

COVER LETTER CHECKLIST – WHITMAN COLLEGE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT CENTER

Content

Show That You Meet the Requirements

- Use the job description as a checklist for your letter. Try to address in depth how your experiences have prepared you for what seem like the three most important requirements and then mention or allude to how you meet or could develop the skills for as many of the other qualifications as possible.
- Provide solid examples as evidence, emphasizing what you accomplished with quantifiable details whenever possible (e.g. instead of “I helped market club events,” try something like “I designed three flyers to promote different parts of a campus symposium attended by 95 students.”)

Demonstrate Your Interest in the Organization

A cover letter is not only about how the job might benefit you or fit into your goals. It’s about how you want to contribute to the organization.

- Research the organization—its mission statement, the people who work there, the projects it undertakes.
- Refer to specific attributes of the organization and the position that piqued your interest.
- Indicate how you could support a specific initiative/department or how you fill a need of the organization.

Construction

Spelling and Grammar

Your cover letter demonstrates your written communication skills, so your writing should be technically sound.

Some common spelling and grammatical mistakes:

- Misspelled words that spell check won’t catch (e.g. form/from) or missing words (read the letter aloud to find these)
- Improper word choice (e.g. who/whom, there/their)
- Lack of agreement between nouns and verbs (e.g. “cats curls up” instead of “cat curls up” or “cats curl up”); inconsistent or incorrect verb tense
- Ending a sentence with a preposition
- Lack of parallelism (e.g. Wrong: For my birthday, I want a bicycle, a chocolate cake, and to go to the zoo. Correct: For my birthday, I want a bicycle, a chocolate cake, and a trip to the zoo.)
- Missing commas or commas in excess – watch for run-on sentences

Language - Formal vs. Informal

- Avoid slang, colloquialisms, or overly familiar language (e.g. Wrong: Dear Jen; Correct: Dear Ms. Eguchi).
- Explain what acronyms stand for the first time you use them (e.g. Student Engagement Center (SEC)).
- Do not write as you speak (no extraneous use of the word “like”) and avoid contractions (e.g. use “cannot” instead of “can’t”).

Word Choice – Remove Repetition

- Vary your sentence length and type (e.g. simple, compound and complex).
- Do not start all of your sentences with “I.”
- Expand on the stories behind the content of your resume; do not copy and paste the text from your resume bullet points.

Readability

A cover letter creates a narrative that augments the information on your resume and explains why you’re applying.

- An anecdote or example from a project/experience/internship/volunteering should have a beginning, middle, and end.
- Make sure you transition between your ideas; spell out how things are connected instead of relying on a reader to infer what you mean.
- Have someone else read your letter to see if your explanations make sense.