



WEATHERHEAD
SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

CASE WESTERN RESERVE
UNIVERSITY

Cover Letter Writing Guidelines



Career Management Office
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OVERVIEW

The main purpose of a cover letter is to concisely highlight your relevant skills and experience that demonstrate your qualifications and fit for a specific position (or company or industry, but this document will address cover letters tailored for specific positions). A cover letter is your opportunity to provide additional details or context that your resume is not designed to do. You can use it to “connect the dots” for an employer to explain your personal career or education path, as well as explain how, even if your qualifications may not be a traditional fit, you would add value to the company.

A good cover letter will convey who you are, which position you are applying for, how you learned about it, and why you are interested in the position. It also includes specific examples of how you are well-qualified to excel at the position and provide value to the company. Finally, a cover letter should grab the attention of the reader and motivate him or her to call you for an interview.... All in a 5-15 second read!

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

When should I send a cover letter?

Always include a cover letter when you send a resume as a hard copy or in an email. When applying online through Career Link or another aggregator or company web site, always upload a cover letter when given the opportunity.

Why should I send a cover letter?

Cover letters are an additional opportunity to introduce yourself to an employer and are often used as the first mode of screening of candidates. In your cover letter, employers will evaluate your writing ability, attention to detail, understanding of the position requirements, and passion for the industry, company, and/or function. This translates into you taking the time to craft a message that is clear, concise, free of errors, obviously personalized, and logically developed.

How long should my cover letter be?

Cover letters are read quickly. For this reason, 3-4 paragraphs should be your target. The entire body of the letter should use no more than 1/2 - 3/4 of a page of text. There is a lot of white space on a cover letter. Specific guidance on what to include in each of these paragraphs is found in the **Body Section** of this document.

What if I don't know who will be reading my cover letter and resume?

The best practice is to try to find out a person's name who will be involved in the resume review process. When you meet someone at a career fair or at a networking event and you plan to apply to an open position, it is acceptable to ask to whom you should address the letter. (However, do not be surprised if your contact is unsure.) You have a number of options for how to address the letter. The specific pros and cons of each alternative is provided in the **Salutation Section** of this document.

COMPONENTS OF A COVER LETTER

There are 5 main components of a Cover Letter. More details about the content, structure and purpose of each of the sections are provided on the following pages of this document.

<p style="text-align: center;">TIMOTHY SHARP 9856 Lee Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44118, (216) 555-1234, timothy.sharp123@case.edu</p>	<p>Header</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ This should match your resume precisely.
<p>October 10, 2016</p> <p>Mr. John Smith New York Consulting Group 257 Park Avenue South New York, NY 12345-6789</p>	<p>Date and Inside Address</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Even if you are submitting your resume online or via email, include the physical address to demonstrate you know the components of a formal business letter.
<p>Dear Mr. Smith:</p>	<p>Salutation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Always greet the person in a formal manner. Make attempts to identify the person who will be reviewing your resume.
<p>I am a first-year MBA student at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University and am very interested in the summer consultant position with the New York Consulting Group (NYCG). I believe that my background in technology has prepared me well for the analytical challenges that face strategy consultants and would like to be considered for an interview.</p> <p>Before coming to Weatherhead, I worked for 7 years as a biochemist in the research and development department of Chemical Products, Inc. My experience in working on a successful drug discovery project introduced me to both strategy consulting and the overall importance of it in the pharmaceutical industry. As I investigated the field of strategy consulting, I recognized that consulting is analogous to scientific research. In science, you need to solve many different problems by both using past knowledge and thinking creatively. This knowledge then needs to be clearly communicated so that people can utilize your insights and suggestions. Strategy consulting uses a similar skill set by applying it to business problems instead of purely scientific endeavors.</p> <p>I have a passion for the fast-paced research and solutions-orientation of strategy consulting and look forward to meeting with you soon and hope you will consider me for an interview for the North American offices. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.</p>	<p>Body</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ In a cover letter, the body contains 3-4 paragraphs:<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Introduction paragraph2. Qualifications paragraph(s)3. Closing paragraph
<p>Sincerely,</p> <p>Timothy Sharp MBA Candidate 2017</p>	<p>Signature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ There are 3 parts to the signature<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <u>Complimentary close</u>: common professional phrases to use are:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sincerely,• Best Regards,• Kind Regards,2. <u>Signature space</u>: In a printed letter, use your handwritten signature just below the Complimentary Close. An electronic version of your letter should still leave a blank line where it would be.3. <u>Title</u>: as a student, this is the name of the degree you are pursuing as a Candidate with the completion date. (As shown in this example). You may also choose to include your email and/or phone number under your title.

HEADER SECTION

TIMOTHY SHARP
9856 Lee Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44118, (216)555-1234, timothy.sharp123@case.edu

October 10, 2016

Mr. John Smith
New York Consulting Group
257 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 12345-6789

Dear Mr. Smith:

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Sincerely,

Timothy Sharp
MBA Candidate 2017

Use the same header as your resume so that the two documents are immediately associated with one another in case they get separated during the resume review process. This also ensures your complete contact information is provided and easy to find.

DATE AND INSIDE ADDRESS SECTION

TIMOTHY SHARP
9856 Lee Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44118, (216)555-1234, timothy.sharp123@case.edu

October 10, 2016

Mr. John Smith
New York Consulting Group
257 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 12345-6789

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Sincerely,

Timothy Sharp
MBA Candidate 2017

- The inside address is a standard section of a formal business letter. It includes the date you send the letter, the full name of the addressee (if you know it), the name of the company, and the mailing address of the company.
 - Date: Do not abbreviate or use numerical dates (such as “Oct. 10, 2016” or “10/10/2016”)
 - Name of the addressee: If you know the person’s name, put his or her full name at the top of the address block. This should include relevant titles such as Dr. or Prof. then first and last name.
 - Company name: Always include the company name above the mailing address. It reinforces that the letter is not a generic form letter.
 - Company mailing address: Use the physical mailing address of the company even if you are submitting via email or through a web site portal. This indicates you are familiar with formal business letter formats and, again, reinforces it is not a form letter.
 - If the job posting does not list the company address, look it up!
 - If there are multiple locations and you are unsure which to use, you can use the address of the location of the position or as a default, corporate headquarters.
 - Especially if you are not familiar with US Mailing Address formats, double check you have everything on the correct line and with the appropriate punctuation. US Zip Codes always have 5 digits. If you know the “plus 4” you can include it.
 - If the address on your resume and the address of the company are both in the same country, you do not need to include the country in the address.

First Line: Street Number Name, Suite (Suite is not always applicable)

Second Line: City, State Zip Code

Example 1

1234 Main St.
Atlanta, GA 30301

Example 2

1234 Main St., Suite 204
Atlanta, GA 30301-1234

SALUTATION SECTION

TIMOTHY SHARP
9856 Lee Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44118, (216)555-1234, timothy.sharp123@case.edu

October 10, 2016

Mr. John Smith
New York Consulting Group
257 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 12345-6789

Dear Mr. Smith:

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Sincerely,

Timothy Sharp
MBA Candidate 2017

- The salutation sets the tone for the letter. It conveys respect for the reader, and potentially resourcefulness and detail-orientation about identifying the correct person and/or title of the person who will be reviewing the letter.
- Make every attempt to find out the name of the person who will be reviewing your resume for the first round of interviews. A little bit of leg work goes a long way in making a positive impression on a company.
- Do not use the person's first name in the salutation. Instead, a title and his or her last name is appropriate. Such as Mr., Ms., Dr., or Prof. (abbreviations are appropriate).
 - **DO NOT use "Mrs." unless you are 100% sure that is what the woman prefers.**
 - "Ms." Is appropriate for a woman who is unmarried, a woman who is married but uses a different last name than her spouse, as well as a married woman who uses her spouse's last name.
- If you cannot find the name of the person, use an appropriate title of an individual. It is well-worth the effort to identify the titles at the company. Resources such as LinkedIn or Career Shift can be very helpful. If you cannot determine who will be reviewing your resume and cover letter, you have a number of options, each with Pros and Cons.

SALUTATION EXAMPLES

Alternative	Pros	Cons
To whom it may concern:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadly covers whomever may be reading the letter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be considered too generic
Dear Sir or Madam:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as above 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as above • May be interpreted as overly formal
Dear Hiring Manager:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defines your audience as the person to whom you will be reporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not be the actual person reading the letter (at least initially) • The person may not be a manager
Dear Recruiting Manager: or Dear HR Recruiter:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledges that you understand the initial round(s) of screenings will be conducted by a recruiting or HR function 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as above • If there is not a recruiting or distinct HR role it may appear you don't understand the company structure
Dear HR Team:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as above 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It may be interpreted as being impersonal because it is addressed to a group rather than a person
Dear Recruiting Representative:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus is on the activity (recruiting) rather than the title 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The focus is more on recruiting rather than the position's function
Dear [insert name of company] [insert any of the titles above]:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforces it is not a form letter by including the company name (see cons) • All the same "pros" as listed above for the title you use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salutation may get long • If the insertion of the company name in the salutation and its use in the body of the letter is overdone, it may have the counter-effect of making the letter seem MORE like a form letter which you have "cut and paste" the company name to disingenuously "personalize" the letter • All the "cons" listed above for the title you use

TOP OF COVER LETTER – Examples

Example 1

ALLISON WONG

555 Overlook Dr., Cleveland OH 44106, (216) 555-1234, allison.123@case.edu

October 10, 2016

Ms. Carolyn Smith
Superior Technologies
123 Forest Drive, Suite 303
Cleveland, OH 44106

Dear Ms. Smith:

Example 2

ALLISON WONG

555 Overlook Dr., Cleveland OH 44106, (216) 555-1234, allison.123@case.edu

October 10, 2016

Dr. Steve Erickson
BASF
333 Mount Hope Ave.
Rockaway, NJ 07866

Dear Dr. Erickson:

Example 3

ALLISON WONG

555 Overlook Dr., Cleveland OH 44106, (216) 555-1234, allison.123@case.edu

October 10, 2016

BASF
333 Mount Hope Ave.
Rockaway, NJ 07866

Dear Recruiting Representative:

BODY SECTION – Opening Paragraph

TIMOTHY SHARP
9856 Lee Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44118, (216)555-1234, timothy.sharp123@case.edu

October 10, 2016

Mr. John Smith
New York Consulting Group
257 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10017-0789

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am a first-year MBA student at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University and am very interested in the summer consultant position with the New York Consulting Group (NYCG). I believe that my background in technology has prepared me well for the analytical challenges that face strategy consultants and would like to be considered for an interview.

Before coming to Weatherhead, I worked for 7 years as a biochemist in the research and development department of Chemical Products, Inc. My experience in working on a successful drug discovery project introduced me to both strategy consulting and the overall importance of it in the pharmaceutical industry. As I investigated the field of strategy consulting, I recognized that consulting is analogous to scientific research. In science, you need to solve many different problems by both using past knowledge and thinking creatively. This knowledge then needs to be clearly communicated so that people can utilize your insights and suggestions. Strategy consulting uses a similar skill set by applying it to business problems instead of purely scientific endeavors.

I have a passion for the fast-paced research and solutions-orientation of strategy consulting and look forward to meeting with you soon and hope you will consider me for an interview for the North American offices. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Timothy Sharp
MBA Candidate 2017

The **Opening Paragraph** is your introduction. It establishes who you are and indicates why you are applying to the position. Provide specific and meaningful reasons as to why you are submitting an application and provide a framework for the information you will be providing in the following paragraph(s). You can describe your passion for the industry or state why you admire the company. Demonstrate a genuine enthusiasm for the opportunity in your opening paragraph.

If the reader is a networking contact and you have not met, be sure to indicate who gave you his/her name. If your referral is from an online advertisement or some other place (magazine article, for example), state that first and then address your reason for writing.

Example 1

I am a first-year MBA student at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University and am very interested in the summer consultant position with the New York Consulting Group (NYCG). I believe that my background in technology has prepared me well for the analytical challenges that face strategy consultants and would like to be considered for an interview.

Example 2

I am a recent MBA graduate at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University with a strong background in supply chain management and newly developed financial skills. I am extremely interested in Sunlight Technology's financial analyst position. I learned about this opportunity from your posting on our school's recruiting website and would like to be considered for an interview. I believe my specific experience in working with automotive distributors and the research and financial analysis skills I've developed during my MBA studies and a recent internship, have prepared me to contribute to the company and excel in your financial analyst position.

Tips

- If you have met someone from the company or have a relevant referral, this is the paragraph to mention it. Make sure the person you mention knows that you plan to mention him or her in the letter.
- If you have met the person to whom the letter is addressed— remind the reader of when/how you met.
- Anything you can do to help the reviewer read your letter quickly and stay organized is a good thing....
 - Start with a statement regarding your status as an MBA (or other degree) student to immediately establish your basic qualifications for the position.
 - Be sure to name the position for which you are applying. Use the exact name the company uses in the job posting.
 - Rather than making a general statement about how you are interested in applying for the position, state why you are qualified and be specific.
 - Your statement about why/how you are qualified or prepared for the position should introduce and establish the framework for what you will provide more detail about in the second paragraph.

BODY SECTION – Qualifications Paragraph

TIMOTHY SHARP
9856 Lee Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44118, (216)555-1234, timothy.sharp123@case.edu

October 10, 2016

Mr. John Smith
New York Consulting Group
257 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 12345-6789

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am a first-year MBA student at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University and am very interested in the summer consultant position with the New York Consulting Group (NYCG). I believe that my background in technology has prepared me well for the analytical challenges that face strategy consultants and would like to be considered for an interview.

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I have a passion for the fast-paced research and solutions-orientation of strategy consulting and look forward to meeting with you soon and hope you will consider me for an interview for the North American offices. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Timothy Sharp
MBA Candidate 2017

The **Qualifications Paragraph** is your opportunity to highlight your past experience and/or education in relation to the position in which you are interested. Identify the competencies that the position requires and ensure that you provide examples that demonstrate your possession of these competencies. Be specific when describing your qualifications and provide additional information beyond what is stated in your resume while remaining concise. If you provide specific examples that align with the job description, you demonstrate your qualifications and fit for the position. For example, if you are applying for a finance position, mention your analytical skills honed through the MBA program as well as your experience writing and presenting financial reports in your last job.

Example 1

Before coming to Weatherhead, I worked for 7 years as a biochemist in the research and development department of Chemical Products, Inc. My experience in working on a successful drug discovery project introduced me to both strategy consulting and the overall importance of it in the pharmaceutical industry. As I investigated the field of strategy consulting, I recognized that consulting is analogous to scientific research. In science, you need to solve many different problems by both using past knowledge and thinking creatively. This knowledge then needs to be clearly communicated so that people can utilize your insights and suggestions. Strategy consulting uses a similar skill set by applying it to business problems instead of purely scientific endeavors.

Example 2

During my internship at PowerUp Electronics I worked directly with the VP of Marketing to create 5-year pro forma financials for two adjacent geographic markets to evaluate potential. I completed primary and secondary research, financial analysis, and participated in strategic evaluation. At the end of that project I presented our findings and recommendations to the CEO and COO resulting in the decision to begin expansion efforts into one of the two markets. This project developed my understanding of how the details of a project fit into the big picture of strategic decision-making. This experience will help me collaborate closely with multiple business units to complete financial forecasting and market research as described in your position description.

Prior to beginning my MBA at Weatherhead, I worked in the distribution division of TrinSystems, an automotive after-market company specializing in brake components for a number of manufacturers. My first-hand understanding of and success in managing inventory for multiple suppliers and customers will help me immediately grasp the complex vendor, internal, and client relationships at Sunlight Technologies.

Tips

- This is your opportunity to provide a little more detail about how your skills and past experiences directly relate to what the company is looking for. Make sure what you talk about the job posting specifically without copying the job posting verbatim.
- If you are changing functions or industries, be direct about how the skills you have are applicable in the position for which you are applying.
- Do NOT try to write a long and involved story in the cover letter. You do not want the reader to feel like everything there is to know about you is on the page. Write enough to entice the reader to call you in for an interview.

BODY SECTION – Closing Paragraph

TIMOTHY SHARP
9856 Lee Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44118, (216)555-1234, timothy.sharp123@case.edu

October 10, 2016

Mr. John Smith
New York Consulting Group
257 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 12345-6789

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am a first-year MBA student at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University and am very interested in the summer consultant position with the New York Consulting Group (NYCG). I believe that my background in technology has prepared me well for the analytical challenges that face strategy consultants and would like to be considered for an interview.

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I have a passion for the fast-paced research and solutions-orientation of strategy consulting and look forward to meeting with you soon and hope you will consider me for an interview for the North American offices. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Timothy Sharp
MBA Candidate 2017

The **Closing Paragraph** concludes your letter and is fairly standard. This paragraph is your opportunity to thank the reader for reviewing your application and offer details regarding the next step in the recruitment process. If you are unsure how to follow-up with the reader, indicate your interest in speaking further to discuss your qualifications.

Example 1

I have a passion in the fast-paced research and solutions-orientation of strategy consulting and look forward to meeting with you soon and hope you will consider me for an interview for the North American offices. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Example 2

The more I learn about Sunlight Technologies, the more excited I am about the financial analyst position. The recent growth and continued dedication to sustainable technologies both in your product and services, as well as on your corporate campus resonates with me both personally and professionally. I hope to have an opportunity for an interview when I can provide more detail about my skills and experiences which will help me contribute to the continued success of your company. Thank you for your consideration.

Tips

- This is your final opportunity to make an impression. While you have already given details about how you are qualified, this is a good place to demonstrate passion. However, do not simply say you are passionate without indicating specifically what or why.
- This is a good paragraph to demonstrate additional details you know about the company.
- Always close by stating you hope to be granted an interview.
- Do NOT presume you will get an interview. This comes off as over confident and will likely not be viewed favorably.

SIGNATURE SECTION

TIMOTHY SHARP
9856 Lee Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44118, (216) 555-1234, timothy.sharp123@case.edu

October 10, 2016

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257 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 12345-6789

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Sincerely,

Timothy Sharp
MBA Candidate 2017

The most common closing for the letter is “Sincerely,” followed by your signature and full name below.

- Write your full name (including your legal name if you are using a preferred name)
- You may use 1-2 lines under your name to add a final title and/or an email address
- You may also include your phone number and/or email to remind the reader

Example 1

Sincerely,

Allison Wong
MBA Candidate, 2015

Example 2

Kind Regards,

Timothy Sharp
Timothy.Sharp123@case.edu

Tips

- Keep the closing statement formal.
- If you are sending a physical letter, be sure to include your handwritten signature.