

# Cover Letter Guide

## What's a cover letter, and why do I need one?

A cover letter is a formal business letter that accompanies a resume and serves as an introduction of you to potential employers. It will inform the employer of your skills, abilities, and experiences that relate to the job. Since your letter needs to be tailored for each employer, you should do your homework to discover what is unique and special about the organization. Remember that your letter communicates your “voice.” It needs to be well written and express your enthusiasm for the organization and the job. When emailing a cover letter, it should be included as an attachment.

## How is this going to help me?

This guide is here to walk you through writing a cover letter step by step and show you some ways to tailor a cover letter for future jobs. As always, while we consider our guides helpful tools to work through your writing independently, we also encourage that you get a second set of eyes on your cover letters before hitting submit. Career Services offers 1-1 and group-based advising on how to draft and revise cover letters throughout the year.

### Step 1: Do your research!

The first step in your writing process is to revisit the role you are applying for and organization you are applying to, so you are well equipped to then write about your fit. You won't be able to write about everything you have done in detail, so this is an exercise in finding what matters most. There are a few areas you want to gather information on and a few things to look out for as you do your research.

- **Start with the job description.** Re-read the job description and pay specific attention to any company values or culture section as well as the 'what you will do' sections. As you are reviewing the description, write down or highlight the pieces of information you feel are most relevant to your background and/or values or areas that you feel your resume did not explain fully.

Here's an example of what you are looking for:

#### Who We Are

Founded in 1917, Eide Bailly is one of the top 20 CPA and business advisory firms in the nation with over 40 offices across 15 states. At the core, Eide Bailly is a people-first firm - real people, passionate about living fulfilling lives both in and out of the office. We strive to foster an environment that is centered around respect, trust, support, integrity, professionalism, fun, innovation, and providing a work-life integration where our people can be their full authentic selves! As a result, we are proud to have been rated a Top 10 Accounting Firm in culture, relationships with supervisors, benefits, firm leaders, and work/life balance in the 2022 Vault survey.

#### Why You'll Love Working Here

The Culture – At Eide Bailly, you'll feel respected, trusted, and cared for. The firm truly values your personal growth and wellbeing, while empowering you to not only do your job well but to also live a meaningful life outside of work. We're all here to help each other be the best version of ourselves!

#### Who You Are

- You are inquisitive and enjoy learning about various client business processes and traveling to different locations to help clients (10–40% travel may be required in audit intern role).
- You like the challenge of working on audit engagements and helping clients succeed.
- You are a multi-tasking master, and there has never been a deadline you could not meet.
- You have interest in a variety of industries.
- You hold yourself to the highest professional standards and maintain strict client confidentiality.
- In addition to all of this, you are working toward a bachelor's degree in Accounting and are on track to sit for your CPA license.

Here you might highlight that they are focused on authenticity

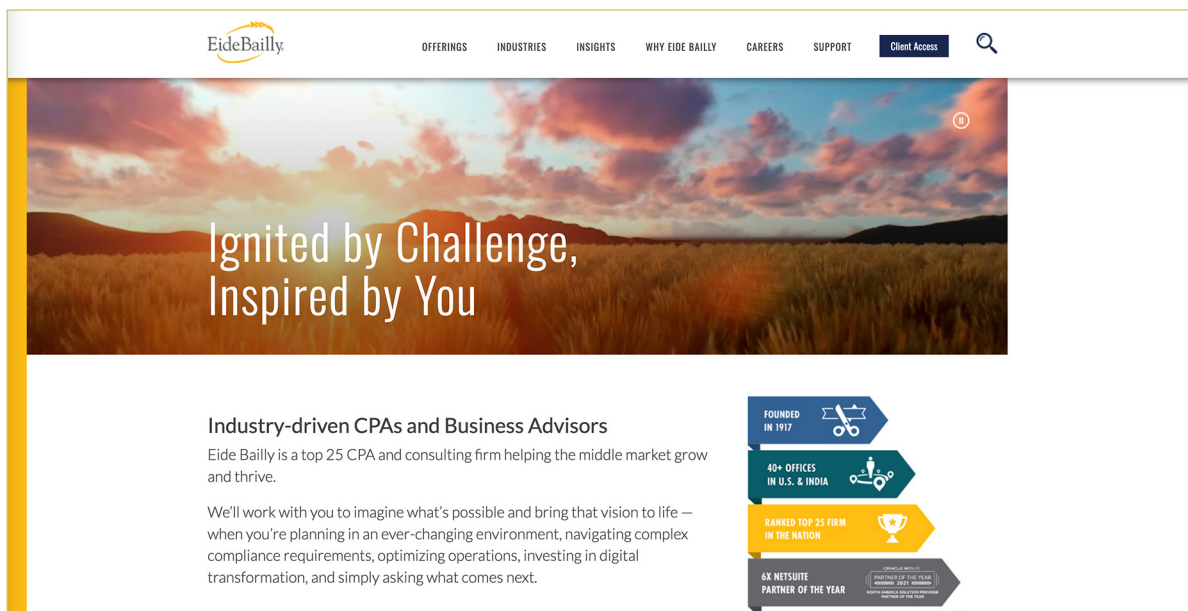
Here you might highlight multi-tasking, audit background, CPA

**Pro-tip:** Copy the job description and paste it into a Google or Word Doc. It will make for easier highlighting and allow you to add tracked comments with your notes. Also, if the job listing expires you will then have a copy of it for if you move onto an interview.

Add your notes below.

- **Look at the organization’s website.** Especially if you are applying for a job with a limited job description, this can be a helpful next step. Look at any tabs focused on ‘about the company’ and even ‘who we are’ or who their staff is. Follow the same steps to highlight and identify any relevant information.

Look for something like this:



Add your notes below.

### Spotlight: Frequent Challenges

**You don’t know what is most important.** Look at your resume and your notes on previous experiences in classes, jobs, or in extracurriculars. What are the types of skills the job is asking for that you have done the most? For example, is it a tutoring job and you have done a lot of babysitting, tutoring, and TA jobs? That is probably something you will want to highlight. Or what are the types of skills you know you’ve done informally but you couldn’t quite get them on your resume? For example, the job listing calls for experience working on a team, but you have only done this for classes. This can be something to talk about in your cover letter. Finally, most strong cover letters include some way you connect to the organization in your values, identities, and/or interests. Make sure you highlight something in this area that connects best with who you are.

**You have done the exact same job and don’t know what to talk about in your cover letter.** If you are an exact match for the job you are applying for that’s great news. In this case you don’t need to talk through every single thing you have done that’s relevant but focus on the pieces that are most important for the job (usually the first things they write about or represented by a larger percentile of the work you will do).

## Step 2: Make an outline

Now that you've picked out what you want to write about it's time to outline your cover letter. The template below provides you with guidance of the information that (usually) will go in each paragraph. Remember this is a basic cover letter format for beginners. If you have written cover letters before and have context of what your specific employer is looking for, you may branch out of this format.

**Introduction.** This paragraph highlights very generally who you are and why you are writing to the employer. This paragraph is usually short—between two to four sentences in length.

- State what job you are applying for and where
  - Role name:
  - Company name:
- Give a broad descriptor of who you are—generally this includes your major and interest area relevant to the job
  - Information you will include here:
- Provide context on why this company—what makes the organization itself stand out to you
  - My reasons why are:
- End with a thesis statement for your letter that states what you will talk about
  - The topics of my body paragraphs are:

**Body Paragraphs.** Most cover letters have one to two body paragraphs. These should be a deeper dive into the qualities or skills that make you a great candidate for the role and should reflect on that 'thesis statement' you wrote above.

You can organize your body paragraphs by role or by skill/organization connection. For example, you might choose to have one paragraph focus on one job you did that is relevant or another that focuses on the skill of project management as told through classwork and a job. You also might include a paragraph about how your values or identities align with the organizational mission—this is particularly useful if you are applying to work in education, social impact, sustainability, or healthcare.

Topic for Paragraph 1:  
Key points I want to make:

Topic for Paragraph 2:  
Key points I want to make:

Topic for Paragraph 3:  
Key points I want to make:

**Conclusion.** The conclusion is just tying the knot on the points you made above. It should be no more than two to three sentences in length.

- Sentence 1: restate your 'thesis'
  - My body paragraph themes:
- Sentence 2: add a thank you and perhaps "please reach out with questions"

**Add your notes below.**

**Step 3: Type it out**

Now that you've planned it's time to write. Write a draft of your letter in the space below. Feel free to use the examples in the appendix as a reference.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for writing a draft letter. The box occupies most of the page below the instructions.

#### Step 4: Edit, revise, and format

Cover letters don't have as many strict formatting guidelines as resumes do, but they still have a few. Review this checklist to ensure that your letter fits the appropriate specifications for a cover letter.

##### Basic Format Checklist

- ✓ Margins are between 0.5–1.0 inches
- ✓ Font:
  - Legible style, for example: Times New Roman, Calibri, Cambria, Arial (usually the same font as your resume)
  - Size is between 10–12 pt
- ✓ Spacing:
  - Uses single line spacing
  - Indents for paragraphs or creates a space between paragraphs
- ✓ Contains a 'header.' A section at the top that notes your name, contact information (email, phone number), location (city and state), and, if desired, pronouns
- ✓ Contains employer name and address on top left (only applicable if provided)
- ✓ The letter is addressed to the specific hiring manager (if this information is available) OR to the 'hiring committee' and has a salutation at the bottom like 'sincerely' or 'best' followed by your name
- ✓ Fills one page without overcrowding

After checking for format, re-read the letter to yourself and/or have someone else read it for you to provide any guidance. Aim to review it side-by-side with the job you are applying for.

##### Spotlight—Don't reinvent the wheel.

Cover letters should be specific to the position you are applying for and tailored to the job description provided. With that said, if you are applying to multiple jobs that are very similar in nature but at different companies, you can and should repurpose elements from your cover letter. Particularly, general statements in introductory and conclusion paragraphs and body paragraphs that cover desired skills of both jobs. With this said, be mindful to make changes to mission/vision alignment paragraphs (as this will likely vary from company to company) and to make sure to edit the title of the role and organization you are applying to for general statements.

Tip: If you are applying to a few 'types' of jobs in the same industry, feel free to keep a sample cover letter for each of these positions. Feel free to highlight the areas in each template that you will likely need to change for each position.

You may use a rubric like this one to proofread:

### Cover Letter Rubric

	Excellent	Acceptable	Needs Improvement
<b>Overall Format &amp; Content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses correct business format (see page 6)</li> <li>• Date and address are at the top</li> <li>• Name is at the bottom</li> <li>• The letter is clear &amp; concise</li> <li>• No grammar or spelling errors are found</li> <li>• Uses a “hook” to grab the reader’s attention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some business formatting is used</li> <li>• Dates, addresses, names are included but in different parts of the cover letter</li> <li>• Letter is not as clear and concise as it could be</li> <li>• Minimal grammar and spelling errors are found</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business formatting is not used</li> <li>• Contact information (for either employer or student) is not included</li> <li>• Letter is unclear</li> <li>• Multiple grammar and spelling errors are found</li> </ul>
<b>Section 1: Introduction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies the position that you are seeking</li> <li>• Describes how you heard about the position</li> <li>• Explains why you are interested in the employer and job</li> <li>• Wording is creative and catches an employer’s attention quickly</li> <li>• Section reflects interest in employer (i.e. through own research)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies the position you are seeking</li> <li>• Describes how you heard of the position</li> <li>• Vaguely describes why you are interested in the employer and job</li> <li>• Section is general and might not catch the employer’s attention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not identify what position you are seeking</li> <li>• Doesn’t describe how you heard about the position</li> <li>• No indication of why you are interested in this employer and job</li> <li>• Section will not catch the employer’s attention</li> </ul>
<b>Section 2: Body</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses one to three relevant examples from your past experiences to clearly show how these skills apply to the job</li> <li>• Relates the top two to three job qualifications to your skills (see above)</li> <li>• Conclude all ideas in this paragraph as you transition to the conclusion section</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses non-relevant examples from your past experiences to clearly relate how these skills apply to the job</li> <li>• Relates one of the job’s qualifications to your skills (see above)</li> <li>• Conclude some ideas in this paragraph as you transition to the conclusion section</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not use any examples from your past experiences</li> <li>• Have not related your skills to the position for which you are applying</li> <li>• Doesn’t conclude ideas in this paragraph as you transition to the conclusion section</li> </ul>
<b>Section 3: Conclusion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thanks the reader for taking time to read the letter</li> <li>• Refers the reader to your resume or any other enclosed documents</li> <li>• Describes how you will follow up with the employer in a stated time period</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thanks the reader for taking time to read the letter</li> <li>• Reader is not referred to your resume or any other enclosed documents</li> <li>• Assumes that the employer will contact you to follow up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not thank the reader for taking the time to read the letter</li> <li>• There is no reference to a resume or any other enclosed documents</li> <li>• Letter does not mention any plan for follow up</li> </ul>

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# APPENDIX A

## Cover Letter Samples

### Ashley Sagehen

Claremont, CA | 999-777-9888 | Ashley\_sagehen@pitzer.edu | [www.linkedin.com/in/ashley-sagehen](http://www.linkedin.com/in/ashley-sagehen)

August 13, 2021

Moss Adams  
10960 Wilshire Boulevard  
Suite 1100  
Los Angeles, CA 90024

Dear Hiring Committee,

I am writing to express my strong interest in the Campus Recruiter position at Moss Adams. The position stood out to me because of the opportunity to execute recruiting efforts and bring new talent to the Moss Adams team. I believe my experience in event planning and working with college students will allow me to assist in recruiting efforts and coordinate programs and other events, making me a qualified candidate for this position.

In my current role as a Coordinator at the Community Engagement Center at Pitzer College, I implement and coordinate community programming for students and the local community. My ability to plan and develop large scale events with up to 100-200 attendees will allow me to successfully lead recruiting efforts and support hiring across all areas. My current role has also allowed me to establish and maintain cooperative working relationships with various departments on campus, as well as community members and organizations, an experience I will bring to this role when developing relationships with students and universities. As a coordinator, I have participated in tabling events and workshops, as well as making classroom presentations to students. My event planning experience will be an asset when planning targeted events such as career fairs and other campus events and activities.

As a Career Fellow at Pitzer College Career Services Office, I provided individual & group advising to students from diverse backgrounds and disciplines. I had the opportunity to be hands-on in many projects and was given increased responsibility during my time at the office. I assisted with various Winter Break Shadowing Program projects such as posting internship opportunities on Handshake, our career platform, and helped go through student applications. I worked collaboratively with the counseling team to help develop programs and presentations geared towards affinity groups at Pitzer. I assisted in giving presentations to student groups and met with students individually when they would come in for drop-in hours, assisting with resume & cover letter preparation. My experience helping put together programs & involvement with student groups has allowed me to see first-hand the work that goes into planning & implementing programs and events, an experience that will be valuable when assisting with local internship programs and summer leadership programs for Moss Adams.

I believe my experience in event planning and experience in career services would make me an asset to the Recruiting Team at Moss Adams. Thank you for your consideration, I look forward to hearing from you all soon!

Sincerely,

Ashley Sagehen



## Cover Letter Samples

February 21, 2021

Liza Wideman  
Recruiting Coordinator  
Great Strategy Consulting Firm  
200 Shell Fish Blvd, Suite 199  
San Francisco, CA 94080

Dear Liza Wideman:

I am writing to express my interest in securing an Associate position at Great Strategy Consulting Firm. I am a Master of Liberal Arts degree candidate at Harvard Extension School, specializing in Information Technology. I come from a solid technical background with a strong interest in business and a passion towards strategy. My area of focus and interest varies from quantitative analysis to project management. I have maintained a 3.95 GPA through a well-balanced program of study, which is not only very analytical and technical by nature but also helps to build leadership and team building qualities. I am extremely impressed with Great Strategy's approach to strategy consulting, especially within the Business Development and Innovation practice areas. I believe my academic background, business knowledge and industry experiences have provided me with the credentials needed to thrive as an Associate.

Prior to Harvard, I worked as a technology professional, primarily resolving strategic issues related to technology process improvement. I gained solid research, analytical and problem-solving skills while working in Fortune 500 companies. My background in generating innovative ideas and strategies to improve processes has provided me with a deeper understanding of multifaceted problems that companies encounter in their daily operations. Moreover, because of my work experiences, I fully understand how important it is to have great team dynamics in today's multi-disciplinary business environment.

To date, my experience as an IT professional has been extremely rewarding and productive. However, it is through strategy consulting that I can use my analytical aptitude and creative problem-solving skills to their fullest. I strongly believe that consulting is a discipline that will force me to view problems not only from the client's standpoint but also from a marketplace, best practices and "think out of the box" point of views.

I would appreciate the opportunity to interview with Great Strategy Consulting Firm for the Associate position. Please find enclosed my resume for your review. I can be reached via email at [jacob.mclean@post.harvard.edu](mailto:jacob.mclean@post.harvard.edu) or by phone at (617) 555-3456. I enthusiastically look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jacob A. McLean

## Cover Letter Samples

February 25th, 2022  
Pitzer College Career Services 1050 North Mills Avenue  
Claremont, CA 91711

Dear Ms. Stephanie Gandara,

I am writing to express my interest in the Career Fellow position. I was drawn to this opportunity because I aspire to further both my own and others' career development. I want Pitzer students to feel that Career Services, and professional development more generally, welcomes all with open arms. This desire is rooted in my experiential understanding of such impact as both a student at the Career Center and an applicant on the job and internship market. My recent experience as a mentor at Teach For America (TFA), extensive career experience, and commitment to cultivating community align with the essential skills of a Career Fellow.

Pitzer Career Services has profoundly influenced my own professional development. Through discussions and compassionate support, various staff and fellows have helped me understand resume structure, the cruciality of developing and maintaining connections, and the job search writ large. Equally important, however, is the sense of belonging and respect that Career Services have made me feel in every session. Brad Tharpe stands out especially in this regard; he has encouraged me to bring my whole self to the application process and played a formative role in developing my professional confidence and discerning my passions.

I have explored the other side of the mentoring relationship as an Ignite Fellow at TFA. Four times a week, I work with two 6th grade students in need of academic support beyond classroom teaching. I began this fellowship expecting to teach and mentor in the traditional sense; that is, imparting knowledge, acting as a guide, and ensuring students feel valued in much the same way that I have experienced as a student at Career Services.

The relationship I have fostered with my students, however, is far more reciprocal than I ever expected. Sometimes my students have a unique perspective on a lesson that I had never considered. At times, their reflections on upbringing and identity prompt deep reflection about my own background and identity. These experiences have fostered a pivoting from viewing myself as a mentor, and then learners, to regarding everyone as tackling issues together. While this change in perspective has gone unsaid, it has certainly not gone unnoticed. I have become better at making my students feel heard, and ultimately a better mentor, educator, and communicator.

I hope to bring the fullness of this experience as a student-mentor to the Career Fellow position while furthering the impact. The position is an ideal opportunity to both apply and expand the skills I have cultivated—fostering belonging, supporting other students in their growth, and conveying information effectively—in a community that I care about deeply. I know that working with college students at Career Services will be a somewhat new experience with different focuses than my time at TFA. I am, however, confident that my core skill set will carry over.

As a Career Fellow, I am especially interested in helping to create career focus tracks for students. These tracks could be tailored to student interests at Pitzer, such as economics/business, public policy/advocacy, and the sciences. Such a system would not only increase resources for specific career interests, but also concentrate community and mutual support among similarly impassioned students. I specifically see myself helping to formulate resources and outreach for students interested in public policy, advocacy, and public service because of my experiential understanding of the challenges and opportunities within this career area. For these students and others, I am excited by the prospect of encouraging community members to be confident and bold in all facets of their professional life. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

