



Cover Letters: A Guide for Undergrads

What is a Cover Letter?



The cover letter is a marketing tool – often one of the first things that a recruiter sees when considering your application. Its purpose is to advertise yourself well enough to secure an interview. It represents you – your passion, energy, accomplishments, individuality and professionalism within the context of the job to which you are applying. Each cover letter should be customized and tailored to demonstrate your skills and qualifications desired by the employer. For example, if you are applying for a position to be a research assistant for a professor, you might emphasize course work, grades, class papers you’ve written, interest in the subject, and your ability to work independently and learn quickly. If you are applying for a position as a tutor to grade school students, you might emphasize attributes that include previous experience working with children, examples of your creativity, love of learning, academic background and patience.

Before Writing Your Cover Letter, You Should:



- Do your research on the industry, field, company/ organization, and the job itself so you fully understand what the employer is seeking. Talk with a Career Advancement adviser to learn more about how to do this.
- Think like an employer—what qualities would you seek in an employee and how do your experiences reflect them? You can find hints: carefully read the job description, research the company/organization, go to company info sessions, and conduct informational interviews with individuals working in the field.
- Remember that you can include classes, class papers, hobbies, volunteer work and interests to highlight your transferable skills.

Ask yourself the following questions:



- *What qualifications does the employer want?* Read through a job description of interest and underline the attributes. These qualities are usually clear; in some positions or industries, however, the descriptions are vague. (This is where research and informational interviews come in handy.)
- *How does your experience relate to the job?* What are at least two specific accomplishments you can cite?
- *What are three qualities or experiences you want the employer to know about you?*
- *Why do you want to work for this organization or person?* What do you know about them? Look for something deeper than their being an “excellent” company. Is there something specific about their services, product, philosophy you can express?



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Undergrad Cover Letter Guide



To Craft a Successful Cover Letter, You Should:

- Write your letter in a conversational/natural, deferential, style. Stilted prose is not effective.
- Show enthusiasm for your work and the position.
- Establish your credentials early; give specific examples from your experience that show your relevant skills.
- Give them one or two compelling reasons to interview you.
- Run spell-check but check word-by-word afterwards. Also, check your phone number, email address and street address carefully. Have as many people as possible read your cover letter for mistakes, including a career adviser.
- Be attentive to details. If you merge your letter in a word processing program, check that you changed everything and are not addressing the letter to a different organization than the one you mentioned in the body of the letter.
- Address your cover letter as neutral or non-specific as possible since multiple people might come across it. Use “Dear Hiring Manager” or “Dear Hiring Team”.
- Limit your letter to one page in length, consisting of three to five paragraphs.
- Use the active tense; avoid “i-n-g” endings when possible.
- Avoid generalizations and trite expressions (e.g. “I am the ideal candidate”).
- There is more than one way to write a cover letter. Ask different people for their perspectives, then develop your own style. Trust your own judgement.
- Visit a Career Advancement adviser to review and discuss your cover letter before submitting it to an employer.
- When you sign your name, you can include your preferred pronouns in your email or cover letter signature.

Online Cover Letter Protocol

If someone asks you to email a cover letter and resume to apply for a position, you can do one of two things, both equally acceptable:

1. Write a brief e-mail, with the cover letter and resume attached.
2. Use your cover letter in the body of the e-mail, with the resume attached. Email format does not require you to include your mailing address, the date or the recipient’s mailing address; simply start with the salutation, for example, “Dear Mary Smith.”

Be formal. It is not acceptable to use email/texting conventions that you would with friends (for example, lower case “I’s,” acronyms such as BTW, etc.); avoid contractions, and do not use “Hi” as a salutation.

Be very clear in your subject line so the recipient knows that he or she is not receiving spam.

Cover Letter Format

Your street address
City, state and zip code
Phone number
Email address

Date

Hiring manager's name (if known)
Hiring manager's title (e.g., Human Resources Coordinator)
Name of organization
Street address of organization
City, state and zip code

Salutation

- If you have a specific contact, you can address the contact using an honorific ("Dear Ms. Smith,") or their first and last name ("Dear Jane Smith,")
- You can also simply write "Dear hiring manager,"

First Paragraph

- Briefly introduce yourself: mention that you are a University of Chicago student, give your year in school, and include your major if applicable
- Specify which position you are applying to
- Briefly summarize your relevant qualifications and experiences
- If you know someone at the organization, mention that person's name ("Mark Smith recommended that I apply for this position")
- Do not start with "My name is..."
- Avoid overconfident language like "I am the ideal candidate"

Body Paragraphs (Usually 2-3 Paragraphs)

- Describe your skills and qualifications: you can mention relevant jobs, courses, volunteer opportunities, etc.
- Structure each paragraph around a skill mentioned in the job description
 - Example, if research skills are an important part of the job description, dedicate a paragraph to your research experiences
- Show, don't tell: cite specific examples to show your qualifications
 - Ineffective: "I am skilled at time management"
 - Effective: "I managed five large-scale events and scheduled regular check-ins with our 25 event volunteers, all while balancing a full-time courseload"
- Keep it brief: one or two examples of each skill works great

Final Paragraph

- Reiterate your interest in the position
- Thank the reader
- End with a professional signoff like "Sincerely,"

Sample Cover Letters

Sample 1

5422 Frankford Avenue, Apt. 1
Chicago, IL 60637
(212) 333-0897
idanoyes@uchicago.edu

February 22, 2026

Sharon Smith
Director of Logistics and Business Relations
DonorsChoose.org
134 West 37th Street
New York, NY 10018

Dear Sharon Smith,

I am a first-year student at the University of Chicago planning to major in Public Policy. I am writing to express my interest in the Logistics and Business Relations Intern position at DonorsChoose.org.

This internship interests me because I am passionate about DonorsChoose.org's mission of promoting democratic education. I believe that my experiences in education, my organizational skills, and my communication skills would be great assets for your office.

At the University of Chicago, I am the Logistics Director of Splash! Chicago, a community service organization that offers educational programs to local Chicago high school students. I currently direct several Splash! programs that allow students to take enrichment classes taught by University of Chicago community members. In this role, I oversee multiple projects with many moving parts, balancing needs and deadlines in a fast-paced, demanding environment. For example, this past quarter, I successfully recruited 25 new student teachers for our programs (a 20% increase), led 10 teacher training sessions, and raised \$1,000 to support our programs.

Back in December, I also completed a job shadowing experience with Advance Illinois, an education policy nonprofit. Over the course of the three-day shadowing experience, I learned about the key issues facing education policymakers like expanding early childhood programs, responding to teacher shortages, and school funding challenges. As part of the experience, I completed a policy memo outlining the benefits and costs of allocating more funding to preschool programs that the organization included in a report for the Illinois General Assembly.

I would welcome the opportunity to talk further with you about this position. Thank you in advance for your consideration!

Sincerely,
Ida Noyes

Sample 2

5745 S. Everett Ave.
Chicago, IL 60637
davidmaroon@uchicago.edu
773-221-3242

January 26, 2026

The PFM Group
222 N. LaSalle Street, Suite 910
Chicago, IL 60601

Dear Hiring Manager,

I am writing to apply for The PFM Group's Summer Internship Program. As a second year Economics major at the University of Chicago with a prior business internship, I believe that I will be able to contribute analytical, quantitative, and problem-solving skills to this internship.

During my internship with the Strategy team at BlueCross BlueShield Association, I analyzed the competitiveness of Blue Plans in the Affordable Care Act individual insurance market and recommended strategies to maximize customer growth. I learned how to gather data, conduct market research, understand trends, and identify correlations between variables such as price and market share using Excel spreadsheets and functions. This allowed me to develop strong database management skills and attention to detail. At the end of my internship, I created a 20-slide deck for the senior management team outlining a strategy to expand the client base. The leadership team adopted several of my suggestions, resulting in a 10% increase in client enrollments and a 5% increase in revenue.

My previous experiences have also helped me build strong organizational and relationship management skills. As a member of the student organization Moneythink, I work with five charter schools to organize personal finance classes for K-12 students. I am responsible for managing our relationship with schools, developing our year-long curriculum, and ensuring adequate training and preparation for our college student mentors. Within four months of joining the organization, I was appointed Mentor Captain, and Moneythink classes at my schools have consistently received satisfaction ratings of 95% or higher.

If you feel that my skills could benefit the PFM Group's clients, I would be thrilled to join your team. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about my application. Thank you for considering my application.

Sincerely,
David Maroon

Sample Cover Letters – Sample 3

5745 S. Brim Street, Apt. 12
Chicago, IL 60637
jamiekim@uchicago.edu
773-221-3242

April 1, 2026

John Grey
Managing Attorney
Altshuler Berzon LLP
177 Post Street
San Francisco, CA 94108

Dear Mr. Grey,

I am a fourth-year Public Policy major at the University of Chicago writing to apply for the Litigation Assistant position at Altshuler Berzon LLP. My previous legal internship and other college experiences have prepared me to succeed in this role.

Last summer, I completed an investigator internship at Orleans Public Defenders, the public defense agency in New Orleans. Over the course of my two-month internship, I did hands-on, client-driven work with a partner on fifteen different cases ranging in severity from drug possession to motor vehicle theft and murder. Due to the immense workload our supervising investigator faced, we often worked independently and had to make quick decisions ourselves. Our purpose each day was to obtain all relevant information regarding a client's case; we conducted jail visits, took witness statements, interviewed our clients' friends and family, canvassed and photographed crime scenes, viewed evidence, and assisted with trial preparation. I regularly wrote detailed investigative memos to keep attorneys apprised of our work, as well as provide my own insight into cases and witnesses. This internship taught me how to tackle very complex cases in a collaborative and fast-paced work environment, which I believe has prepared me for the role of a Litigation Assistant.

My co-curricular experiences in college have also helped me develop strong project management skills. During my third year at the University of Chicago, I served as the Logistics Chair of TEDx UChicago's annual conference: Make No Little Plans. I worked on a team with eight other board members to host the event for nearly 1,000 attendees from the University and greater Chicagoland area. I was responsible for coordinating all logistical aspects of the conference which included ordering nametags and programs, booking flights and hotels for all speakers, coordinating volunteer efforts, and feeding 1,000 hungry conference-goers. We spent a year preparing for the conference, which taught me a great deal about time management and organizational skills.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak with you further about my qualifications. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jamie Kim