

# Cover Letter Guide

A cover letter is a persuasive document that highlights the candidate's skills, knowledge of the employer, and ability to contribute to the organization.

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[www.colgate.edu/careerservices](http://www.colgate.edu/careerservices)

# Steps to a Successful Cover Letter

## Step 1 – Determine what information is important

### **Research the Career Field & Employer:**

- ⇒ What is the pace of work?
- ⇒ How is success measured?
- ⇒ How is the organization unique?
- ⇒ What are its major products or services?
- ⇒ How would you describe the organization's culture/working environment?
- ⇒ Whom does it serve?
- ⇒ What are its areas of growth?
- ⇒ What are the challenges and opportunities?

### **Research the Position:**

Reference the job description and your knowledge of this role to identify the skills needed to succeed in this position. What are its main responsibilities?

## Step 2 – Identify and articulate:

Identify **two or three** experiences or themes that best **exemplify** your demonstrated potential to excel. Utilize the STAR/SOAR model to develop your arguments.

The STAR/SOAR model helps the employer to understand your potential. It contextualizes your experiences and provides sufficient detail to explain your background to an audience that might be unfamiliar with the experiences you reference. With the STAR/SOAR model you maintain your writing's focus and demonstrate your ability to produce results.

STAR/SOAR Model	STAR/SOAR Example:
<p><b>Situation:</b> Environmental conditions (differentiate and describe the organization/situation).</p> <p><b>Task or Obstacle:</b> What was asked or expected of you? <b>OR</b> What did you have to overcome? What was in the way of success?</p> <p><b>Action:</b> What did you, not the organization, specifically do to address the task or obstacle?</p> <p><b>Result:</b> Outcomes or impact that you had during the time that you were on task.</p>	<p><b>Situation:</b> I worked with five other Colgate volunteers to run the weekly Spanish Club for elementary students at Hamilton Central School. We taught kids beginning Spanish through interactive 45-minute sessions.</p> <p><b>Task or Obstacle:</b> The program was in its second year and needed to be developed. We had no lesson plans, no materials, and little teacher or parent support.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> We met once a week to agree on a lesson plan, brainstorm and plan activities, gather materials, and delegate responsibilities. I led the brainstorming and lesson planning. I designed a syllabus to cover one basic topic per week, to be taught in a way that focused on what works best for the kids. I scheduled each lesson strategically, based on the volunteers available, the previous subject matter and future sessions.</p> <p><b>Result:</b> The program was a huge success! The activities engaged and entertained the kids, while teaching them basic vocabulary and phrases. My scheduling and coordination was definitely worthwhile: the weekly lessons built upon one another, the kids' Spanish improved as the semester progressed, and the sessions ran smoothly. The parents were grateful as well—we received positive feedback on parental evaluation forms. The program is now firmly established at the school and appreciated by students, parents, and teachers.</p>

### **Step 3 – Explicitly connect your STAR/SOAR experiences to your potential value for the employer**

#### **Intern, Youth Learning Center**

Description: non-profit organization that provides support and education to low-income families to break the cycle of poverty.

#### **Skills necessary for position:**

- ⇒ Teaching/mentoring
- ⇒ Organization
- ⇒ Goal setting
- ⇒ Interpersonal skills
- ⇒ Leadership
- ⇒ Patience
- ⇒ Manage projects with little guidance
- ⇒ Experience with diverse populations (age, economic background, etc)

#### **Relevance of STAR/SOAR to Employer:**

- ⇒ Experience in education, tutoring kids for a non-profit
- ⇒ Developed a curriculum
- ⇒ Approach was child-specific
- ⇒ Gained trust and rapport of the school to sustain the program
- ⇒ Moved a program forward—had visible outcomes for the organization and children

In your draft, shape the content you created using Step 1 & Step 2 into brief paragraphs, following the format on page 4. Your letter should not exceed one page.

#### **Potential Paragraph for Cover Letter:**

My proven experience in developing relationships with children, parents and a school speaks directly to my potential to integrate into the Youth Learning Center's family-focused approach. Over the past year I worked collaboratively to develop our local elementary school's Spanish language program. In a group of five peer instructors, I designed weekly 45-minute interactive lessons aimed at gaining students' trust and teaching the language. I excelled at managing my role with little supervision. Regardless of each child's starting point, they finished the program feeling valued and accomplished. Our efforts also firmly established the program within the school after teachers' and parents' evaluations confirmed our positive impact. Through applying my knowledge of adapting lesson plans to an individual's unique learning style, making learning fun, and establishing rapport with parents and teachers, I have the potential to make an immediate impact to your staff. I feel this will be a tremendous asset to the families you serve, providing them the quality service they seek and need to achieve their goals.

### **Step 4 – Ask for feedback on your draft**

Obtain honest, constructive and critical feedback on your draft from a career advisor or peer advisor. Your networking contacts, especially those familiar with the position or career field, are also good resources.

### **Step 5 – Submit the letter with your resume and other materials indicated before the deadline.**

### **Step 6 – Follow up**

Contact the employer within 10 days of submitting your cover letter to ensure your application was received. Inquire about the timeframe for interviewing.

## The Anatomy of a Cover Letter

Your street address  
City, State Zip Code

Date

Contact Name  
Title  
Employer  
Street Address  
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr/Ms. \_\_\_\_\_:

The opening paragraph should pique the employer's curiosity by stating enthusiastically **why you are pursuing the organization**. You should **name the position** and tell **how you became aware** of the opportunity. If you were referred by someone, or **networked** with someone extensively who would be relevant to the employer, mention that person's name. This paragraph should encourage the employer to want to read more. **Reveal your knowledge of the organization's culture**. State a topic sentence introducing the next paragraphs.

Using the **STAR/SOAR model**, the middle paragraph(s) is/are where you provide **concrete** examples that outline your **specific qualifications, skills, or accomplishments that match the position's requirements**. Refer to the key aspects of your resume. Avoid restating resume descriptions. Additionally, if your relevant personal qualities are not obvious from your resume, this is your opportunity to discuss them. The most effective middle paragraph(s) **explicitly tie your experience back to the organization**, showing your research by articulating your potential to add **value to the employer and position**.

Close your letter with a **strong indication** of your desire to work for this organization. You should **request an interview** and indicate that you will **follow up** to discuss this possibility. Note that your resume is enclosed. Include your **contact information**. Close the letter by **thanking the employer**.

Sincerely,  
(signature here)

Your typed name

Cover letters are one page, single-spaced. Standard business format is used: 1" margins; Times New Roman, Times, or Arial font, sized 10, 11 or 12

## Best Practices for Cover Letters

### DO...

- ⇒ Customize your letter for the position. *It is the writer's responsibility, not the reader's, to connect your experience to the employer's needs.*
- ⇒ Write concisely, formally, and keep your writing focused. Your letter should not exceed one page.
- ⇒ Address your cover letter to a specific person. If the contact is not provided, call the employer to secure the information, unless the employer specifically asks candidates not to call.
- ⇒ Provide your contact information (phone number and email) in the closing paragraph.
- ⇒ Have several people proofread your letter to ensure it is error free.
- ⇒ If sending a hard copy, print your letter using white or cream bond paper.
- ⇒ Sign your signature in black or blue ink.
- ⇒ If you will be abroad when interviewing will occur, reference the best method of contacting you and emphasize your willingness to call for a phone interview, or to interview before your departure.
- ⇒ Follow up with the employer within 10 days of sending your cover letter.

### DO NOT...

- ⇒ Mass-produce your cover letter. Generic cover letters are obvious and will not be impressive.
- ⇒ Provide a list of accomplishments without articulating their connection to the employer's needs.
- ⇒ Send your materials to "To Whom It May Concern" or "Director of Human Resources" unless no other option exists.
- ⇒ Overstate your accomplishments. Expect employers to research you.
- ⇒ Use contractions, slang, abbreviations, or other casual language.
- ⇒ Use "Mrs." in the salutation. Always opt for "Mr." or "Ms." (Last name). If you are unsure of the contact's gender, use Dear (Full name).

## Example 1

Candidate's street address  
City, state, zip code

Date

Contact's name  
Youth Learning Center  
Street address  
City, State, zip code

Dear Mr. X:

I am writing to apply to the Youth Learning Center's summer internship opportunity posted through Colgate's Career Services. I am a young, passionate, individual interested in a hands-on approach to tackling issues of educational access. Therefore, I am excited to work for an organization, such as the Youth Learning Center, whose focus centers on building skills and confidence in its children. I hope to put my energy, leadership experience with children, and knowledge of issues of privilege to work for this cause.

My proven experience in developing relationships with children, parents and a school speaks directly to my potential to integrate into the Youth Learning Center's family-focused approach. Over the past year I worked collaboratively to develop our local elementary school's Spanish language program. In a group of five peer instructors, I designed weekly 45-minute interactive lessons aimed at gaining students' trust and teaching the language. I excelled at managing my role with little supervision. Regardless of each child's starting point, they finished the program feeling valued and accomplished. Our efforts also firmly established the program within the school after teachers' and parents' evaluations confirmed our positive impact. Through applying my knowledge of adapting lesson plans to an individual's unique learning style, making learning fun, and establishing rapport with parents and teachers, I have the potential to make an immediate impact to your staff. I feel this will be a tremendous asset to the families you serve, providing them the quality service they seek and need to achieve their goals.

In studying Sociology and Anthropology at Colgate I have challenged myself to better understand social dynamics, and the significant effects of poverty and inequality. My academic studies are a complement to the hands-on work I do in the community; they allow me to expand my knowledge and understanding of the impact of privilege. I am certain that in working for the Youth Learning Center my academic knowledge will assist me to better understand and apply what I learn on the job.

The families who are served by the Youth Learning Center will be best served by those who are committed to building authentic partnerships between parents, children and the staff. I am excited about the potential to join this dynamic team. Please find enclosed my resume, which I hope you will consider. I will be in contact with you to discuss the potential of interviewing for a summer internship position.

Respectfully yours,

Candidate's name  
Phone  
Email

## Example 2

Candidate's street address  
City, state, zip code

Date

Employer  
Employer's title  
Employer's street address  
City, State, zip code

Dear Ms. X:

Please accept the submission of my resume for a Sales and Trading Analyst position with ABC Company. I have been encouraged to apply after speaking with your on campus recruiter. I have a strong background in finance, and am confident that I would bring a unique perspective to your team. Through my internships in finance, I have gained considerable research experience, and have developed sound quantitative and qualitative skills; additionally, my coursework and campus activities at Colgate University have provided me with the sharp analytical skills necessary to succeed in the challenging, fast-paced environment of the Sales and Trading division at ABC Company.

During my time as an intern at 123 Finance Corporation with the Interest Rate Derivative Sales group, I did research on the hedging practices of various airlines and shipping companies to see how they hedged their risk of fluctuation in interest rates, oil prices, and foreign exchange rates. The derivative sales team then used the information I found to advise clients who were in these particular industries. This experience was particularly rewarding as it was my first significant exposure to sales and trading, and it played a big role in sparking my interest in the field. I believe that I will be able to utilize the knowledge and skills I obtained from this experience and apply them to the dynamic environment of ABC Company.

During the last two weeks of my internship in the Performance Management and Product Control group at XYZ Sales, I had the opportunity to participate in a rotation through XYZ Sales' trading floor. Additionally, I completed the Bloomberg Product Certification in Equities, giving me exposure to an essential tool for sales and trading. These were excellent experiences that further developed my already substantial interest in global financial markets. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to contribute to ABC Company while simultaneously advancing my education in finance.

Thank you very much for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you, and can be contacted by email at xxx@colgate.edu, or by telephone at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Sincerely,

Candidate's name