Writing a Cover Letter for an Internship

The purpose of a cover letter is to present yourself and your qualifications to a host organization. A cover letter provides an opportunity to articulate why you are a good candidate for an internship and should complement your accompanying CV. Your cover letter should highlight specific skills, achievements and interests that are relevant to your internship and present them in a way that adds to rather than repeats the contents of your CV. It should also convey your knowledge of the specific organization to which you are applying.

**STEP 1: SELF-ASSESSMENT**

Just like with a CV, it is important to take time to reflect on what you would like to communicate in your cover letter. What skills are required for your internship? Has the host organization posted a list of qualifications that successful candidates must possess? Consider making a list of what your host organization is looking for. Once you have your list, make a separate list of the interests/experiences, skills, achievements or values you possess that demonstrate that you meet these criteria. These are the things you want to showcase in your cover letter.

While it is important to target your cover letter to the interests of your host organization, taking the time to assess your strengths and weaknesses may reveal other ideas that you wish to express in your letter. If you have a skill or experience that is not required for the internship but you think is important, try to find a way to include it. This can help you stand out among other applicants. Remember though, that while originality is important, you must always ensure that you have provided the host organization with the information they are asking for.

**STEP 2: RESEARCH YOUR HOST ORGANIZATION**

An often overlooked but crucial component to writing a cover letter is to research the internship for which you are applying. Do not assume that you can send the same cover letter to multiple host organizations. It is just as important to explain why you are interested in this particular internship or host organization as it is to say why you think you are a good candidate.

Targeting your cover letter to your host organization has many benefits. First, it shows that you are serious and have taken the time to do prior research on the organization. Second, it shows that you understand the host organization and are interested in the internship because of what the opportunity has to offer. Third, the more you know about your organization, the more you can articulate what you can bring to the position. This is important because the person reading your cover letter is more interested in what value you can bring to their organization than the benefits you hope to get from the internship. Framing is everything and you want your reader to come away from your letter feeling that you can contribute to their work.

**STEP 3: FORMATTING**

Unless otherwise specified, a cover letter should be one page long and laser printed on good quality 8½” x 11” paper. It should be formatted like a typical business letter and include your contact information and the recipient's contact information.
information. Text should be aligned to the left and margins should be ¾”. Be sure to use the same type face as your CV and keep the font to a legible size (preferably 11 point).

In the following order, your cover letter should include:
- Your contact information (header)
- The date
- The recipient’s contact information
- Reference line (optional) indicating the purpose of the letter

**Example:**

Re: Human Resources Internship

- Salutation (preferably to a specific individual)
- Body of the letter
- Signature
- Enclosure(s) if you are including other documents

**Example:**

Sincerely,

Your (electronic) signature

Your name

Enclosures: Resume and Writing Sample

**STEP 4: WRITING THE BODY OF YOUR COVER LETTER**

A cover letter normally consists of 3-4 paragraphs: an introductory paragraph, one or two body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.

**A) INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH**

The introductory paragraph states who you are and explains why you are sending the letter. This is where you introduce yourself and your interest in the internship position. If you are responding to a specific call for applications, you can state the name of the position to which you are applying. If you know someone who interned there before, or you have a contact who recommended you for the position, this is where you can refer to them. The introductory paragraph should be brief but clearly express why you are applying for the internship.

**B) BODY PARAGRAPHS**

The body paragraphs explain why you are a good candidate. This section is more than a list of previous accomplishments or a rehashing of your CV. Use the body of the cover letter to expand on the points your host organization has identified as important. Here, you should highlight your knowledge of the organization and its activities, programs, research, etc.. Frame your experiences in a way that will be of greatest interest to the reader and that will demonstrate why you are an excellent fit.
You may develop a second body paragraph if there is a particular topic upon which you wish to expand. This may be one of the internship duties that interests you, or a connection you see between the internship and a previous experience. If you intend to pursue graduate or post-graduate studies in this area, you can explain how this internship fits into your future plans and why you will take this opportunity seriously if given the chance.

C) CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH

The concluding paragraph should be positive and reiterate your overall interest in the internship. If you are writing a letter of inquiry, you should describe if and how you will follow up on your application. Conclude your letter with a statement expressing your desire to be interviewed or considered for the position, and how the host organization can reach you if they wish to follow up on your application. Finally, be sure to thank the addressees for their consideration of your application.

Below your concluding paragraph, use a closing remark ("Sincerely" or "Regards") to complete your letter. Leave three lines of space and type your name. Neatly sign your name or insert a copy of your electronic signature within the blank space.

STEP 5: REVIEW, REVIEW, REVIEW

Along with your CV, your cover letter is your first opportunity to impress your host organization. You do not want to jeopardize this first impression with a typo or worse, misspelling the recipient’s name. Proofreading your letter is essential to ensure that your writing is at its best.

In addition to checking grammar and spelling, you will also need to review your cover letter to make sure that the structure and flow of ideas makes sense.

Think back to your self-assessment exercise and then ask yourself what the point is of each statement you have made. Does it respond to the list of skills and experiences required for the internship?

STEP 6: SENDING YOUR COVER LETTER

If submitting a hardcopy: Unless otherwise specified, laser print your cover letter on good quality 8½” x 11” paper. Type labels to address envelopes rather than writing them by hand. Paper should be the same as what you used for your CV for consistency.

If submitting electronically: In the body of your email, write a brief note indicating the position you are applying for and that your cover letter and CV are attached. Unless otherwise specified, attach your cover letter as a separate file from your CV. Don’t forget to include the attachment.

Keep track of your letters. Create a folder that holds copies of all your cover letters, CV, position description, and the status of your application. It can be both confusing and embarrassing to receive a reply from a host institution (particularly a request for an interview) and not be certain of what you sent them or what the position entails.

Tips:

✓ Have someone proofread your letter to check for typos or spelling mistakes.
✓ Read the letter from the bottom to the top to catch errors more easily.
✓ Read your cover letter out loud to see how it sounds. You will be more likely to catch awkward phrasing or run-on sentences if you hear your words out loud.

Tips:

✓ To retain original formatting when sending electronically, convert the letter into a PDF and name it “Your Name, Cover Letter.”
✓ Use a basic text editor, like Notepad, to convert your cover letter to a text-only version when copying into online applications.
✓ Do not staple your cover letter to your CV
✓ Do not fold your cover letter.