

# Cover Letter Guidelines and Checklist

## Getting started

- The purpose of the cover letter is to get an interview. It is not simply repeating the information that can be found on your resume.
- Before writing your cover letter, research the agency and position of interest. Consult with GSSWSR students, staff, and alums who may be familiar with the agency.

## Layout & appearance

- Use business letter format with default margins. If margins are adjusted, they should be no less than ½ on either side.
- Font should be easy to read. No smaller than 10 pt. and no bigger than 12 pt. Times New Roman and Arial (or similar font styles) are the suggested fonts to choose for readability.
- Your cover letter should typically be no more than one page in length. Some academic, research, and fellowship positions may request longer cover letters. In all cases, be as concise as possible!
- Break large, dense paragraphs of text into smaller easy to skim sections.
- Be consistent. You may choose to use the same font style and size on both your cover letter and resume. The font style, size, spacing, and other formatting details should be consistent throughout your cover letter.

## Content

- If possible, address your letter to a specific individual using their name. If you are unsure of their name, you can use “Dear Hiring Committee” or “Dear Hiring Manager”
  - Honorifics include Mr., Ms., and Mx. Mr. and Ms. are considered gender specific while Mx. is considered a gender-neutral/inclusive honorific.
  - Double check spelling of names and confirm address and other contact information is correct
- Your cover letter should convey why you’re writing (i.e., the position you’re applying for), your most relevant experiences and skill, what you expect to add to the agency, and why you’re excited about the position.
- Use keywords from the job announcement and from information you’ve gathered on the agency and position. Be sure that descriptions on your resume align with content in your cover letter. Namely, don’t highlight an experience in your cover letter that you don’t describe in your resume.
- If you’ve been referred by an individual in good standing with the agency, mention their name (after getting their permission) in your introductory paragraph.
- Conclude your cover letter by indicating your plans to follow up. For example, “I look forward to talking with you. I’ll plan to follow up via e-mail next week to ensure my materials have been received or if you require any additional information.”

## Finalizing your cover letter

- Proofread. Don’t count on spell check to catch everything. Thoroughly proofread it at least once while reviewing spacing and formatting.
- When uploading your resume to a website or into the body of an email, create and upload a PDF version. This assures your formatting and spacing doesn’t change or become distorted.

## Other suggestions

- If you're e-mailing your cover letter as an attachment, be sure to include a brief message in the body of the e-mail and provide: the job you're applying for, a 1-2 sentence summary of your background and qualifications, and an explanation of your attachments.
- Example: Dear Human Resources Director: I am writing to apply for the Program Coordinator position with the Community Care program. I am a graduate of the Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research at Bryn Mawr College and bring strong advocacy and organizing experiences with health care equity to the position. I have attached my cover letter and resume for your review. Please let me know if you have any difficulty opening the attachments. I look forward to hearing from you.
- Keep track of applications. Identify a method, such as a spreadsheet, that works for you to keep track of applications, contacts, and follow up steps.

## Checklist

- Do your research. Find out about the agency and position of interest.
- Use business letter format, preferably with default margins
- Font size is easy to read, 10 pt.-12 pt. Times New Roman, Arial, or similar font
- Formatting is consistent throughout cover letter, including font style, size, and spacing
- Finished cover letter is no longer than 1 page, unless otherwise requested by the employer
- Key words from job announcement are included in cover letter
- Cover letter has been reviewed and proofread closely. Schedule a cover letter review session with GSSWSR Career Services!
- Be sure names and contact information is correct in cover letter and any other correspondence
- Save a version of your resume as a PDF

*Don't forget that GSSWSR Career Services is here to support your job search.*

*Visit our website, call, or e-mail to learn more!*