

College of Engineering Graduate Student Cover Letter Guide

A cover letter is a one page overview of your relevant skills, experiences, and education to support your candidacy for a specific position. In some instances a cover letter will be a job application requirement, while in others, it will be optional. This guide provides information on developing cover letter content and formatting. It also provides a checklist and sample cover letter for your review.

Focus your Cover Letter on:

1. Connecting your past, present and future:

The body paragraphs of your cover letter should show how your past experiences (education, internships, research, etc.) make you a unique candidate in the present, and how those qualifications will be an asset when you apply them to projects at your target company in the future. In particular, you should explain the advantages of your experiences: the unique approach of CMU's programs and the qualifications and training the degree and/or your research has equipped you with and the qualifications you have gained from additional experiences (internships, leadership, work experience, etc.)

2. Highlighting the qualifications that your experience gave you – not the experience itself:

Your cover letter should NOT simply restate your résumé but should elaborate on the qualifications that your abilities, accomplishments, and experiences give you as they relate to the specific position and company to which you are applying- i.e. you should be highlighting the skills and qualifications that you have that the company is asking for in the job posting.

For Example:

BEFORE: I graduated with a Masters in Chemical Engineering from Carnegie Mellon University. This past year, I was a research assistant with Dr. XXX and I worked alongside other chemical engineers to ensure we completed our project by the deadline.

What's wrong with this? It doesn't state what the applicant gained from the experience

AFTER: My research in the Chemical Engineering department at Carnegie Mellon University has been focused on migration of electrolytic components through separator membranes. As a research assistant with Dr. XXX, I worked towards the device implementation of semiconducting conjugated polymers and acquired integrated technical judgment and a background in modeling from first principles. Through my research assistantship I have been prepared to provide materials expertise to Sandia National Laboratories' customers and sponsors.

Why is this better? It states the qualifications gained from experiences AND links those qualifications to the future.

Tailor your information:

1. Be as specific as possible when introducing your abilities and qualifications; explain why:

Remember the axiom: show; don't tell. You do not want the ideas in your cover letter to be general or vague. Try to eliminate sentences that could be written by anybody with a Master's degree in your field. Specifics make you look interested, well-informed, detail oriented and most importantly, qualified.

2. Unify each body paragraph of your cover letter around one qualification, including the experiences that have given you this qualification:

In particular, the first or second sentence of the paragraph should emphasize one or two specific qualifications afforded by the unique training of your degree and/or work and internship experience. The rest of the paragraph should provide specific details that support this main idea. These details should distinguish you from other applicants who also have a Master's degree in your field.

Please note: The above information has been taken and adapted from Carnegie Mellon University's Global Communication Center's guide for Cover Letter Writing. Additional information on Cover Letter Writing and the guide referenced above can be found on the GCC Website:

<https://www.cmu.edu/gcc/HandoutsandResources/index.html>

Name

Address

Phone Number

Email Address

Optional: LinkedIn Profile URL / portfolio address / personal website address

Date

Company Name

Company Address

Salutation (*such as: Dear Recruitment Team*)

Introductory Paragraph:

- Introduce who you are and the position to which you've applied
- Introduce how you heard of position, if through networking, faculty contact, or at a job fair
- State your degree, major, college affiliation and graduation date
- In the closing sentence, present the reasons for which you are qualified for the role (skills, education, training, experience, etc). This information will be discussed in further details in the subsequent body paragraphs.

Body Paragraphs:

- Write two to three body paragraphs.
- Demonstrate how your past experience, current skills, and education make you a fit for the opportunity.
- Highlight your CMU experience and specialized training and skills you're developing in your program and/or through your research.
- Elaborate on the skills and experiences (education, research, and professional work/intern experience) found in your resume and connect them to the job qualifications versus simply restating your resume.
- Present information specific to you versus using general language that could have been written by any candidate in your program.

Concluding Paragraph:

- Reiterate why you're a strong candidate for the position.
- Reference any documents you've attached or enclosed (if sent via email).
- State your interest in interviewing or moving forward in the hiring process.
- Thank your reader for his/her consideration.

Closing salutation,

Your Name

Cover Letter Writing Checklist



Once you have drafted a cover letter, check your document against the below checklist to ensure you have the appropriate content. We strongly encourage you to have your cover letter reviewed by a career consultant as well.

☐ Formatting:

- Entire document uses one inch margins
- Paragraphs are short, concise and direct
- Heading includes your address and contact information, followed by the date, and employer's name and address
- Salutation is formal: Using the hiring manager's name if known OR a general salutation such as Dear Hiring Manager or Dear Recruitment Team
- Total document is One Page or less
- Cover Letter is free of grammatical and spelling errors

☐ Introduction:

- Names the position for which you are applying
- States your degree, major, college affiliation and graduation date
- Last sentence makes a strong claim about your candidacy that previews 1-3 qualifications you discuss in the body paragraphs
- Qualifications listed directly correlate to the job description for the position to which you have written the letter

☐ Body Paragraphs:

- The 1-3 qualifications highlighted in the introduction align to the body paragraphs topics, with one qualification highlighted per paragraph
- Qualifications or skills gained from experiences are presented, not just the experiences themselves
- Focuses on connecting your past and present skills, qualifications and education to the company and/or position (i.e. your future)
- Specifics are provided and generalities are avoided
- Does not simply restate the resume
- Strong action verbs are used

☐ Conclusion:

- Reminds your reader why you are a strong match for the position
- Mentions the other documents you are enclosing and/or the application you have submitted and the documents within
- Includes a call to action--requests an interview, refers to future contact, etc.
- Provides your contact information
- Thanks the reader for their time and consideration

Anna Gear
1234 Best Street
Pittsburgh PA, 15213
(412)-555-1234
annagear@andrew.cmu.edu

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Awesome Engineering Co,
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Dear Recruiting Manager,

I am writing to apply for the Research and Development Engineer position, as advertised at the Technical Opportunities Conference 2016 at Carnegie Mellon University. Currently, I am pursuing a Master's degree in Mechanical Engineering at Carnegie Mellon University with an expected completion date of May 2017. I believe that my professional experience in the field of Mechanical Engineering, especially in product design and development coupled with the research I am currently conducting as CMU have provided me with the design and development skills needed to solve advanced engineering problems and to be successful in this role.

Most recently, I spent two years working in Research and Development at National Engineering, Inc., where I contributed to the area of advanced product technology development and worked with a team of experts in Mechanical Engineering. As part of the research team, I designed and developed two new one way clutch technologies for the two wheeler industry. I was also the lead engineer in the design and development of a new seal mechanism which provides zero grease leakage and a longer running life. In addition, I was involved in several other projects, including improving thrust load carrying capacity for a ball bearing and large radial-axial load carrying bearing design, for which both have been submitted for patents at the Indian Patent Office. This practical experience in engineering design and development, as well as working with a collaborative team, would allow me to contribute effectively in this position.

My current research at Carnegie Mellon University focuses on understanding the design process and design and development of Fall Aid Health Care devices and Ship Hull Cleaning Robots. My past experience and the current research are similar to the position you are offering: it involves finding the root cause of the problem, mapping a plan to tackle the problem and designing the mechanisms that could solve it in a cost effective and efficient manner. I have a proven track record in the field of product design and development and I believe I can make a positive impact in solving complex engineering problems as well as driving innovative results.

I have always enjoyed research and creative problem solving and I believe that my present and previous experience will help me to work as a part of a team and be an effective representative of the Awesome Engineering Company. If given an opportunity, I know I will be a valuable asset to your company. I thank you for taking the time and consideration and I hope to hear from you soon.

Best Regards,
Anna Gear