A cover letter, also known as an application letter, is a chance to make a great first impression and an opportunity to inform your reader of your achievements, strengths, experience, availability, and contact information. You can also use your letter to request an interview and refer to your résumé and other application materials.

Before you start, think about what you want this letter to accomplish: Do you want an interview, referral, application, more information, or some combination? Make your objective clear.

YOUR ADDRESS

DATE

NAME, TITLE, AND ADDRESS OF RECIPIENT

If you know them, use the title. Dear Ms. Smith:

Title unknown? Use the full name. Dear Barbara Smith:

Name and title unknown? To Whom it May Concern:

SALUTATION

OPENING PARAGRAPH

Identify the position and how you heard about it. Your degree can go here or in the next paragraph.

BODY PARAGRAPH(S)

Remember that you’re writing an argument for what you want. Support your argument with persuasive points (like experience and strengths), back up your points with evidence (like results and statistics), and explain how each point is relevant. Get to your point quickly and concisely.

Think about tone. You want to come across as confident (but not conceited), professional, pleasant, and intelligent.

CLOSING PARAGRAPH(S)

This is your opportunity to discuss your availability and outline any other enclosed application materials. You can also give your contact information, invite an interview, and thank the employer for his or her time.

SIGNATURE

Close with “Sincerely,” leave four lines, and then type your full name. Sign the space in black or blue ink.

Tips for Writing an Effective Cover Letter

- Try to find out to whom the letter should be addressed. Visit the company’s website. Call them. Do some investigating. Use Ms. instead of Mrs. or Miss. If you aren’t sure of the employer’s gender, use the first and last name without the courtesy title. For example, Dear Pat Thompson:

- Learn something about the company you’re applying to; show them that you’ve done your homework and understand what they’re looking for. Read the job description carefully; consider using its language.

- Edit: Vary your sentence lengths. Replace dull and vague words with active language. Use examples.

- Proofread: Go backwards through your letter one sentence at a time and check each for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. Read your letter out loud.

- Write several drafts. Ask friends and mentors to read your letter for you and revise, edit, and proofread until it is something you are proud to send to a potential employer. Ask yourself, would you hire you?