for this internship.

10 Over the last two years, I have been involved with a diverse range of opportunities. As an Architecture and Design marketing Intern at Haworth, a global office furniture manufacturer, I worked on projects including market tools such as post-convention presentations, strategic planning, graphic design, and internet-based advertising. I learned that marketing and design is intentional, creative, innovative, and competitive. A second significant experience has been to develop creative and attractive costumes for both period and modern musicals and dramatic presentations on campus. Working within a budget and consulting with the director and creative team has allowed me the chance to develop my interest in fashion. The combination of my experience in the visual industry along with my commitment to the fashion field has prompted me to pursue opportunities in industries focused on the visual beauty of our world.

11 My strengths in student leadership landed me a position on the Student Activities Committee that annually plans 28 campus events, a weekly coffee house and two movies every weekend. In this role, I developed strong communication skills, problem-solving abilities and effective time management strategies. In addition, I served as a Residential Assistant to a group of 20-25 first-year women. Residential Life allowed me to work on a multi-tiered leadership team and gave me good practice in communicating a consistent message and maintaining a high standard of excellence throughout our interactions with residents. Relationship building was an important part towards my success in this role and one that I know will help at Nordstrom.

12 I look forward to using the skills gained through my experiences and training to positively contribute to Nordstrom. I will follow up with you in two weeks to see where the process stands and determine if you need any additional information from me. Thank you for your time and consideration. 13

Sincerely,

*Anna Smith*

14 Anna Smith

- 1 RESEARCH**  
Use the job description and other research on the company or industry to help create strong language in your cover letter.
- 2 QUALIFICATIONS**  
Be sure you meet the job qualifications before applying.
- 3 SKILLS**  
Read through the skills and requirements then highlight your related experience or strengths in these areas in the body of your cover letter.
- 4 HEADER**  
The header on your cover letter should match the header on your résumé document. If you have a list of references, the header should be the same on that as well.
- 5 DATE**  
The date appearing on your cover letter should be the date you plan to send the letter.
- 6 ADDRESS**  
List the correct company address: Contact Name, Company Name, Address, City, State, and Zip Code.
- 7 GREETING**  
Find out the person who will be receiving your cover letter and use their name. Address them formally as Mr./Ms./Dr. If a name is not listed, it is appropriate to call the employer and ask to whom you should address your letter.
- 8 LIMIT THE USE OF 'I'**  
Throughout your writing try to limit the use of 'I', especially when starting a new sentence.
- 9 CONTACT NAME**  
If someone referred you to this job or internship opportunity, be sure you get his or her permission, then state their name and how you found out about the position in the first paragraph.
- 10 SPECIFIC EXAMPLES**  
Use specific examples when discussing past experiences and related skill sets.
- 11 TRANSITIONS**  
Use transition sentences to connect paragraphs and create an enjoyable reading experience.
- 12 FOLLOW UP**  
If you choose to include a follow up date, be sure to actually follow up on that date.
- 13 THANK YOU**  
Be sure to thank the reader for his or her time and consideration.
- 14 NAME**  
Three spaces below your salutation, be sure to type your name exactly how you will sign the letter.

# PREPARING A COVER LETTER

## DO:

- Proofread!!! Be sure your letter is free of any typographical, spelling or grammatical errors.
- Tailor your letter for each opportunity and tell the reader why you are qualified for the position.
- Mention something you know about the organization that is related to the position for which you are applying.
- Write clearly and simply, using industry specific keywords.
- Sign your cover letter and include your phone number, email and address. Or use electronic PDF signature options.
- Showcase your written communication skills.
- Check your layout for adequate margins and white space and see if it is centered top to bottom.
- Ensure the font style matches that of the résumé and is simple and easy to read.
- Use high quality résumé paper — the same paper on which you print your résumé.

## DO NOT:

- Give a summary of your life, values, goals, etc. longer than 50 words.
- Describe, at length, your admiration for the company's history.
- Overuse the pronoun "I" or repeat your resume verbatim.
- Explain why you left your last job or want to leave your present one.
- Use a form letter and only change the company name.
- Include your salary requirements, unless asked to provide this information.
- Inflate or exaggerate your experience or qualifications.
- Hint that you are interested in virtually any job within that organization.
- Use contractions.
- Overuse flowery language such as "love" and "passion".
- Provide links to non-professional social media.
- Restate bullets from your résumé.

## COVER LETTER CHECKLIST

- Margins are balanced (standard one-inch margins on all sides of the document, or match margins with your résumé).
- Concise and error-free.
- The specific job title is stated within the first paragraph.
- All paragraphs are aligned to the left of the page (paragraphs should not be indented).
- Used specific examples to highlight your experiences.
- Attracts and holds the reader's attention.
- Avoids sentences starting with the word "I".
- Says thank you.
- Signed and has three spaces between your closing (such as "Sincerely") and typed name.
- Content is centered within the page.

*Need further assistance?*

## E-COVER LETTER

**Buzzwords:** The hiring manager will describe the skills and even former job titles that apply to his or her current job opening, and the human resources person will query the job applicant database for those same terms or keywords. Applicants are then screened out and/or ranked based on a simple matching algorithm. It's possible to increase the chance of success by ensuring the right keywords or key phrases are included in the body of the electronic documents.

**What to Name & How to Send Cover Letters:** Too often, people's résumés and cover letters are given the generic name "resume.doc" or "coverletter.doc." Step it up a notch and personalize the files by adding your name, e.g. "AnnaSmithResume.pdf" and "AnnaSmithCoverLetter.pdf."

**Email:** The body of your email could be used in place of a formal cover letter if you have networked with that person and are sending your résumé to them. This is a less formal option but may be useful in certain situations.