

Anatomy of a Cover Letter

Memorable! ^

Your contact's info

Write your contact's name, title, and address (if you have it) on the left margin before beginning your letter.

A salutation

If you can, address your cover letter to a specific person. It's much stronger to start "Dear Mr. Jones" than "To Whom It May Concern."

A "hook"

After you've set the scene, it's time to hook your reader. Insert a captivating sentence early on in your letter, which will distinguish you from your competitors and make the contact want to keep reading about you.

Your experience as solution to their problem

Don't just catalog your most recent accomplishments and positions--that's what your resume is for. Cherry-pick specific examples of your expertise, experience, and interests to demonstrate how YOU are the perfect fit for this school's particular needs at this particular time.

Your personal info

Put your personal information--name, email address, phone number--in a prominent (but not distracting) position at the top of your page, either on the right or in the center. This will make it easy for the person reviewing your cover letter to remember who you are and note your contact information.

A statement of purpose

Begin with the basics: explain your purpose in writing this cover letter. Don't assume that the reader will know why you're writing; s/he is likely reading hundreds of cover letters for various openings at his/her school.

A demonstrated understanding of their needs

Pay attention to the position description, and if it's not particularly helpful or elaborate, do some research on this particular school/department. What do they need? What are they missing? What do they value? Succinctly demonstrate that you understand the school's current needs.

A firm statement of next-steps expectations.

Conclude by summarizing why you would be interested in joining this community, and state that you look forward to hearing from the contact soon.

