

HOW TO MAKE COVER LETTERS LESS PAINFUL



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Centre for Career
Development

WHOSE LAND ARE WE ON?

We respectfully acknowledge that we work on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Anishnaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, which includes ten kilometers on each side of the Grand River: land promised and never returned to the Six Nations.

Some incredible local community members on IG: Bangishimo Johnston @bangishimo, Amy Smoke @amysmoke, C. Elizabeth Best @lizbot5000

Support: O:se Kenhionhata:tie – Land Back Camp, @ose.kenhionhatatie on IG

Reports: TRC Calls to Action, National Inquiry into MMIWG

Reading: The Inconvenient Indian, 21 Things You May Not Have Known About the Indian Act, This Place: 150 Years Retold

What land are you on? native-land.ca

Learning opportunity:

INDG 201 The Indigenous Experience in Canada



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Centre for Career
Development

Checking In:



Share in the chat, if you're comfortable!

- A GIF (or emoji) that captures how you feel about cover letters!
- What is one *question* or *curiosity* you have about cover letter writing?



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Centre for Career
Development

Today's Roadmap

- Cover letter myth-busting
- (Why) do I need a cover letter?
- How to write a cover letter
- What skills are employers looking for?
- Going from skills identification to articulation
- Q&A



A Safe(r) Space

Going into this presentation, my intention is to create as safe a space as possible.

A safe space means different things for everyone, but we'll do our best! Let's keep 3 things in mind:

- **Choice**
- **Respect**
- **Care**



Photo by Dennis Leinarts from Pexels



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Centre for Career
Development

Housekeeping: co-creating a safe(r) space

- Participate in the way that feels most comfortable for you!
- Please use the chat or raise your virtual hand to ask questions during presentation time.
 - Feel free to send me a direct message if you have a question or comment you would like to share anonymously
- Ask questions in the chat whenever! We have dedicated time at the end for Q&A
- If having tech issues, we'll do our best to troubleshoot

Take what works for you, leave what doesn't.



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

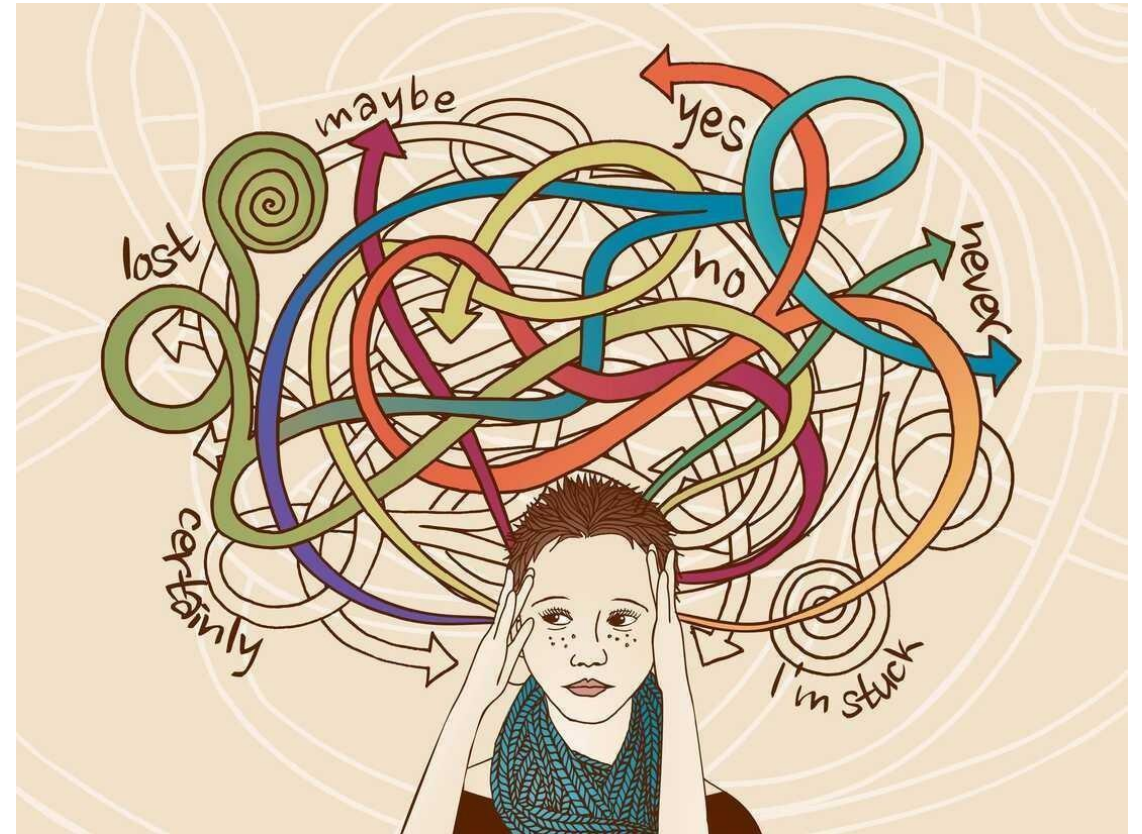
Centre for Career
Development



COVER LETTER MYTH BUSTING

Common Cover Letter Misconceptions

- Cover Letters are replicas of resumes
- Employers don't read cover letters
- Cover letters are time consuming
- Cover letters are a waste of my time



Stock photo from npr.org

Feel free to share in the chat: True or False? What ideas come up for you?



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Centre for Career
Development



(WHY) DO I NEED A COVER LETTER?

The Function of a Cover Letter



- Cover letter = bridge between resume and interview
- A place to...
 - Demonstrate your interest in the role & how you can contribute
 - Go into detail! (Skills, experiences, etc.)
 - A narrative tool to convey: *why this role? Why this company?*
 - Show you've done your research



Prioritizing Job Applications

Job Applications

High priority

Jobs that align very well with my interests/career goals

Mid-priority

Jobs that are appealing but not in complete alignment with my interests/career goals

Low priority

Jobs in minimal alignment with my interests/career goals

- When should I submit a cover letter?
- How much time should I invest tailoring my cover letter?
- Is it OK to submit a generic cover letter?



How Does a Cover Letter Benefit You?

- Ensures job fit
 - If you can't make your cover letter sound authentic, should you be applying?
- Articulates your career story
 - Helps us self-reflect & articulate our story across contexts (e.g. interviews, LinkedIn)
- Creates future opportunities
 - Deepen your understanding of the sector



The slide features several thick, geometric lines in red, teal, and yellow. A red line forms an L-shape in the top-left corner. A teal line forms an L-shape in the bottom-left corner. A yellow line runs vertically down the right side, with a teal line branching off it diagonally. A horizontal bar at the bottom is divided into teal, dark blue, and yellow sections.

CAPTIVATING COVER LETTERS!

What are some things we can do to make our cover letters stand out?

Please use the chat or raise your virtual hand to SHARE.

P.S. there are no right or wrong answers!

The background is a solid yellow color. It features several abstract geometric shapes: a red L-shaped bar in the top-left corner; a pink L-shaped bar below it on the left; a horizontal bar at the bottom composed of a pink segment on the left and a teal segment on the right; a blue curved bar on the right side that starts from the bottom and goes up; and a pink diagonal bar connecting the bottom pink segment to the blue curved bar. There are also thin horizontal bars of yellow and gold at the very top.

HOW TO WRITE A COVER LETTER

The Recipe:

One option: **Write your cover letter like a research paper!**

- Form a hypothesis: You [x] are perfect for the job [y] because...
- Show the “correlation” between y & x
- You choose the variables!
 - Interests? Values?
 - Skills? Experiences?
- Make the formula yours!



Another option...

Another option: **Write your cover letter like a creative writing project!**

- Set the context; create story
- Who are the key actors?
- What actions did you undertake?
- What skills did you use?
- What did you accomplish?
- Get creative! Applicable for all industries!



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Centre for Career
Development

Let's Talk Strategy...

STEP 1: Review the job description

- Reflect on 2-3 reasons you want the job
- Highlight key words / skills
- Pay attention to tone

STEP 2: Research

- Learn more about company: values, mission, etc.
- Consider scheduling an informational interview (informal chat with someone in the industry)

STEP 3: Start writing!

- Tailor the cover letter based on priority and capacity – mirror the job posting language!



Cover Letter Structure

❑ Opening

- Summarize how values/experience align with the company's requirements/mission/values
- Show enthusiasm by highlighting your reasons for applying
- Name the job you're applying to and how you found out about it

❑ Body

- 2-3 specific examples of why you're a good fit for the job
- Use **key words** from job posting

❑ Closing

- Reiterate your reason for applying
- Refer to your enclosed resume and provide contact information to follow-up

Your Name & Contact Information

 **John Doe**
VP, Finance & Operations
john.doe@gmail.com
416-821-9879
Toronto, Canada
linkedin.com/in/john.doe
john.doe

To:
Doris Johnson
Human Resources Manager
Optimal Workplace Inc. 321
Employment Avenue. Toronto,
Canada
21 September, 2018

Name & Address of Recipient

Date

Salutation

Dear Ms. Johnson,

As the Vice-President of Finance and Operations at a national food chain, I bring proven success in enhancing productivity and gaining an advantage when it comes to profit margins. My work spans companies and business units at varying stages of growth, from start-up to multinational organizations.

With over 20 years of achieving profitability and long-term growth, I seek to monitor budgets and sales numbers closely to identify areas for improvement. I am known for enhancing performance through technology upgrades, implementing best practices, and improving employee training protocols.

Examples of my achievements include:

- Drove successful launch of start-up organization through contemporary hiring practices, defining product implementation, and developing go-to-market strategies to achieve 50% margins and \$15M+ revenue within my first three years.
- Managed daily operations of a \$100M+ consumer goods department that introduced a complete line of products to the U.S. and Canada, improving profit margins by 14%.
- Proved a vital team member that conducted a complete leadership reorganization that resulted in a 10% improvement in productivity within the sales department and a 15% improvement within the technical team.

As a skilled professional with a CPA degree and a background in analyzing and improving sales numbers, I am confident I will prove an asset to your company and respectfully submit my application for your review. I would like to request a meeting to discuss how I can help meet your goals. I am available at your convenience and hope to hear from you soon.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
John Doe

Respects & Your Name

Opening: try a “hook”!

Body: how do your skills, values, attributes contribute & solve a need?

Closing

STRUCTURE OF A COVER LETTER



**WHAT SKILLS ARE EMPLOYERS
LOOKING FOR?**

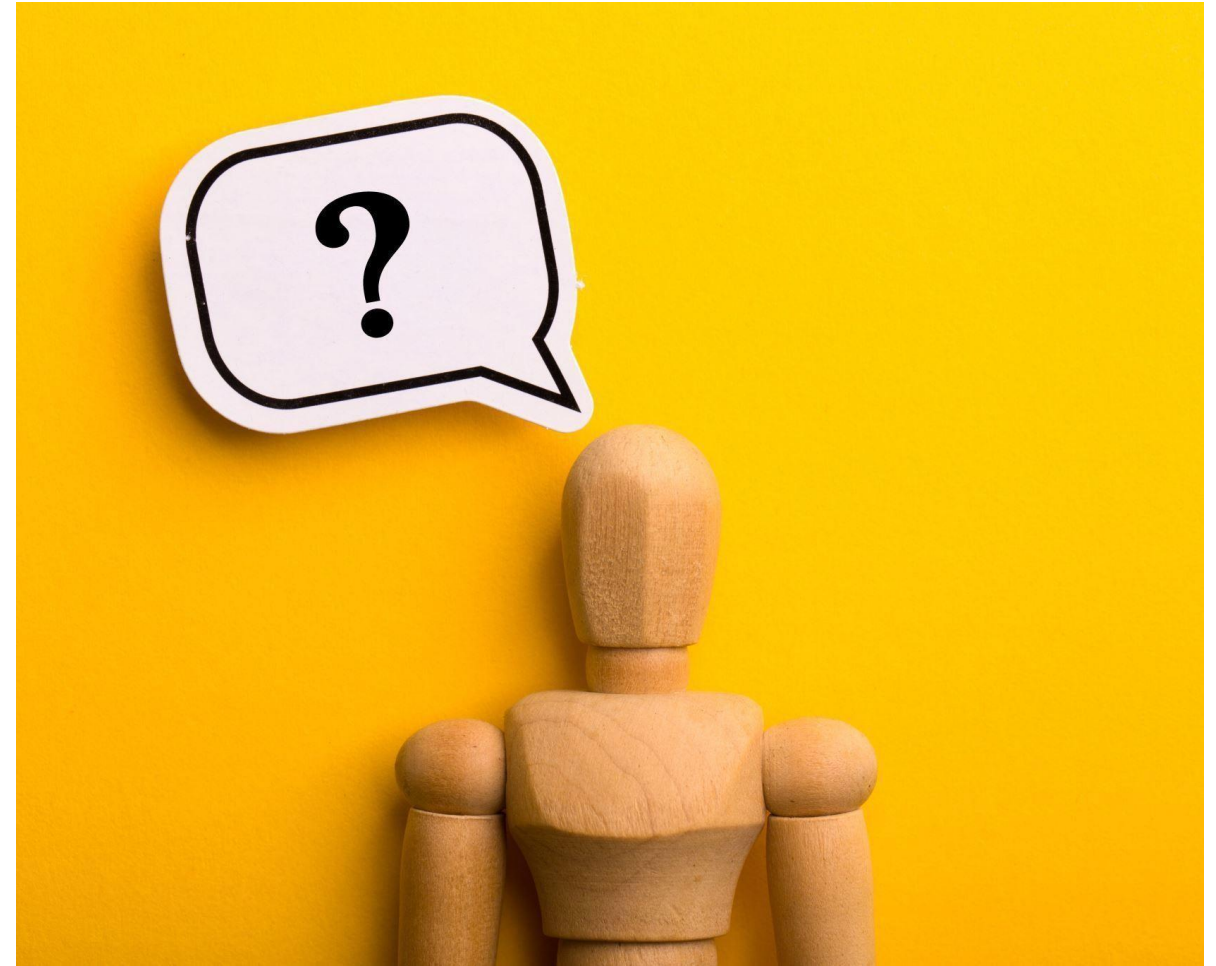
Making Your Case

Why are you a match for the job?

- Identify the employer's "wish list"
- Identify your skills & experiences
- Create a table if it helps!

Connect the dots for the employer!

- Draw a line between academics, work experience, projects, etc for them



Identify Skills Required

What required skills can you identify?

Library Shelver – Job Posting

We're looking for individuals with exceptional eyes for detail to step into the inner workings of our library system. At WPL, Shelves play an important role in our day- to-day operations with their knack for process, friendly faces, and their ability to keep things impeccably neat and tidy to allow our customers to have a superb library experience.



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Centre for Career
Development

Identify Required Skills

What you'll do:

- Use automated sorter to check in and sort materials
- Shelve materials in the library according to the Dewey Decimal System
- Maintain a tidy library space
- Be a friendly face to customers by responding to basic questions and referring them to our staff

What we're looking for:

- Highly detail-oriented individuals with a flair for neatness and organization
- Warm and friendly personalities who keep the customer always in mind
- Responsible and dependable individuals that can work with minimal supervision
- People who enjoy a job with both physical and mental demands



Match Your Experiences

Job requirement	Evidence that I meet them
Attention to detail	Citing research
Warm and friendly	Teaching assistant
Physical and mental demands	UWaterloo swim team member
Minimal supervision / dependable	Independent research
Neat and tidy	Organizing books and journals



How might we improve this piece?

"As a graduate student, I have the interpersonal skills necessary for this job. As a member of the swim team, I also have the abilities needed to physically carry and shelve materials. Having worked as a content writer with marketing experience, a major portion of my work involved writing articles and reports as well as managing meetings with clients situated in Australia, Europe, UK and the US, so I have the communication skills needed for this position as well."

Key words: attention to detail, neat and tidy, physical and mental demands, responsible and dependable, minimal supervision, warm and friendly personality



The Re-write

"My experience as a graduate student at the University of Waterloo has equipped me with the skills needed to be a **dependable** member of the shelving team. In my independent research, I need to stay organized with all the books and journals I reference and pay **detailed attention** to the current research in my field – all with **minimal supervision**. As a teaching assistant, I also support 25+ students every term with their coursework. My teaching evaluations indicate that my **warm and friendly personality** makes students feel comfortable approaching me with questions and concerns. I believe these interpersonal skills will be an asset in this customer-facing role."

Key words: **attention to detail**, neat and tidy, physical and mental demands, responsible and **dependable**, **minimal supervision**, **warm and friendly personality**





FROM IDENTIFICATION TO ARTICULATION

How can you demonstrate that you have these skills?

The Body Paragraph(s)



- Show, don't tell
- Use specific examples!
- Use S.T.A.R. approach to structure examples
 - **S**ituation (What, when, who, why, where?)
 - **T**ask (what action did you take?)
 - **A**ction (What skills did you use?)
 - **R**esult (What was the outcome?)





WHAT'S MISSING?

“I am able to work effectively as part of a team.”

Please use the chat or unmute to SHARE.

P.S. there are no right or wrong answers!

Show, Don't Tell

Telling

“I am able to work effectively as part of a team.”

Showing

Situation	In my mechanical engineering class this year,
Task	I was required to collaborate with my peers on building a functional robot.
Action	As team lead, I leveraged my project management skills to delegate tasks as well as my communication skills to resolve inter-personal conflicts.
Result	We received top marks and our prototype will be used as an example for future classes.

Smart Tailoring

- Don't write every cover letter from scratch!
- Look for patterns and recurring key words in job postings
- Try out the Lego approach:
 - Paragraphs = building blocks
 - Swap out the opening and closing paragraphs
 - Prepare multiple middle paragraphs to pick and choose from



WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

These workshops are for you! We are always looking for ways to improve. Please complete the feedback survey delivered to your inbox after this session.



The background is a solid yellow color. It features several abstract geometric shapes: a red L-shaped block in the top-left; a pink L-shaped block below it; a horizontal pink bar at the bottom-left; a horizontal teal bar at the bottom-center; a pink diagonal bar on the bottom-right; and a thick blue curved line on the far right. The word "TAKEAWAYS" is centered in the middle of the image.

TAKEAWAYS

What's one learning you will take away from today?

Please use the chat or unmute to SHARE.

P.S. there are no right or wrong answers!

Key Takeaways

- Employers are busy – make your cover letter stand out!
- The process of writing cover letters benefits YOU
- Tailor your cover letters – efficiently!
- Study the job description carefully
 - Match your skills/experience with what they're looking for!
- Show don't tell
 - Use the S.T.A.R. model



SUPPORTS & RESOURCES

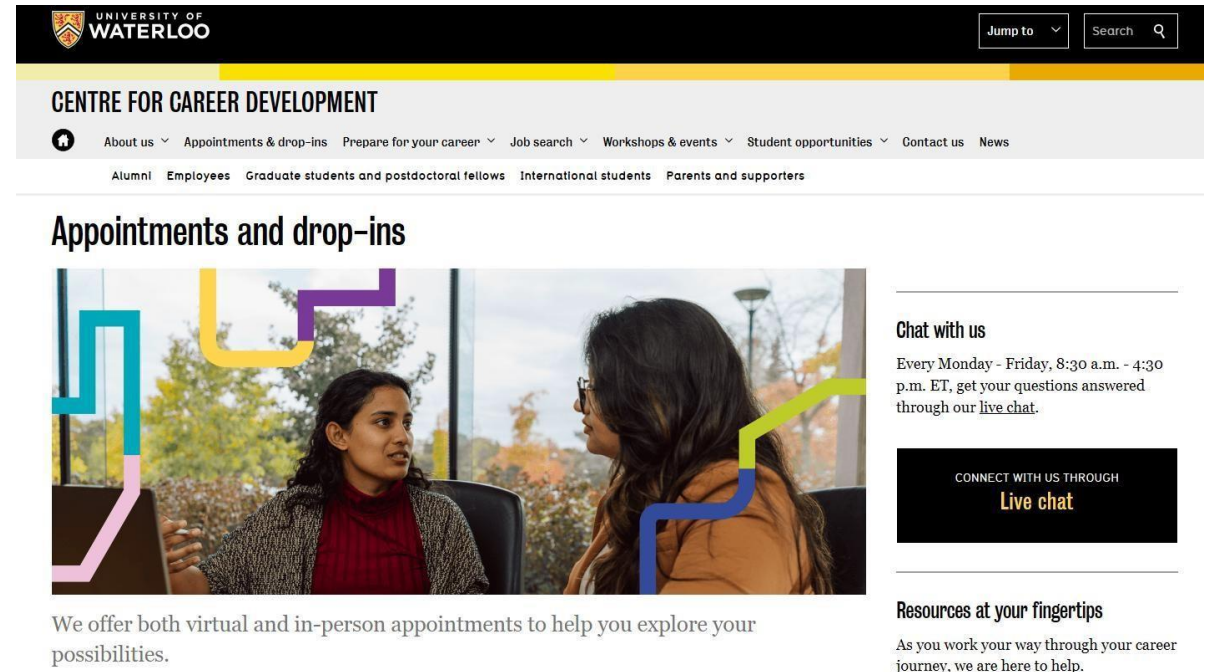
A Note on Safety and Disclosure in CL's

- **Social safety:** you *can* share, but you don't *have* to share
- **Emotional safety:** what is coming up for you when writing this cover letter?
- **Accommodations:** can be requested through the company's Human Resources department
- Protected grounds from the **Ontario Human Rights Code:**
 - “Age, Ancestry, Colour, Race, Citizenship, Ethnic Origin, Place of Origin, Creed, Disability, Family Status, Marital Status, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Receipt of public Assistance, Record of Offences, Sex, Sexual Orientation” The Ontario Human Rights Code | Ontario Human Rights Commission (ohrc.on.ca)



Additional Support

- Visit the Centre for Career Development (virtually or in-person) for one-on-one support with your job search and application documents, including **resumes & cover letters**
- 30-60 minute appointments
- Ongoing workshop offerings (WW)
- <https://uwaterloo.ca/career-development/appointments-drop-ins>



The screenshot shows the website for the University of Waterloo's Centre for Career Development. The header features the university's logo and a navigation menu with links such as 'About us', 'Appointments & drop-ins', 'Prepare for your career', 'Job search', 'Workshops & events', 'Student opportunities', 'Contact us', and 'News'. Below the header, the page is titled 'Appointments and drop-ins' and includes a photograph of two students in a meeting. To the right of the photo, there is a 'Chat with us' section with a live chat button and a 'Resources at your fingertips' section with a link to career resources.


UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

CENTRE FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

About us Appointments & drop-ins Prepare for your career Job search Workshops & events Student opportunities Contact us News

Alumni Employees Graduate students and postdoctoral fellows International students Parents and supporters

Appointments and drop-ins



Chat with us

Every Monday - Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. ET, get your questions answered through our [live chat](#).

CONNECT WITH US THROUGH
Live chat

Resources at your fingertips

As you work your way through your career journey, we are here to help.



QUESTIONS?

**UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO**



**Centre for Career
Development**