# Cover Letter Writing Guide 2016-2017

## What is a cover letter?

A cover letter is a one-page narrative used to introduce yourself, express your interest in a particular position or scholarship, explain your most relevant skills/knowledge/experiences to that opportunity and request an interview. It should be pleasant, clear, succinct and informative. After reading the cover letter, your reader should understand why you are enthusiastic about the position and what you would bring to it. It also serves as a writing sample so proper formatting, grammar, spelling and punctuation are critical.

## Is a cover letter required?

*The only time you should not include a cover letter is when a job or internship posting specifically states not to, which is rare.* Even if the posting does not state that one is required, you should take the time to write a cover letter since it is great way to distinguish yourself from the many other applicants. The cover letter is your chance to share your story and to state your top “selling points” that relate to a

potential employer’s needs.

*It is imperative that you tailor each cover letter to the position or opportunity you are seeking.* Show that you have researched the company or organization and have thoroughly read the position description and requirements. By doing so, you indicate your respect for the position, the organization, and the

reader’s time, and the reader will notice.

## Preparing to write a cover letter

* **Thoroughly understand the position description**, including what experiences, skills and qualities the organization is seeking. Take note of key terms and phrases to use in your cover letter and resume. If a good description of the organization is not provided, visit their website. Note their mission, client/product base, locations, and how the department you are applying for fits into the organization.
* **Determine to whom to address the letter** if the information isn’t provided. Use your investigative skills – if the job posting says “send resumes to tdavis@abccompany” or “apply to “HR Director”, visit the organization’s website to find “tdavis” or the “Director of HR” name so you can address the letter accordingly – “Dear *Dr. Davis, Mr. Davis,* or *Ms. Davis*:” Or, call the organization and inquire.
* **Consider the reader:** Given the position description, decide what will be most important for them to know about you.

## Cover letter basics

A cover letter is professional correspondence and needs to conform to an appropriate block style format

* left justified and single spaced except for a double space between paragraphs. Ensure there are no typos, grammar mistakes, exclamation marks, humor, hyperbole, abbreviations or smiley faces. Margins should be no smaller than .8 inches.

As with your resume, the cover letter should be neat and inviting to view. Use a font that is easy to read such as Arial, Arial Narrow, Garamond, Georgia, or Trebuchet MS in 11 or 12 point. It should be the same as or similar to the font used in your resume. If you will be submitting a hard copy, use the same high quality, white or ivory paper for both your cover letter and your resume.

Your writing should be in a pleasant, confident tone and provide clear, concise examples. Also, make sure to vary your sentence structure so every sentence doesn’t begin with “I.” Don’t mention or apologize for any experience you feel you are lacking. Avoid using overused phrases like “contact me at your earliest convenience” or “I desire to be a member of your team.” Instead, use your own professional voice.

## Additional thoughts

* + **Use accurate contact information.** Recipients will use the contact information you provide so list an email and phone that you check and use regularly. Make sure you have a professional email address and voicemail greeting and that you answer your phone professionally during your job search.
	+ **Pay particular attention to key points highlighted in bold on page 3.** These are critical to a strong cover letter.
	+ **Proof, proof, and proof again.** Spell check and grammar check. Read it out loud, slowly. Then ask another person (or two) to read it line by line, even if you are pressed for time. You don’t want the reader to think you are careless in your work so proofreading will keep you from being derailed by uncaught, simple mistakes.
	+ **Always PDF your cover letter before emailing.** If you send a Word document, the formatting may change when the reader opens it on his or her computer. So review and save your document as a PDF before sending electronically.
	+ **Always include a cover letter with your resume.** When emailing, you can attach it separately or use it as the email’s content when attaching your resume (cut and paste it into the email body).

***For cover letter help, see attached cover letter outline. Also, you may make an appointment to meet with staff in the Office of Internship and Career Development via: compass.agnesscott.edu***

# Student’s First & Last Name

141 East College Avenue, Decatur, GA 30030

Date

Dr./Mr./Ms. First and Last Name Title

Company/Organization Name Organization Street Address City, ST Zip Code

Dear Dr./Mr./Ms. Last name,

Indicate **which position** you are applying for and how you learned of it (on their website, advertised on LinkedIn, through Agnes Scott College’s Office of Internship and Career Development, from XY person who is known to the letter recipient, etc.) Express **why you are interested** in this position. Provide a brief statement of the **top 2-3 reasons you are a good fit** for the position. Think of it as the thesis/topic sentence for the letter. Limit this first paragraph to 3 sentences in most situations.

In the next paragraph (5 or so sentences), **support your topic sentence by highlighting 2-3 of your best examples of academic, campus/service or internship/work experience related to the position to which you are applying.** Provide more detail than what is on your resume. You should try to connect the dots of your experience to support your topic sentence and overall strengths related to the position you are seeking. State skills, knowledge or experience you gained that this new employer needs and their position requires.

In your closing paragraph, **restate your interest in the position** and **indicate that your resume is attached for their review** (and any other materials they require.) Encourage them to reach out to you with questions or to arrange an interview. **Indicate that you hope to hear from them soon. Thank him or her** for their time and consideration of your application.

Sincerely,

Your First and Last Name (or insert a scan of your signature with your name printed directly underneath) Your email address

Your cell phone number