The cover letter is a tool job applicants use to introduce themselves in a powerful way and convince potential employers to read their résumé. Since there are many formats and alterations used when writing cover letters, the style described below is general enough to be appropriate for most situations, but always tailor your to the needs and expectations of your intended audience.

## Format/Mechanics

### Format

- Is the font appealing, easy to read, and appropriate for the audience?
- Have items such as the following been included appropriately for the chosen format and audience?
  - Name and contact information (of applicant and addressee)
  - Date
  - Opening and closing salutations
  - Signature block and enclosure indication
- Is there consistency in abbreviations, spacing, margins, etc?

### Mechanics of Cover Letter

- Are there any spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors?
- Has the applicant used professional wording that is appropriate to his/her audience? (Say ‘NO!’ to texting lingo.)
- Has the applicant used word variety in the letter?
  - Are there redundancies or over usages of any words or phrases? (Avoid over usage of the word “I”)
- Do the sentences flow?
  - Are they easy to read, rather than confusing, ambiguous, and/or cumbersome?
- Are transitions between paragraphs logical and effective? Or are they choppy/random?

## Content

### The Introductory paragraph

- Explains the purpose of the letter (i.e., the position being sought)
- Includes a powerful “grabber” that
  1. Shows the applicant’s vision, knowledge of the company, and/or how the applicant might fit in OR
  2. Is a general statement about how the applicant will help the organization achieve its goals through his/her skills
- Includes a general/global claim (implicit or explicit) about how qualifications (typically education and work experience) will benefit the audience
  - This often serves as a transition sentence to the next paragraph

Optional:

- Explains how the applicant heard about the job the position (include only if it will add value to your letter)

### The Body paragraph(s)

- Shows specifically how the applicant’s skills and experiences can meet the needs of his/her audience. (It should not rehash the résumé)
- Discusses relevant accomplishments in terms that are meaningful to the audience

Optional:

- Includes a non-obvious comment that makes the reader want to review the applicant’s résumé
  - Ex: Point out the THMs* that you would like the reader to draw from your résumé

### The Closing paragraph(s):

- Reiterates why the applicant wants the position, in terms of what s/he can contribute, without being redundant
- Thanks the recipient for taking the time to read the application materials (for general audiences and some block audiences)
- Facilitates the opportunity for an interview
  - States follow-up intentions and details OR requests that the reader contact the applicant
- Provides signature block and enclosure information

*The THMs (or ‘take-home messages’) are the messages you want your reader to glean from your application materials about you and what you have to offer them. They include, but are not limited to, the top 5 skills/attributes that the audience wants.