

Cover Letter Toolkit

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Business Career Centre

Cover Letter Toolkit

Reading time: 20 minutes

- **Start with the basics**

What is a cover letter and how is it different from a resume?

- **Design your header**

How to create a polished and professional cover letter header.

- **Do your research**

Show an employer that you're well-prepared and are truly interested in the job.

- **Be compelling**

Strategies for writing a compelling cover letter employers won't be able to put down.

- **Draw in the reader**

Get the reader interested in what you have to say from the first paragraph.

- **Tell your story**

Use the STAR framework to tell the best possible stories about your past work experience.

- **Finish strong**

Summarize your capabilities, interest, and fit.

- **Use a template**

Get started quickly with a UBC Sauder-approved cover letter template.

- **Review the cover letter checklist**

Make sure you have all the components of an impactful cover letter.

- **Get feedback**

Talk to family, friends, and classmates, or book a coaching appointment with your Career Manager.

Start with the basics

Do you really need a cover letter?

Career Managers are often asked whether cover letters are needed in today's job search landscape. The reality is that, even though not all employers ask for them, cover letters are still requested and read by many employers.

Cover letters are useful because they:

- Provide an opportunity to highlight information not on your resume
- Can show that you understand the needs of the employer and requirements of the job
- Can show how you fit with the company's management style, employees, and clients
- Help you think about who you are, and what you have to offer, relevant to the needs of the employer, which also helps you prepare for job interview questions
- Provide an example of your written communication skills

Even if not all employers ask for a cover letter, the benefits mean that writing one is still time well spent.

Your cover letter lets you go into detail about how your skills, qualifications, and motivation are a good fit for the job

A cover letter shows your **intentions and interests** and your ability to communicate. It also answers:

- **Can** you do the job? (*Do you have the skills needed for the role?*)
- Do you **want** the job? (*What gets you excited about the role?*)
- Are you the right **fit** for the organization? (*Do you share similar values and work styles?*)

If you're unsure whether or not to include something in your cover letter, ask yourself if it's useful for the employer to know. Will including that information increase your chances of getting the job?

How to format cover letters

No matter how good your content is, your cover letter won't be looked at if it isn't easy to read. Cover letter formatting best practices include:

- ✓ Font size **10-12pt**
- ✓ Margins at least **2cm wide** on all edges
- ✓ Enough **white space** so it is easy to scan (your cover letter shouldn't be a big block of text)
- ✓ Save as a **PDF** to ensure your cover letter looks the same on all screens and devices

No matter how impressive your cover letter is, it's still hard to stand out in a pile of hundreds of other letters. The best way to get noticed is if the employer already knows you. That's why it's so important to make a personal connection beforehand. For strategies to build your network, use the **Networking and Informational Interviews Toolkit**.

Your cover letter at a glance

Your Name

Header should be identical to your resume

City, Province
Phone Number

Professional Email Address
LinkedIn URL

These spaces are important

Date **Format: January 1, 20XX**

Contact Name **Contact name and job title can be omitted if unknown (but try to find it)**

Their Job Title

Company Name

Company Street Address

City, Province Postal Code **Country is unnecessary unless applying outside of Canada**

Re: Position Title, Job ID Number (if available) **Bold the reference line to make it easy to see at a glance**

Dear Mr./Ms. LastName OR Hiring Manager OR FirstName LastName,

Avoid "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Sir or Madam", make sure prefix/salutation is correct

Your opening paragraph usually starts with a hook – one or two sentences outlining a personal story, question, or anecdote that relates to the position, and gets the employer interested in reading further. The rest of the first paragraph is a chance to describe a) why you want the job (based on your interests and experiences), and b) why you're a good fit for working at the organization (based on shared values with the organization, their company culture, their mission, etc.) This is also a chance for you to demonstrate that you've done research about the organization, or to mention people you've networked with at the organization – both of which demonstrate that you're prepared and are serious about the role.

Following your first paragraph you will generally have 2-3 body paragraphs that demonstrate that you can do the job, based on your skills and experience. Your cover letter is more detailed than your resume, so this is an opportunity to tell stories that highlight how you've developed 2-3 skills that are important for the job. You can highlight more than one skill per story. One option to structure your skill-matching stories is to use the STAR model – Situation (who, what when, where), Task (your objective), Action (what you did, how you did it, skills you used), and Result (qualitative or quantitative proof of your success).

The closing paragraph lets you re-state your skills and re-affirm your interest in the position and the organization. Thank the employer for their time and consideration, and invite them to follow-up with you about the next step in the hiring process.

Sincerely, **Other options include "Regards," or "Best,"**

Your Name **You can include a written or digital signature here if you choose**

Degree **E.g. BCom Operations & Logistics Co-op Candidate 20XX, Master of Management Candidate 20XX**

UBC Sauder School of Business

Attached: Resume

Design your header

Make it easy for employers to find your contact info

Your header (or letterhead) is a banner at the top of your cover letter and resume that displays your contact information in a professional and visually appealing way. It should include:

Your name

- Make your name stand out by making it bold, putting it in capitals, or adding some colour
- If you have a preferred first name, you should follow this format: Legal First Name (Preferred Name) Legal Last name, e.g. **Bo (Shawn) Chan or Shawn Chan**

Your contact information

- Your current city
- Professional email address (ideally including your first and last name, instead of something like honeychunks52@hotmail.com) that you check frequently
- Telephone number with a professional voice mail message
- LinkedIn account
- A relevant personal website or social media accounts (optional)

How to design an appropriate header

Keep in mind the values of the relevant company and industry. Some employers may prefer a colourful and creative header, and others may want something more traditional. Your header should appear on your cover letter and all pages of your resume. Keep it consistent across both.

Sample headers

Jim Roogle	123 4 th St, Vancouver, BC, V1W 2X3 (604) 123-4567, jroogle@gmail.com linkedin.com/in/jimroogle
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REGINA LAM business student non-profit director coffee enthusiast 123 4 th St, Vancouver, BC, V1W 2X3 604.123.4567 rlam@gmail.com linkedin.com/in/r-lam

123 4 th St, Vancouver, BC, V1W 2X3 604 123 4567	Jaime Sangha	jaimesangha@gmail.com linkedin.com/in/jsangha
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Do your research

Get the facts to sound convincing

Before writing your cover letter and resume, take some time to research the industry, employer, and position you are applying to.

Your documents should demonstrate that you know something about the organization beyond basic details. Doing research not only shows you are dedicated and resourceful, it will also give you more ideas for cover letter content. Check out these key areas to focus your research on:

Job description	<p>What specific skills are the company looking for?</p> <p>What's the tone of the job description? Professional? Encouraging? Humorous? Serious?</p> <p>How do they describe what it's like to work at the company?</p> <p>Based on what you see, what gets you excited about the role?</p>
Company website	<p>What's the mission statement of the organization?</p> <p>What are the values of the organization?</p> <p>How do they describe themselves?</p> <p>What information is included in the careers section of their website?</p> <p>Based on what you see, what gets you excited about the company?</p>
Company social media	<p>How do they communicate via social media? Is it different from their website?</p> <p>How do they interact with others online?</p> <p>What's the focus of their social media content?</p>
Informational interviews	<p>Don't skip this step! It's ideal to schedule an informational interview with a current or former employee from the company before you apply. If you don't yet know someone at the organization, it's also perfectly acceptable to connect and schedule an info interview with someone at the organization when you apply for a position.</p> <p>You can also name-drop a person you talked to in your cover letter. This shows you were motivated to reach out to learn more about the organization. (Just make sure to get their permission first.)</p> <p>Read our Networking and Informational Interview Toolkit for more ideas, including how to set up an informational interview, how to find senior students or recent UBC Sauder alumni to talk to, and examples of good questions to ask.</p>

Be compelling

How to be persuade the employer of your suitability

A good cover letter illustrates how an organization would benefit from hiring you. It should not just reiterate your resume. Instead, it should give relevant, detailed descriptions of how your experience relates to the job you want. It's also an opportunity for you to showcase your ability to clearly articulate ideas.

Here are some suggestions for ways to be more persuasive:

1) Be authentic

It's tempting to make a cover letter formal. After all, you're serious about the job you want. However, being overly formal can come off as unapproachable and impersonal. Incorporate your own style into your writing.

2) Use jargon

Incorporate industry or job-specific terminology where appropriate. This shows you've done research and understand the field you want to work in.

3) Keep it simple and specific

Keep language clear. Consider how you would describe the role to a friend. You're unlikely to tell them that you are "absolutely honoured to be applying for this prestigious role." Statements like this often aren't specific enough to be effective, and don't sound authentic. If you can replace the name of the company and the sentence still makes sense, you probably aren't being specific enough. For example:

"I'm extremely passionate about the potential to work with a well-respected company like BDO."

"I'm extremely passionate about the potential to work with a well-respected company like O2E Brands."

The above sentences make sense with both company names, which means it isn't specific enough.

4) Start with a hook

A cover letter can look intimidating (or boring) if it's a solid block of text that's focused only on describing why you have the skills needed to do the job. We recommend starting the first paragraph with a hook—a story, anecdote, quote, or saying that draws the reader in and gets them interested in reading more. Read the next section in this guide ([draw in the reader](#)) for examples. Note: some finance roles do not want a hook.

5) Relax

Writing a cover letter can be a nerve-racking process. It's not easy to do, and it takes several hours to get it right. As [Jenny Foss](#) from themuse.com suggests:

**"Stress and tension may very well breed stress and tension in your tone.
If you can create some space and release your paranoia about saying the wrong things,
you'll likely produce something that's more conversational,
more genuine to you, and more impactful."**

6) Focus on your strengths

As [Lily Zhang](#) from themuse.com explains, instead of drawing attention to your weaknesses, focus on the skills you do have. For example, you don't need to apologize for only having one year of experience when the job description is asking for two. The only exception to this is if you are missing a critical part of the job description, such as access to a vehicle, or a particular training certification. In that case, you'll need to be honest and upfront in explaining your situation, and the steps you're taking to improve.

7) Write the way that works for you

If you find it easier to start at the end, or if you want to write your hook last, that's okay. Write your cover letter in a way that works best for you.

Draw in the reader

Opening paragraph: the hook

Your opening paragraph usually starts with a hook—one or two sentences outlining a personal story, question, or anecdote that directly applies to the position, and gets the employer interested in reading further. It should answer these questions: Who are you? Can you align yourself with what the company is looking for culturally? Can you do it in an interesting and engaging way?

The rest of the first paragraph is a chance to describe:

- Why you want the job, based on your interests and experiences
- Why you're a good fit for working at the organization, based on shared values with the organization, their company culture, their mission, etc.

This first paragraph is also a chance for you to demonstrate that you've researched the organization, or to mention people you've networked with at the organization. Both of these demonstrate that you're prepared and are serious about the role.

Sample opening paragraphs

Since our meeting, I have become especially excited about the prospect of working at CBC and spending the summer helping to launch our oldest and most respected national broadcasting source to even greater heights. The company feels like a great cultural fit for me and is exactly in line with what I want to do professionally, which is to contribute to the media and arts in Canada.

I was impressed by BC Hydro's tips on saving energy in response to sudden climate changes and the company's contribution to our province's community. Building on my previous work experience of implementing the ERP system at Ipsos Korea, I would be excited to join BC Hydro to contribute to your team and further develop my skills by learning from your experts.

Evidence of my firm understanding of accounting and financial principles can be seen from my accomplishments as a Summer Research Associate with CIBC World Markets Inc. During this past summer, I built and updated models based on company financials. I also demonstrated my problem-solving skills and attention to detail by assisting analysts in solving issues that arose throughout the coverage initiation process. Furthermore, I have experience using Bloomberg and Capital IQ software packages as well as being thoroughly proficient in Excel.

We met earlier this season when our UBC MBA Hockey Team came to Rogers Arena to watch a game in the box seats. We spoke that evening and you mentioned you would be open to talking with me about my interest in Sports Marketing. I have been researching my options in the Sports Marketing/Management industry and am interested in getting to know the business and your role a little more intimately. I wanted to take a moment to introduce myself and provide you with a little background.

Tell your story

Body paragraphs: show off your skills

Your work experience and extracurricular involvement are the key areas recruiters and employers examine to assess your suitability for a position. They are looking to see if your experience and skills match the needs of the job. The middle paragraphs of your cover letter let you show off the skills you've gained from your past work experience, i.e. all the reasons why you are qualified for the job.

Your experience shows off the skills you've gained, whether that's leadership, decision-making, initiative, flexibility, customer service, teamwork, or communication skills.

Remember that the skills you highlight in your cover letter should be the same as the ones found in the job description for the position you are applying to.

That's where STAR stories come in. These are **specific, relevant**, and **personal** stories about your past experience. This should look familiar – it's the reverse of the RATS model used when writing a resume.

STAR power

S What was the **situation**? Be specific: a job, club, group, class, etc.?

T What was your **task**? Did you improve something? Did you solve a problem?

A What concrete **action** did you take? What did you personally do? What skills did you use?

R What was the **result**? How did your organization benefit from your actions?

Ideally, results are quantitative: *Increased participation by 20%, increased revenue by \$2000*

Results can also be qualitative: *Promoted to supervisor role, received positive client feedback*

It's important to note that **one STAR story can demonstrate multiple skills**. For example, a project you worked on could illustrate both your communication skills and your ability to work effectively in a team.

Sample body paragraphs (with STAR stories)

As an Airfreight Export Agent at KN Ltd., I helped clients export perishable goods quickly and efficiently. One simple mistake could result in a transportation delay, which could destroy the entire cargo. Under such demanding circumstances I strived to achieve excellence by navigating the company's complex software for documentation processes while abiding by standard operation procedures. I organized my documents and prioritized multiple tasks to complete the job while double-checking my work to ensure accuracy. Most importantly, I worked as a team player, asking relevant questions and voluntarily offering help when needed resulting in shortened timelines, customer satisfaction and stellar feedback from my supervisor. The exposure to the transportation of goods and my strong work ethic have prepared me to add value to KN.

To bolster my analytical skills, this past term I took Quantitative Decision-Making. The course involved building complex Excel models, analyzing sensitivity reports, and finding the optimal solution to problems. In building these models, I was determined to focus on the details to ensure the success of my model. By thinking critically, I gained a strong understanding of the core concepts and excelled on the assignments and exams. To further develop my MS Excel skills, I am currently taking an online course that covers data analysis including pivot tables and mathematical functions. With these new skills in hand, I look forward to contributing to the success of London Drug's process management.

Just as I have experienced industrialization's key role in catalyzing growth, I have also experienced the crucial role of innovation. During my internship with MzN International this past summer, I consistently took it upon myself to not only offer innovative ideas for improvement, but to actively pursue them. Through my own initiative, I undertook a complete redesign of both the organization's website as well as its transparency scheme. These are two projects that have since transitioned from ideas into points of action currently being carried out by the organization, and have been commended by clients as having further differentiated MzN and strengthened its overall brand image.

My involvement as two-time captain for the UBC Rec flag football team has developed my ability to perform well in a team, while also competing to establish myself as a self-starter and individual contributor. Similarly, I further improved my collaborative skills with corporate team members at Scotiabank Global Banking and Markets when working there as an intern this past summer. This experience gave me the opportunity to translate the skills I learned on the football field, such as concise communication and collaborative efforts, into the business world. I now have a better understanding of how an effective corporate team must function and the importance of asking others for guidance. These two specific experiences have provided me with the team skills necessary to further enhance my professionalism and quickly adapt as I look to begin my professional career with PwC's large and diverse Calgary team.

My enthusiasm towards sports is paired well with my experience in general management, event planning, communications, and marketing. I have a proven track record in sales, honed in commodity trading and waste management services. As General Manager, I restructured the customer services team, recruited a new sales staff and drastically cut costs and inefficiencies. In addition to operations management my other responsibilities included financial management, business development and marketing. While handling external relations I represented the company at the Vancouver Board of Trade, the Strathcona Business Association and the Canadian Association of Recycling Industries.

For the last three years, I worked as a pricing and market analyst for two diverse financial departments in the utilities sector in Alberta. These positions allowed me to build on my understanding of risk and volatility with respect to revenues, as well as many other topics such as modelling and forecasting. I was also responsible for analysing oil and gas projects in Alberta based on macro-economic conditions, as these would significantly affect the quality of my forecasts. I worked closely with others, as the team leader and designer on developing econometric forecasting and reporting software, thoroughly communicating and discussing my ideas with management. My dedication allowed me to meet deadlines and exceed project expectations. During this time, I also coordinated and organized charity events and guest speakers for ABC's "Employees Participating in Communities" campaign.

Finish strong

Closing paragraph: Wrap up your pitch

Your closing paragraph summarizes the key messages from your cover letter, and distills your message down to just a couple of sentences. Your closing paragraph lets you:

- Remind them of your specific interest in the job
- Restate your skills (using different wording helps)
- Include a call to action inviting the employer to follow-up with you directly
- Give genuine thanks
- *(Optional)* Refer back to previous examples or stories (tied to your hook at the start of your letter)
- *(Optional)* If you are missing any critical parts of the job description, such as a low GPA or a lack of a particular certification, this is the appropriate space to be honest and upfront about your situation, and the steps you're taking to improve

Sample closing paragraphs

My experience in inventory management and strong grasp of data-driven decision-making has prepared me for MEC's fast-paced, innovative, and consumer-oriented environment. I am confident that my skills will help accomplish your goal of achieving lean operations. I look forward to an opportunity to discuss my qualifications at your earliest convenience. Thank you for your consideration.

My experience being mindful of audience response, and having a keen interest in HootSuite's content-driven marketing strategy would assist me in creating content to grow your audience. I am hopeful that my creative and people-oriented personality would be a great fit for your team, and I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to further discuss this role. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sample closing paragraph addressing low GPA

While I understand that my academic record may not be as competitive as other applicants, I firmly believe that the time I dedicated to being a Residence Advisor and student club executive over the past two years has developed my skills as a leader beyond that of my peers. As a firm that defines inspiring and leading others as a core value, I sincerely hope you will view my unique experience and skillset as a valuable asset, particularly my ability to be an integral part of a team, to manage time effectively, and to develop meaningful relationships. Thank you for your time and consideration of me as a prospective summer intern at Teck Resources. I look forward to further discussing my qualifications in an interview at your earliest convenience.

Use a template

Get started quickly

Now that you know what goes into each section of your cover letter, you can download this template (Microsoft Word format) and plug in your experience.

Your Name
123 4th Ave
Vancouver, BC V1W 2X3
<http://ca.linkedin.com/in/yourname>
604.555.5555
youremail@gmail.com

January 1, 20XX

Contact Name
Their Job Title
Company Name
Company Street Address
City, Province, Postal Code

Re: Position Title, Job ID Number (if available)

Dear Mr./Ms. Lastname OR Hiring Manager OR Firstname Lastname,

Your opening paragraph usually starts with a hook – one or two sentences outlining a personal story, question, or anecdote that relates to the position, and gets the employer interested in reading further. The rest of the first paragraph is a chance to describe a) why you want the job (based on your interests and experiences), and b) why you're a good fit for working at the organization (based on shared values with the organization, their company culture, their mission, etc.) This is also a chance for you to demonstrate that you've done research about the organization, or to mention people you've networked with at the organization – both of which demonstrate that you're prepared and are serious about the role.

Following your first paragraph you will generally have 1-2 body paragraphs that demonstrate that you can do the job, based on your skills and experience. Your cover letter is more detailed than your resume, so this is an opportunity to tell stories that highlight how you've developed 2-3 skills that are important for the job. You can highlight more than one skill per story. One option to structure your skill-matching stories is to use the STAR model – Situation (who, what when, where), Task (your objective), Action (what you did, how you did it, skills you used), and Result (qualitative or quantitative proof of your success).

The closing paragraph lets you re-state your skills and re-affirm your interest in the position and the organization. Thank the employer for their time and consideration, and invite them to follow-up with you about the next step in the hiring process.

Sincerely,

Your Name
BCom [Option] Candidate 20XX
UBC Sauder School of Business

Attached: Resume

Download the cover letter template (.docx)

Cover letter checklist

Format & Header

- ☐ Header contains name, contact info, LinkedIn profile, and is identical to your resume header
- ☐ Margins are 2-3 cm, consistent use of spacing, cover letter has white space and isn't a wall of text
- ☐ Font size 10-12pt, appropriate use of bolding/italics
- ☐ Spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation are correct

Personal Branding

- ☐ Key words from job description are included (especially skills and qualifications)
- ☐ Format/tone/font/style is appropriate, e.g. address, dates, professional writing style
- ☐ Uses active language ("I exceeded expectations" not "expectations were exceeded by me")
- ☐ Uses technical terms or industry jargon to demonstrate familiarity
- ☐ Answers CAN (skills for the job) WANT (interest in the position) FIT (fit with organization's values)

Content: Opening Paragraph

- ☐ Starts with a hook – a customized, relevant story/question/anecdote that draws in the reader
- ☐ Shows research (trends/key facts/mutual connections) in the industry/company/position
- ☐ Demonstrates a specific, genuine interest in the role based on interests and/or past experiences
- ☐ Illustrates fit with the company's value, mission, culture, etc.

Content: Body Paragraphs

- ☐ Skill matching: Describe 2-3 specific skills matching job description, without repeating resume info
- ☐ Tells stories that show off your personality and demonstrate your unique contribution to past roles
- ☐ Tells stories that demonstrate how you will add value to the position being applied for

Content: Concluding Paragraph

- ☐ Re-state skills relevant to the position
- ☐ Re-affirm interest in the position and the organization
- ☐ Call to action (ask for a follow-up or a meeting) to discuss your qualifications further
- ☐ Thank the employer for their consideration

Get feedback

Show your cover letter

After you've written your cover letter, it's a good idea to get at least three people to check it over, like family, friends, or classmates. Your resume should be 100% error free. However, it's hard to spot mistakes yourself because you've likely spent hours looking at it. Send your resume off to family, friends, or classmates to make sure you haven't made any spelling, grammar, or content mistakes.

Get cover letter coaching

Your Career Manager can give you a professional perspective on your cover letter content and formatting, and help you customize your cover letter to the job you want.

Look up coaching availability and [book an appointment](#) now on COOL.

Book a coaching appointment on COOL

Download the more user-friendly COOL app!

Now you can access COOL anytime, anywhere. Download the **Careers by Symplicity** mobile app and log in with your CWL.

Available for iPhone (App Store) and Android (Google Play).



Additional reading

If you're looking for more resources, here are a few of our favourite articles about cover letters:

- [This Cover Letter Template Shows Off Your Skills](#), The Muse
- [Cover Letters | Tips and Advice | Sample Cover Letters](#), Vault
- [The Cover Letter Formula That Skyrocketed My Interviews From 0% to 55%](#), The Muse