



MBA Cover Letter Guide

Career and Professional Development
Summer 2019

What is a Cover Letter?

Your cover letter is a document that accompanies your resume when you are applying for jobs. Think of it as an executive summary of your experience and qualifications. It is your opportunity to give personality to your application and a chance to tell your story. This is your sales pitch! It says a lot about you and showcases your writing style and the skills you bring to the role. The cover letter is not a repetition of your resume but rather an extension of your resume. A well-written cover letter will engage and hold the employer's attention by making it clear that you are a great fit for the role. A poorly written cover letter will send red flags to the recruiter and prevent a candidate from getting further in the recruitment process.

A cover letter demonstrates the following to a potential employer:

- Who you are
- Your unique experience and qualifications
- Your communication style and skills
- Your attention to detail
- Your passion and knowledge for the role and company
- Your level of initiative and motivation

It is critical that you invest time in creating and revising your cover letter **for each application and tailor it specifically to each job posting.**

Everyone has an opinion on cover letters. You will probably hear conflicting messages such as:

- They are a **must have**, an application without a cover letter is incomplete
- Recruiters don't read them – or – they always read them
- Recruiters read them only after the resume passes the initial screen
- If the company name or role is wrong, it's an automatic 'no'
- Any spelling/grammar/formatting errors, it's an automatic 'no'
- We read cover letters to get a sense of fit with company culture

Remember – every document you submit as part of your application can be used at any point during the recruitment process. Take this opportunity to ensure you stand out from all the other applicants!

Sections of a Cover Letter



First Paragraph - Introduction: Capture the Employer's Interest

- Introduce yourself with a powerful opening sentence that shows your uniqueness and quickly sets you apart. If you had to write your cover letter in one sentence, what would it be?
- Highlight 3 key strengths/skills you bring to the position that you identified as important in the job description.
- Strong and attention grabbing, while being concise (approximately 3-4 sentences).
- Include the role title and company you are applying to.
- Include brief details on how you heard about the position, i.e. alumni or peer. This is not required if the role was posted on OscarPlus.

Second Paragraph/Section (body): How You Fit the Position

- Use either a paragraph or two-column format (see sample Cover Letters at the end of this guide). This is the longest section of your cover letter.
- Select 3 skills from the job description (that you stated in the 1st paragraph) and highlight an accomplishment that best demonstrates each skill. Show how your experiences are transferrable to this role, making you a great fit.
- Briefly explain how you have demonstrated each skill by using examples from your resume. Think of a concise STAR format, focusing on your tasks and results.
- Do not include ambiguous or vague sentences (i.e. I am able to quickly adapt to changing situations and requirements) that cannot be directly tied back to your skills, experience, or knowledge.

Third Paragraph: Company Knowledge and Fit

- Include information that showcases your knowledge of the company and/or industry. Do not repeat sections of the company website. Show you have done your research.
- Explain why you are interested in the position – it tells the employer how motivated you are for the position (i.e. spoke with recruiter/grad/alumni at a company information session).
- Show your level of genuine excitement/enthusiasm for the role and company.

Optional Fourth Paragraph: Follow Up and Lasting Impression

- This closing sentence or two can be included at the end of the third paragraph (recommended for the 2-column option) or in a separate paragraph.
- Display confidence in your closing – leave the employer with a positive impression of what you have to offer the company. Thank the employer for their time.

Review and Edit

A good cover letter cannot guarantee you a job, but it can increase the chance of your application getting reviewed in more detail and into the hands of the hiring manager.

| PACKAGING | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Font | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Easy to read, professional looking font (Tahoma, Arial, Calibri)• Size: 10-11 point font• Consistent font style and size between resume and cover letter• Name no larger than size 16 and bolded |
| Formatting | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single spacing within each paragraph |
| Name, Contact Information | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Located at the top, right – Name, Phone Number, Email, LinkedIn Hyperlink• Do not include marital status, age or picture• The header for both resume and cover letter should match |
| POWER INFORMATION | |
| Writing Style | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use your own 'voice', show your writing style• Minimize using words, "I" or "my" (no more than 5 "I's")• Be concise, reduce your word count ("to" vs. "in order to")• Avoid word repetition, use different verbs to start sentences or to describe accomplishments.• Vary your sentence structure and length, make it interesting to read• Mirror the words used in the job description |

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Attribute Themes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convey themes that are woven into your personal experience. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ You thrive in team work settings – involved in sports, coached children, lead a team in a retail environment etc. ○ Financial Acumen – involved in finance cases, manage your own stock portfolio, research, courses, projects etc. |
| Achievement Oriented | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show how your skills, demonstrated through your greatest achievements are transferrable to the role and skills the employer is looking for • Use STAR statements, build upon a statement from your resume • Avoid stating, “I was responsible for...” as this does not show how or why |
| Research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate your knowledge of the company, link to your interests/values • Show enthusiasm for the role/company • Do not repeat information from the company’s website |
| PERSONALITY | |
| Sales Pitch | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show your uniqueness • What is your personal brand? Are you portraying it? • The first paragraph needs to grab the reader’s attention |
| PROFESSIONALISM | |
| Error-free | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure it is free from spelling or grammar errors • Ensure proper and consistent tense is used • Check that you have identified the correct position, company and contact name • Read it out loud, it’s a great way to catch mistakes |

Tips for Writing a Cover Letter

Tailor the cover letter to the position and company. Research the hiring manager's name and title (LinkedIn is a great research tool). Otherwise use 'Dear Recruitment Team' or 'Dear Hiring Manager'. Do not use 'Dear Sir/Madam'. Use similar words to those that are used in the job posting to mirror the employer's language.

Convey your personal brand. This is your sales pitch. It may be the employer's first introduction to you. What message and brand are you conveying? Highlight the unique experiences and talents that demonstrate your brand. Show them your writing style.

Express what you can do for the employer and not what you hope to gain from the employer. Focus on the employer's needs. Express how your skills and experiences are transferrable to the employer's key requirements.

Present your strongest transferable skills from your experiences. Highlight the most significant and relevant aspects of your experience that relate to the position description. Be concise and consistent without repeating what is on your resume.

Be concise in your delivery. Limit to 1 page or less. White space is important to entice the employer to read the entire document. Text heavy pages are quite onerous to read.

Exude genuine interest and enthusiasm. Show the passion you have for the opportunity. To do this, research the company and position, and highlight personal connections. Specifically state what excites you about the company and/or the role.

Write in first person, while minimizing the use of personal pronouns such as "I" (i.e. "I developed a successful brand marketing strategy" could be "Developed a successful brand marketing strategy that enabled...").

Common Cover Letter Mistakes to Avoid

- Not customizing a cover letter for each application
- Spelling/grammar/formatting mistakes
- Incorrect company name or job title
- Referencing skills that are not relevant to the job
- Focusing on what you want to get out of the job, versus what you have to offer

Close the letter with a thank you. Include next steps with timelines (except for on-campus recruitment and co-op postings).

Proofread and review to ensure an error-free document that delivers the intended message. This is a reflection of how you will communicate on the job and shows your attention to detail. CPD is available to review your documents in advance of submission.

Sample Job Description – Finance

Senior Financial Analyst

Reporting to the Senior Manager Wealth Finance, this role will be primarily focused on forecasting & planning as well as decision support to Wealth Operations, Shared Services and Head Office functions. Key responsibilities include supporting the quarterly planning & forecasting process including line of business allocations, providing in depth analytical and decision support for business cases and developing strong working relationships with Wealth business partners and stakeholders.

Accountabilities

- Supporting the quarterly forecasting/planning process including identification, review and validation of assumptions with all stakeholders, updating forecasting models, analyzing and reporting on
- Supporting Wealth Operations and Shared Services analyses/financial projections/benefit realization for business cases/proposed initiatives and other special projects.
- Identifying and opportunities for deep dive analyses on specific expense areas to understand the data source, process and key drivers and work with the team to execute, document and share the results.
- Contributing to continuous process improvement by identifying, recommending, and implementing process improvements or automation opportunities to enhance productivity, operational efficiency and effective data analysis.
- Establishing and maintaining strong working relationships across Wealth, including our internal Wealth Finance partners and various stakeholders that we work with
- Exhibiting high degree of professionalism, passion for the business and intellectual curiosity to drive continuous improvement in quality of deliverables and contribution of value added analyses to Wealth Senior Management and Finance partners

The successful candidate will have demonstrated strong commitment, initiative and drive to continuously exceed expectations and lead change, ability to work with high degree of autonomy, strong technical skills, strong inter-personal skills, effective at problem solving with minimal support and strong organization skills.

- Demonstrated analytical and reporting skills, experience in forecasting and analytics and business cases
- Proven track record of value added customer service through initiative and creativity
- Experience evaluating business issues, identifying potential solutions, implementing action to resolve issues
- Strong inter-personal and communication skills including active team player and strong relationship-building skills and ability to work collaboratively with key stakeholders
- Detail oriented while still able to synthesize issues and present concise concepts and solutions
- Exceptional ability to find efficiencies among proven processes
- Strong working knowledge of MS Excel, MS Word, MS Power Point and Outlook.
- University/College/MBA education with a focus on Finance, Commerce or Business

Sample Cover Letter: 2-Column Format

Douglas DeGroot

(123)456-7890

Douglas@mcmaster.ca

LinkedIn Hyperlink

September 1, 2019

Mr. David Smith, (if not known, state Hiring Manager) Senior Manager Wealth Finance
ABC Bank of Canada
123 Corporate Drive, Suite 250
Toronto, ON M1G 2D3

Dear Mr. Smith,

As an MBA candidate at the DeGroot School of Business with three years of work experience in the financial industry, my well-honed business acumen is complemented by strong analytical, process improvement and client support skills. Throughout my work, educational, and extra-curricular experiences, I have always strived to understand stakeholder needs and deliver the best to my clients, team and organization. These qualities, along with my CFA level 1 designation have prepared me to add immediate value to the Wealth Finance team in the role of Senior Finance Analyst role at ABC Bank of Canada.

Analytical Skills As a Financial Analyst for Capital One, analyzed and reviewed large and complex data sets, to derive a clear financial picture. Leveraging my VBA skills, identified potential risks and developed financial forecasts which I presented to senior leadership.

Client Focused Demonstrated ability to assess customer needs and exceed sales targets. Exceeded monthly sales targets, on average, by 10% with a cumulative annual growth of 140%. As a Customer Service Representative at BMO, successfully managed and resolved daily customer queries, resulting in several letters of recognition for the branch and myself.

Process Improvement Driven by challenges, as a Summer Intern at Sun Life, I identified an opportunity to reduce time spent on administrative work and took the initiative to create an automated monthly reporting process utilizing Excel. Once implemented by the department, 25 hours of work was saved each quarter.

I am confident that I can be a contributing member in achieving ABC Bank of Canada's goal of putting customers at the forefront. My skills and experiences will contribute to supporting the Wealth Finance team and the community it serves. Thank you for your time and consideration of my application for the Senior Financial Analyst role. I look forward to meeting with you to further discuss what I can bring to ABC Bank of Canada.

Sincerely,

Douglas DeGroot

Sample Job Description – HSM

Administrative Resident – McMaster Hospital

McMaster Hospital provides compassionate care to all who walk through its doors. The Hospital also provides outstanding healthcare education to students and professionals in more than 20 disciplines. Our patient care priorities include care for patients experiencing disadvantage, care for the critically ill, and care for our diverse urban community, as well as serving as a provincial and national resource.

Access and exposure to all facets of the organization and an opportunity to work with some of the world's most prominent health care professionals, researchers, and leaders are just some of the benefits of the Administrative Resident program at McMaster Hospital.

The position is situated within the Strategy and Corporate Planning portfolio of the hospital. Be involved in and lead projects with a focus on:

- Strategic planning across the hospital
- Quality improvement initiatives which impact our patients, staff, and students
- Business case development to support innovation and change
- Stakeholder engagement, including reaching out to external partners and hospital
- Corporate communication
- Financial management
- Attend corporate committee meeting to better understand the hospital structure
- Mentorship from senior hospital executives and the President and CEO

Key Qualifications

- Healthcare/hospital experience and/or an ability to demonstrate an understanding of the healthcare system
- Effective verbal and written communications
- Must be able to take initiative, work autonomously and manage time to deliver on projects
- A genuine passion and enthusiasm to pursue excellence in care
- Strong interpersonal skills and ability to work collaboratively with all levels within the organization
- Strong organizational abilities and analytical skills

Sample Cover Letter: 4-Paragraph Format

Sandy Beach
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Sbeach@mcmaster.ca
[LinkedIn Hyperlink](#)

September 1, 2019

McMaster Hospital
140 DeGroote Drive
Hamilton, ON L63 9K1

Dear Hiring Manager,

Through two years of clinical research as an undergraduate Science student and more recently, through my MBA studies and co-op work terms, I have had the opportunity to work on diverse projects supporting patient care outcomes within the healthcare industry. These experiences, combined with a strong drive for success, effective communication skills and a passion for the Canadian healthcare system, position me as the ideal candidate for the role of Administrative Resident at the McMaster Hospital.

Project management has been at the core of both my education and my career. At SickKids Hospital, my self-initiated project entailed identifying a gap in a diagnostic assessment process used by nurses. Through gathering and analyzing stakeholder data, I was able to derive and validate recommendations for improvement and present my findings to the senior leadership team. Communication skills were critical in gathering support from a variety of stakeholders and in pitching the recommendations. My recommendations and implementation plan took into consideration hospital processes, the potential impact on the patient and end user uptake, resulting in the ultimate acceptance of my proposed solutions.

McMaster is a premier healthcare institution demonstrating highest standards in patient care. Your commitment to excellence aligns with my career goals to be able to contribute to patient care at a world-class organization where I can make a difference in our community. I am excited about the opportunity to impact patients in this Administrative Resident role through the implementation of improved and efficient processes as part of the Strategic and Corporate Planning team.

I thank you very much for your time and consideration and welcome further discussion on how I can contribute to this role, your team and the organization overall.

Sincerely,

Sandy Beach