Cover Letter Best Practices
For Jobs in Industry, Nonprofits, and Government
UChicagoGRAD– grad.uchicago.edu
Mastering the Genre

Anyone who tells you that there’s one way to write a cover letter is probably trying to sell you a cover letter guidebook.

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Dear writers and friends: why are YOU here today?
The cover letter is a genre of writing that rewards work.
What makes this genre difficult?
Agenda:
I) The Genre
II) Format
III) Content
IV) Q’s and Steps
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The most important word in the genre is FIT.
### Mastering the Genre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What can a strong cover letter <strong>ACTUALLY DO?</strong></th>
<th>What <strong>CAN’T</strong> a cover letter do (Almost no matter what).</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Show that you can <strong>write</strong></td>
<td>- Get you a <strong>job</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Answer “<strong>why us?</strong>”</td>
<td>- Mask your <strong>ambivalence</strong></td>
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<td>- Highlight <strong>references</strong></td>
<td>- List <strong>everything</strong> you’ve done</td>
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<td>- <strong>Connect</strong> resume’s dots</td>
<td>- Force a person to care about your dissertation or thesis research or coursework.</td>
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<td>- Shape the <strong>interview</strong></td>
<td>- Go onto a <strong>second page</strong></td>
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<td>- Clarify why <strong>your experience and skills</strong> are useful</td>
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<td>- Convince someone to “<strong>turn the page”</strong></td>
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12 Common Mistakes

a) Dearest **Robot Selector 4000**.
b) My cover letter is terrific because it is **long**.
c) Hello **my name is**...
d) My **thesis/dissertation** is aboutZZZZzzzzzt

**e)** **Me, me, me, I, I, I, my, my, my**

f) Then I did this, then I did this....

g) I **believe** I would be a great astronaut!

h) What a terrific opportunity for **me**

i) This would be my **dream job**!

j) I will never ever say the **name** of this place.

k) Sincerely [sic],

l) Written by a Nameless Drone
Who is your audience?
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Easy Format Stuff I

a) Match font to **resume**
b) Don’t cheat on **margins**
c) Destination **address**
d) Full **date**
e) Formal **salutation**
f) “**Best**” is for emails...
g) Send as **PDF** with resume
Brooke Noonan  
UChicagoGRAD  
5801 South Ellis Avenue, Room 225  
Chicago, IL 60637  

January 18, 2016  

Dear Ms. Noonan  

In follow-up to our conversation last Wednesday, I write to apply for the position of Director, Graduate Career Development and Employer Relations at UChicagoGRAD. LOREM IPSUM LATIN IPSUM LOREM IPSUM LATIN IPSUM LOREM IPSUM LATIN IPSUM LOREM IPSUM LATIN IPSUM LOREM IPSUM LATIN IPSUM LOREM.
Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to speaking more with you soon about the opportunity to join the Career Development Team at UChicagoGRAD.

Sincerely,

A-J Aronstein

Free app lets you save in png!
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Good cover letters make **Arguments**.
They have a strong Main Claim...
...strong Sub-Claims...
...which are supported by Strong Evidence.
...and connected to the prompt that the **Audience** provides.
Don’t Let it Drive You Nuts.
Paragraph One:
Let’s Talk About You & Me

a) Why are you writing?
b) Why are you interested?
c) Who did you talk to?
d) What will you bring?
e) Skills and experience.
f) Main claim is last.
Paragraph Two and Three: Here’s Why We’d Get Along

a) Point sentences to start
b) 1 or 2 examples in each.
c) Bring it back to them.
d) “Show, don’t tell.”
e) Don’t repeat the resume.
f) Short sentences.
Paragraph Four
Can’t Wait to Hear from You

a) Look **forward**
b) Future **conversations**.
c) Join the **team**.
d) Don’t hope. **Know**.
e) Sign it.
f) 2 Weeks B4 follow-up.
Be **honest** about what matters to you when you’re writing this thing.
Meet and talk with other people to help your letter stand out.
Don’t **apologize** for the experience you have.
Remember that the cover letter must work in tandem with other materials.
There are other ways to do this.
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Don’t Do This Alone

You can do it!

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UChicagoGRAD Provides

- Programming
- One-on-One Advising:
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  - Oral Communications
  - Fellowships
  - Academic Writing

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Questions?
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