



Cover Letter Toolkit: for Engineering Students



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Co-op Program
Faculty of Applied Science

6 Steps to Create a Powerful Cover Letter

Step 1: The basics

Understand the purpose of a cover letter and all the information you need to include.

Step 2: Do your homework

Understand the employer and what they are looking for.

Step 3: Find your hook

Start with an opening paragraph that will capture the reader's interest.

Step 4: Provide examples

In body paragraphs, use the START technique to describe your experience.

Step 5: Bring it all together

Create a strong closing paragraph that summarizes your interest and includes a call-to-action.

Step 6: Edit, edit, and edit

Proofread, edit and get feedback on your cover letter.

Resources

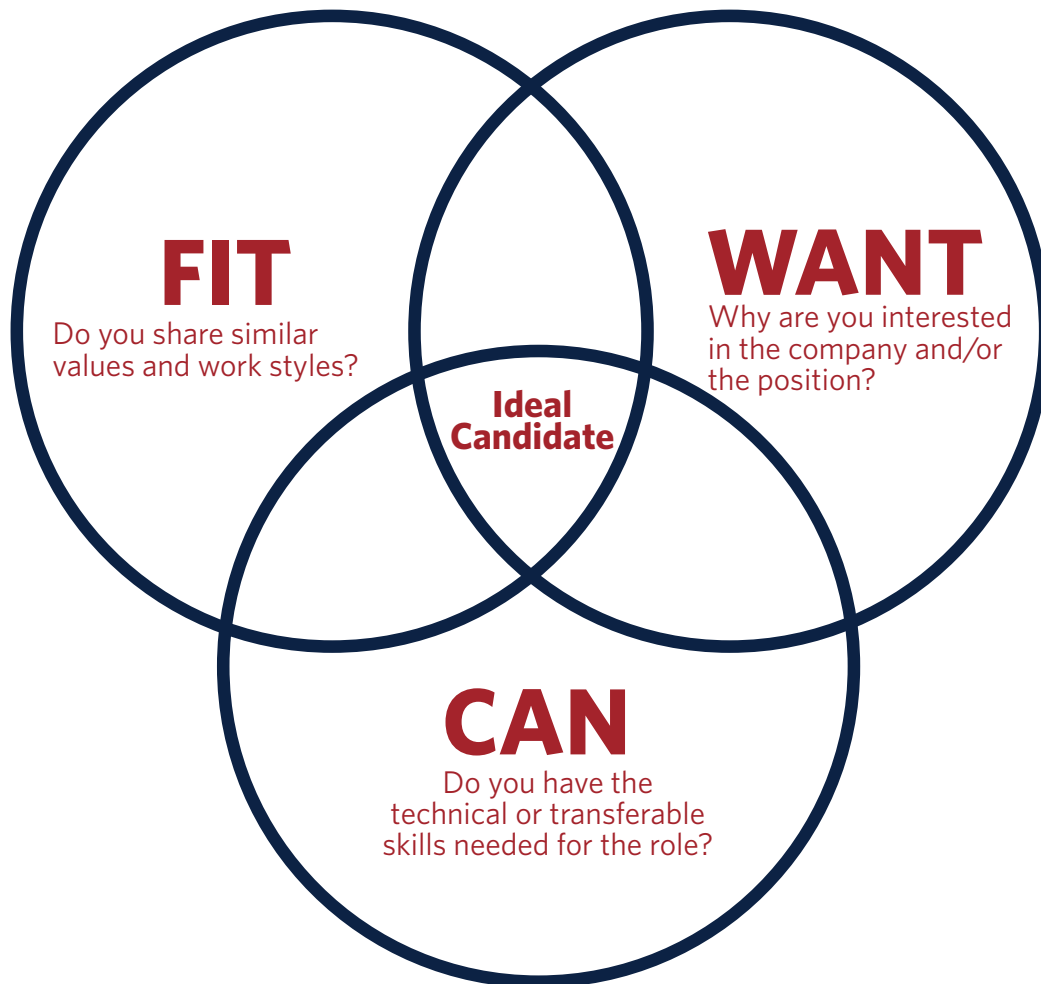
Transferrable Skills List, Skills Matching Worksheet, Checklist for a Powerful Cover Letter, Cover Letter Examples

STEP 1

The Basics

A cover letter is a one-page document that tells your potential future employer your story through specific and professional examples. It is an opportunity to show how your academic, volunteer and work related experiences fit together and how relevant or transferable they are for the position to which you are applying. Because your cover letter addresses the needs of a specific employer, you need to tailor every cover letter that you write.

The goal of your cover letter is to demonstrate your enthusiasm and interest in the position as well as that you **CAN** do, **WANT** and **FIT** the job:



This is the first impression the employer will have of you. Your cover letter should:

- Encourage the employer to continue reading your application.
- Focus on what you can do for the employer (not what the employer can do for you).
- Provide more context to the most relevant experiences mentioned in your resume.
- Be professional, focused, and concise.

Your cover letter at a glance

Header - use the same header as on your resume

Your Name

*123 Street City, Province, Postal Code
Phone Number | Professional Email Address | *LinkedIn URL | *Portfolio Link

Date

January 1, 2000

Employer - Contact

Contact Name
Contact Title
Company Name
Company Address

Subject

Re: Position Title, Job ID Number

Avoid "To Whom It May Concern" | "Dear Sir or Madam" | Only use Mr., Mrs., Ms., if you are absolutely certain of correct title to be used

Go to "Step 3" for more detail on creating your hook

Dear First & Last Name **or** Dear Hiring Manager **or** Dear Hiring Team:

Opening Paragraph (Step 3)

Your first paragraph should grab the employer's attention and work as a **hook**. You can make reference to a previous conversation with the employer, or follow-up on a job lead provided by someone you and the employer both know (ask for permission to use your contact's name). Your hook can also be interesting news about the employer, or what got you excited about the position and/or company. Make sure you also highlight 2 - 3 skills you have that are relevant for the position as stated in the original job description.

Body Paragraph (Step 4)

Share your story through real and significant examples from previous work, extra-curricular activities, design teams and/or volunteering experiences. (See Step 4 in this toolkit) Avoid the excessive use of adjectives when describing your skills; instead, tell a story that demonstrates how you have used your skills in the past and let the employer make their own positive conclusions about you.

Optional Paragraph (Step 5)

If you find a strong point of **connection between you and the company** such as sharing the same values or experience, experience using their services or products, make sure you mention it in your cover letter.

Closing Paragraph

In your closing paragraph **reaffirm your interest in and enthusiasm** for the position, remember to **thank the employer**, and provide your contact information in a call to action for the employer to follow-up with you.

Signature

Sincerely,

Your Name

Formatting Best Practices:

- Font size **10-12 pt**
- Use **professional fonts** that are easy to read such as Calibri, Times New Roman, Arial, Verdana, Cambria, Garamond, Book Antiqua, and Trebuchet MS
- Fit on **one page** and **single-spaced**

Do Your Homework

Planning and preparation

Before you begin to write a cover letter, **you need to identify the relevant information to include by carefully analyzing the employer's job posting and researching the company.** Once you understand what the employer is looking for and where you fit, you can easily customize your cover letter to address the employer's needs.

Starting out, you can expect to spend one hour writing a cover letter, which includes research time. Nevertheless, people have different writing styles and you may find yourself spending more or less time depending on the position. If you are applying for similar roles, you may be able to utilize a previous cover letter and tailor as needed. Regardless of how much time you have spent on your document, it should reflect that you genuinely care about the individual company and position to which you are applying.

1. Examine the Job Posting

After reading the job posting, can you picture a typical day of work in that position? If yes, chances are you have a good understanding of the job! However, some postings present very little information about the job, and sometimes identifying keywords or key competencies for the position can be difficult. If you are in this situation, comparing multiple postings for similar roles can help you identify the appropriate keywords to include in your cover letter.

If you have at least 50% of the technical skills required for the position and are genuinely interested in the role, you should apply for the position. It is important to remember that no candidate will possess 100% of the required skills.

2. Company Research

Research each company you apply to in order to relate your skills appropriately and by answering the following questions, you can gather enough information that will impress any employer:

- Has there been any recent company news (e.g. updates on their website, company strategic plan(s), new products released, project bids won, achievements, etc)?
- Does the company culture, vision and mission align with your values?
- In what type of activities is the company engaged? Are there any projects you are interested in?
- Where is the company and its office(s) located? Do I need to relocate?
- In which business sector does the company operate?

3. Use the company's voice in your cover letter

The employer's choice of words in their job posting (as well as on their company's website) can give you an idea of the company's culture as well as enable you to determine the appropriate tone to use for your cover letter. A more casual and relaxed posting would allow you to be more creative with your cover letter, while a more formal or conservative tone requires a more traditional style of writing.

Here are a few guidelines on tone and style:

- **Use words from the job posting** in your cover letter, as well as appropriate industry terminology you are familiar with.
- **Focus on what you can do for an employer** rather than what they can do for you.
- **Emphasize your strengths**, not your weaknesses, and avoid sounding overeager.
- Aim for **paragraphs approximately five to seven sentences** long.
- Keep your **tone professional**, but also **engaging** and **friendly**.
- **Eliminate unnecessary** words and avoid the excessive use of adjectives.

Dissecting the Job Description

Job Posting Information	
Availability	20XX - Fall
Position type:	Undergraduate Employment
Start of work term:	September 20XX
Length of work term:	4 months
Job title:	Structural Student (September 20XX)
Job location:	Port Coquitlam
Number of positions:	1
Job description:	<p>Overview of the position: Our Engineering teams located in Port Coquitlam offer great opportunities for students. Students are exposed to a wide range of tasks such as assisting with testing, technical documentation, and design. You will have the opportunity to work alongside a team of experienced mentors on exciting projects and ground-breaking technologies as we continue to challenge the limits of the amusement park industry.</p> <p>This role will work closely with our project teams on our amusement ride projects. The specific job duties vary depending on which project team you will support, and more details will be clarified throughout the interview process. We are looking for senior-level undergraduate students in the Civil/Structural engineering field who are available to begin employment in September for a minimum period of 8 months.</p> <p>Please submit a cover letter, resume and unofficial transcript with your application. Follow the instructions given. Please include the following information in your cover letter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Current year of study ▪ Number of work terms completed ▪ Cumulative GPA
Job requirements:	<p>Skills & Qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Major in Structural/Civil Engineering with an interest in steel design; ▪ Strong fundamental mechanics principles; ▪ Knowledgeable in steel design and load standards (CISC, AISC, ASCE7, IBC, etc.); ▪ Experience with structural analysis programs; ▪ Excellent MS Excel skills. VBA knowledge is preferred; ▪ Experience with Autodesk Inventor and AutoCAD; ▪ Strong technical writing and documentation abilities; ▪ Excellent interpersonal communication skills, both verbal and written; ▪ Fluency in languages in addition to English is an asset.

Do you have these skills? Can you provide concrete examples?

In this example, the employer is seeking senior Civil students who are available for 2 work terms. An employer may not consider students who do not meet this criteria..

Which of these skills and qualifications do you have and can demonstrate how you have developed or applied them?

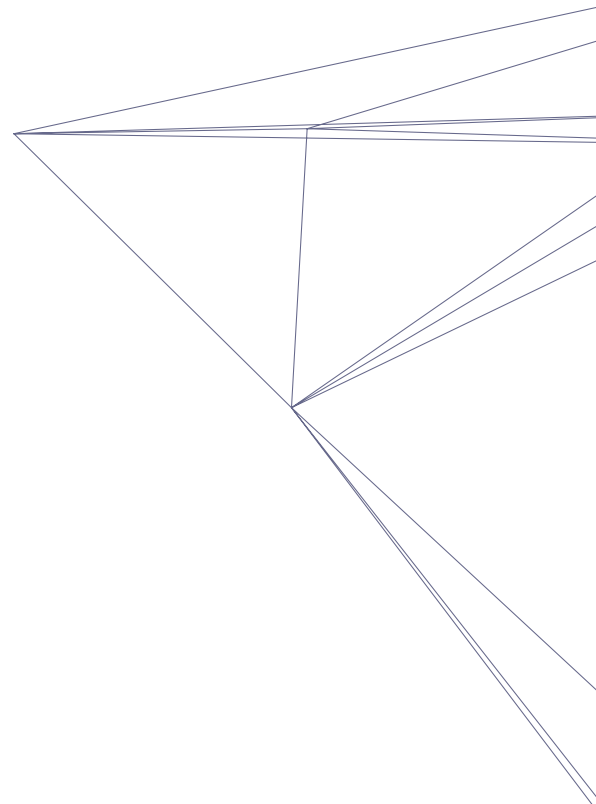
Are you looking for a mentor? Do ground-breaking technologies excite you?

Do you thrive in a team environment? This position will require you to be an accountable team player.

Match your qualifications to the requirements you've identified in the job posting. The table below demonstrates how a student matched their skills with the required qualifications from the job description above...

Job requirements	Related experience and skills
Interest in steel design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ I read about steel design in my free time▪ I watch online tutorials▪ I research projects related to steel design, and I am particularly interested in bridges
MS Excel and VBA knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ In my previous job, I developed a monthly sales report using Excel▪ I executed the macro with a single command, causing Excel to automatically perform many time-consuming procedures
AutoCAD	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ I have used SolidWorks in different school projects. My skills in SolidWorks can be easily transferred to AutoCAD
Strong technical writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ I have experience writing reports at school and received positive feedback from professors regarding my technical writing skills
Fluency in languages in addition to English is an asset	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Fluent in English, French, and Portugese both written and oral

When dissecting a job description, use the [Skills Matching Worksheet](#) to help you pinpoint your specific qualifications.



STEP 3

Find Your Hook

Introduction

Your introduction must capture the reader's interest and motivate them to continue reading your application. However, you should keep it simple. Do not use statements like:

Your company's tremendously noble environmental solutions create a better world for all who live in it, and I would love nothing more than to contribute my skills and knowledge to this worthy and honourable project.

as it will sound over the top to many employers. Also avoid the urge to disclose your childhood dreams to become an engineer since you were four years old, unless it directly relates to the company or the position you are applying for (perhaps your mom worked for the company and you have good memories of it, or you grew up close to a construction site, or you took apart your family's toaster by the age of six and put it back together in no time), you are better off using these strategies:

- **Leverage any personal contacts** you may have within the company, but first, ask for their permission; or mention a conversation you had with an employer during a networking event.
- **Mention any personal interactions you have had with the company;** maybe you used their products, or you are living in a building designed by them. Describe how these interactions have motivated you to apply for the job.
- **Show that you have specific knowledge about and interest in the organization.** You can impress an employer by demonstrating that you have taken the time to research the company. What is the recent news about this employer or their new projects?
- **What caught your attention in the job posting? Do you have the specific skills the employer is looking for?** You can mention it in your introduction and provide an example on your second paragraph.

Sample Opening Paragraphs:

*It was a pleasure to meet you last Thursday at UBC's Junior Reception and I am very excited about the possibility of joining your team as **Electrical Student**. After speaking with you, I learned a great deal about your organization and was particularly interested in the new automation project your company has recently launched. As a second year electrical engineering student, I am interested in the automation field and have developed skills in instrumentation and technical writing. Furthermore, I would bring to this position curiosity, the ability to learn quickly, and flexibility.*

*As a **computer engineering student** with a passion for software development and digital design, I am extremely interested in the Emulation Engineering position at Intel's Foundry Systems (IFS). I know the IFS group is an industry leader in the field of packaging and processing technology. Businesses across the globe rely on your systems to power their IP and computing needs. As such, I am excited for the chance to be part of and learn from the team who develops and tests these systems. With my experience developing Python programs, embedded systems, and digital systems, I am confident I can make high-quality contributions to the IFS group.*

*The main reason I decided to pursue civil engineering was to develop a career that could make a difference in the community, and I see no place better than the City of Vancouver to apply what I have learned to make a positive impact. As an environmentally conscious individual, I have always had an interest in green infrastructure, and I am excited to see the City of Vancouver achieve the Greenest City Action Plan in the coming years. My passion and enthusiasm for transportation engineering, as well as my knowledge of technical design and GIS software, will ensure that I am committed to the **Active Transportation Engineering Assistant II** position with the City. In addition, I have two years of experience in customer service which has prepared me to effectively communicate with the public.*

STEP 4

Provide Examples

Body Paragraphs

The body of your letter demonstrates how your skills, experience and personal attributes connect to the job requirements. It should provide real and specific examples to support that you are a qualified candidate for the position. You may be familiar with the **START** technique, it can help you create powerful and strong examples without missing any details of your story:

S - What was the **situation**? Set the scene and context.

T - What was the **task**? Your exact role(s) (e.g. What you were required to do and your responsibilities).

A - What concrete **action** did you take? Use "I" and not "we" statements.

R - What was the **result**? What did you achieve during the experience (quantitatively or qualitatively)?

T - What can be **transferred**? Skills you have gained and how it will be transferred to the position you are applying for.

You may also want to include some of the following information:

- Aim to demonstrate relevant work, volunteer, laboratory, project, and extracurricular experiences by providing one or two carefully chosen examples to demonstrate that you possess the necessary skills required for the position.
- If you don't have work, volunteer or extracurricular experiences, focus on relevant skills you developed as a student, through your courses; again, provide succinct and specific details so that you sound sincere and knowledgeable.
- Write about your research on the company and how your findings relate to you. (Advanced tip: if you can link your START example to the company through your research that will strengthen your unique connection to this employer).
- Avoid the excessive use of adjectives when describing your skills; instead, tell a story that demonstrates how you have used your skills in the past and let the employer make their own positive conclusions about you.

The following are sample body paragraphs using the START technique

[SITUATION] Last semester, I developed a Django web app for a machine learning course that detects if someone is wearing a mask correctly. **[TASK]** I enjoyed the uniqueness of this project as we were given the liberty to design and develop our innovative solutions. However, this also pushed my boundaries as I had not worked with frontend before. **[ACTION]** I learned how to implement UI designs using HTML, CSS, and Bootstrap as well as handling client-server requests. **[RESULT]** In the end, I was able to produce a perfect fit for our project, allowing users to upload their images and output the appropriate result. **[TRANSFER]** From this project, I gained very useful and important web development skills which I look forward to contributing to your team.

[SITUATION] During my last internship, I played a significant role in improving tools and components, gaining extensive experience with SolidWorks, as well as design verification and validation. **[TASK]** From concept through to prototype and full-scale testing, I developed a safer tool to pressure wash the core of an engine. **[ACTION]** I used GD&T techniques while making the technical drawings for this tool. I iteratively used the design process and focused on design for fabrication and assembly techniques, while maintaining the reliability of the tool. **[RESULT]** I conducted three incrementally complex tests before the tool could be used in full service and also obtained an internal certification for tool quality validation. **[TRANSFER]** I am confident that this experience would allow me to transition smoothly into a design environment and use SolidWorks proficiently.

Tip: Don't forget the transfer! It's your explanation of how your experience or skills relate to the job you are applying for.

STEP 5

Bring It All Together

Closing

The closing paragraph for any job you apply to should include information about how the employer can contact you, generally your phone number and e-mail.

Add an appreciative statement to the employer for taking the time to read your application, or a message of goodwill or positive regard for the company. Also, include a call to action inviting the employer to follow-up and if necessary, include your ability to relocate and travel, and mention any family connections in the area of relocation.

Sample closing paragraphs:

My experience in AutoCAD and data analysis will allow me to meaningfully contribute to ABC Engineering, quickly integrate with the team, and adapt to new technologies. I am enthusiastic about this opportunity and look forward to discussing it further with you. To arrange for an interview, please contact me at 604-123-1234 or first.last@gmail.com. Thank you for your time and consideration.

I also want to congratulate Arbutus' new project to make the ABC Stadium in Nanaimo, BC a reality. I am interested in learning more about its design and contribute my estimating skills to the construction management team. Additionally, I've previously lived in Nanaimo and would embrace the opportunity to return. To arrange for an interview, please contact me at 604-123-1234 or first.last@gmail.com. Thank you for your time.

STEP 6

Edit, Edit and Edit

Proofreading and Editing

Carefully proofread your cover letter and, as much as possible, have someone else read your letter and offer comments. Some employers will reject applications outright for errors, especially when claims about strong communication skills are followed by spelling or grammatical mistakes.

Get your cover letter flawless

- Book an appointment with an Engineering Career Peer Coach (ECPC) via [PD Portal](#).
- Ask a friend or two to proofread for you, or book a writing consultation at the Writing Center on Campus. A second set of eyes is necessary to catch things that you may not have noticed as the writer.
- Consider adding [Grammarly](#) to your MS Word.

It is important to know that people will have different opinions about your cover letter, and this is normal. However, you should own your writing and feel comfortable with the cover letter you have written, as this document will showcase your personality to employers. Writing cover letters is like learning any other skill, the more you practice the better you will become.

Resources

The links below are for resources referenced throughout this toolkit. If you have any challenges accessing the links, please contact an Engineering Career Peer Coach.

[Transferable Skills List](#)

[Skills Matching Worksheet](#)

[Checklist for a Powerful Cover Letter](#)