



VCU

Career Services

Student Success

Cover Letter Guide

You can use the outline feature to jump to sections

What is a cover letter?

Your cover letter complements your resume, telling the employer why you are interested in the position and detailing how you are specifically qualified. It should not be a restatement of your resume, but a chance for you to highlight your experiences and accomplishments that are most relevant to the position and the employer. If you need help with your [resume](#), deciding what effective [action verbs](#) to use, or if you're [writing a career document in Google Docs](#), you can use any of our guides or make an appointment with one of our advisors.

Creating a cover letter

- Use the job posting's position description to brainstorm examples of your experiences that match their requirements
 - Quantify when possible and provide context and visual interest (#, \$, %)
- Structure with 3-5 paragraphs total
- End with a professional sign-off (e.g. "Sincerely,")
- Avoid using contractions since this is formal writing

Formatting a cover letter

- Use a business letter format, including a header and the date
- Use a standard font (e.g. Arial, Cambria, or Times New Roman)
- Save the file as a PDF under your full name with the date submitted (e.g. Rodney_Ram_8_7_20XX_Cover_Letter)
- Keep the document to one page, single-spaced, and manually add any paragraph breaks
- Formatting and style should match your resume

Elevating a cover letter

- Try to find a specific person to address your cover letter to. If you cannot find a specific person, use "Dear Hiring Manager:"
- Research the organization and use specific and relevant information from your research to explain why you want to work there
- Insert a digital signature at the end, if desired, and type your name after the professional sign-off

Possible ways to create a digital signature:

1. Use a touch screen computer or tablet to insert a drawing of your signature
2. Print your final version of the cover letter, sign it, scan it, and save it as a PDF
3. Sign a piece of paper, scan it, use the SnipIt tool to crop it, copy it, and paste it into the document.

Cover Letter Dos

- Write a new cover letter for each job so it is tailored and specific
- Clearly outline how you will be able to contribute to the organization
- Set your cover letter apart from other applicants by giving tangible examples of your skills
- Review and check for spelling or grammatical errors

Cover Letter Don'ts

- Avoid using cliches (e.g. Enclosed please find my resume)
- Try not to restate your resume; instead expand on highlights, experiences, and/or accomplishments
- Don't use generic buzzwords and phrases, such as "hard-working" or "strong communication skills"
- Avoid using italics or cursive fonts for your signature
- Don't use cover letter templates found online, instead develop your own style/flow that follows a standard format

APPOINTMENT HOURS

Monday - Friday, 8 A.M. - 5 P.M.
Schedule on Handshake.
Log in at careers.vcu.edu.

OFFICE LOCATION

University Student Commons,
1st Floor, Rm. 143

CONTACT INFORMATION

careers.vcu.edu
careers@vcu.edu
(804) 828-1645

Example Cover Letter

(Copy your resume header so they are the same. Make sure to have them in the same location.)

Name

Phone | Email | Address

Date Sent

Example:

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Name of Recipient | Rodney Ram |
| Position of Recipient | Career Advisor |
| Organization/Department Name | VCU Career Services |
| Org/Dept. Address | 907 Floyd Ave. Richmond, VA 23284 |

Dear Name of Recipient:

Introduction paragraph: In this paragraph, you will want to state the job you are applying for, how you learned about the opportunity, and how you heard about the position. You can mention your current/previous education, why you are interested in this position and include a hook line to grab their interest and to summarize the key skills/qualifications you are going to be talking about.

Body paragraph: (This may be one, two, or three paragraphs) In this section, you will pull 2-4 points from the job description and describe how you can fill the specific needs they are looking for by describing your past jobs/education/research experience. Show them that you can do the skills rather than simply telling them you have the skills. For example, "As an Office Assistant, I regularly utilized my written and oral communication skills when helping clients. Each day I answered calls from clients and students and answered any questions that they might have. In addition, I scheduled appointments for clients and students when necessary." This is more effective than, "When I was an Office Assistant I utilized my strong communication skills." Make sure to keep your tenses consistent.

Closing paragraph: Reiterate your interest in the position and why you would be a good fit. Summarize the qualifications you have talked about, making sure you are still using similar language as the job description. Thank the recipient and provide information, typically phone and email, on how they can reach you if they have questions.

Sincerely,

(Optional Digital Signature)
Type Signed Name

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Appointments

If you are interested in making an appointment with one of our Career Advisors to review your resume or discuss any other career-related topics/questions, [see which advisor advises your industry of interest](#).

We recommend that first appointments with our office are with a career advisor. In addition, we offer several different appointment mediums to better meet your needs. Choose the medium that best fits your needs.

You can [schedule an appointment](#) by logging into Handshake and selecting the time that works best for you.

Events and Career Fairs

To see our upcoming events and career fairs you can check our [website](#) or log into [Handshake](#).

Questions

If you have any questions you can come into the office, call our front desk at (804) 828-1645, or email us at careers@vcu.edu.

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