

Lucy's Guide to Cover Letters

So you need to write a cover letter for an internship or job, but don't know where to start. That's okay! The definition of a cover letter varies by field so it's completely normal to not know where to start if this is your first time writing a cover letter for a position related to psychology. I am going to break down the cover letter into five sections and tell you what to write in each section. This is specific to psychology but you can adapt it for other jobs by changing 'research experience' into 'job experience' and swapping out other relevant keywords. Once you get this format down, it will be easier to personalize your cover letter for each position you are applying to. There is nothing worse than receiving a generic cover letter that expresses no specific detail about the program for which you are applying. Also, make sure you take a look at the job posting so you are aware of what the requirements are beforehand! These are just my personal tips and in no way are they professional advice.

Dear Hiring Manager, ← I think it's best to personalize this for each position; when in doubt you can always put the PI/Lab Director's name here because they will more likely than not be reading your application.

Introduce yourself here in a few sentences. Explain why you were drawn to apply to this position. This section can be three to five sentences max. Think of it as your 'hook' - you want to make the hiring manager interested enough in you to read further.

Go into more detail about your relevant research or work experience. Discuss relevant projects you have worked on, what your role was with these projects, what findings you discovered, and what these findings made you curious about. Basically, you want to highlight what you have done so far and how it has inspired what you want to do in the future. This section should be roughly one to two paragraphs long, depending on how much experience you have. Even if you don't have much experience, try to draw parallels between any experience you do have or even anything you are interested in researching/working on and what inspired that interest.

This paragraph will serve to connect your research/work experience with the research/general focus of the lab or position you are applying to. This is where you will need to demonstrate that you have taken a look at the position requirements, read through the current research in the lab, and maybe even read a paper or two published from the lab. You will want to connect what you are interested in researching with what the lab is working on currently. This will show the hiring manager that you are a good fit for the position and have done your own research and taken that extra step. It is really important for hiring managers to receive personalized cover letters, so make sure this paragraph is specifically curated to each position you are applying to.

The final paragraph in the cover letter can serve as the 'so what' part of your cover letter. By that, I mean you want to let the hiring manager know why you think you would be a good fit for the position and state any skills you haven't mentioned yet in your cover letter. I think it is always a nice touch to mention that you look forward to speaking with (the hiring manager) soon, but that's not always necessary.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Your Email Address