



My Guide To Writing A Killer Cover Letter

Career

Most people think a cover letter is about themselves. This isn't true.

A cover letter is a marketing tool. Treat it like one and you'll see it do wonders. Treat it like an autobiography and you'll wonder why no one gets back to you.

Here's the cover letter formula that got me my current job:

1. Analyzing the job description
2. Identifying what to include in your cover letter
3. Why do you want to work here?
4. Writing the cover letter

Before we get started: this is a long post (~3000 words). If you'd rather get a free PDF copy of it, feel free to [drop your email](#) here and I'll be sending it next week.

1/ Analyzing the job description

Always write a cover letter from scratch. It's better to apply for five relevant positions with a complementing cover letter than to apply for fifty positions without any background research.

The best way to do this is to start by analyzing the job description.

A job description is composed of two parts:

1. What you'll do
2. What the company is looking for (i.e qualifications)

First, focus on the "what you'll do" portion. The first few bullets are the most important. And we need to make sure that they're addressed in our cover letter. Start highlighting the ones you have experience carrying out.

Analyzing a Job Description

What You'll Do

- Conduct exploratory analysis to understand user activities and trends; identify new opportunities to help move key metrics.
- Design, implement, and analyze experiments to evaluate product and feature changes
- Apply statistical and ML techniques to model user behavior, identify causal impact, and predict future outcomes.
- Build pipelines and other infrastructure to enable analytics and modeling needs
- Regularly present data-based recommendations, state of business, experiment results, etc. to cross-functional teams. Spread best practices to advocate for a data-driven culture

Qualifications

- 2-4 years of experience in a quantitative data science role
- Experience with building machine learning algorithms to solve business problems
- Experience with A/B testing and other casual inference methods
- Strong proficiency with SQL and Python / R
- Advanced degree in a quantitative field

Most Important Tasks

Less Important

Negotiable

Next, take a look at the qualifications. Note down the ones you can comfortably meet and ignore any you don't. We also want to highlight the 'preferred' or 'nice-to-have' items listed in the job posting if you satisfy those.

Quick note: Qualifications are always negotiable and should never deter you from applying if you think you're almost there but missing a few requirements.

Soft Requirements In A Job Description

Years of experience

2-4 years of experience in a quantitative data science role

Familiarity with

Familiarity with elements of the "creator economy"

Degree Type

- **Advanced degree** in a **quantitative field**

... is a plus

Experience in the retail /e-commerce domain **is a plus.**

Make sure to note all these skills you've highlighted in the job description down. We're now ready to move onto our next step.

2/ Identifying what to include in your cover letter

Create a table with two columns. In the left column jot down the highlighted skills you identified in the above section. And now in the right column, start writing down how you can match up to the advertised qualifications.

Here's an example for my latest role. Notice how I try to use as many of the same words as the job description:

Use their language

Role: Solutions Engineer

Advertised Requirements

2+ years experience integrating with web APIs. Experience with modern web frameworks a plus (React, Node.js, etc)

Proven ability to quickly learn new technologies and understand complex systems (APIs, databases, SDK's, etc.)

Excellent communication skills; comfortable leading meetings with executives.

My Qualifications

Built web applications using Node.js and Ruby on Rails, integrated with the Chess.com API and the Twitter API. Did this for 2 years through online programming school.

Learnt how to work with PostgreSQL, different APIs (also listed above), and extension SDKs at Launch School.

I have held talks with executives as an Account Manager at MOLOCO; something I really enjoy doing and have grown my book of business from 0 to \$2mm / month in 1 year.

For now, just put down the qualifications without any regard for style. Also, you don't need qualifications for all the requirements. We're only going to use the top two anyway.

Struggling to come up with qualifications? Try to ask your co-workers or peers about projects they've enjoyed working with you on. Keeping a [brag document](#) can also be really helpful.

And try to speak the employer's language. So if a job description mentions "QuickBooks," don't just say you've used "accounting software".

3/ Why do you want to work here?

You're a great fit for the role. Now you have to convince them that you want to work there.

Realize that this is just a research based question. If you do enough research, you will find information about the company that you can link back to your own interests and goals.

To help you do research, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the company's mission?
- What problem are they trying to solve?
- What's the product?
- What's unique about this company compared to its competitors?
- What are some policies or values that the company has that they feature on their homepage?
- Describe any of the organization's community engagement projects or employee development programs.

A great place to find more info is to look at interviews that their founders or executives have done. Another is the company's blog.

Once you've done your research, list out *why* you find each answer to the above questions appealing. What is it about rockets that appeals to you? Why is a video messaging platform one you can connect with?

And if you've been using their product, that enthusiasm will shine through. It's not mandatory and it's not even common, but when it does happen, you have a great reason for why you want to work at the company.

4/ Writing the cover letter

We're going to use the following format for your cover letter:

(i) Who you are, what you want, and what you believe in.

(ii) Transition

(iii). Skill & Qualification Match

(vi) Why do you want to work there?

(v) Conclusion

(i) Who you are, what you want, and what you believe in

Use the first one or two sentences to make some statements about who you are, what you want, and what you believe in. Here are some good examples:

Who You Are, What You Want, and What You Believe In

Include at least 2 of these statements when starting your cover letter.

I'm a client facing Solutions Engineer with over 2.5 years of experience and I'd love to learn more about your growing engineering team.

I'm a technical, hands-on product owner and an advocate for agile methods, transparency, and collaboration among customers, engineers, and product managers. I'm excited to learn about Notion and specifically the enterprise product roadmap.

I'm a creative Data Scientist with 5 years of experience looking to expand my interests into blockchain after having worked on the CryptoRaiders open-source project over the past few months.

I'm a product focused Software Engineer with startup experience who loves to build secure, reliable, and user friendly web applications that can scale. I'd like to learn more about your growing engineering team.

Emphasize your strengths and also ideally mention something specific to the company.

Mine would be:

Over the last 12 months, I've helped my company generate over \$X in revenue by leading meetings with executive leaders and also built a variety of web applications on the side.

And now I'm excited to continue my journey by contributing and growing at Adyen. There are three things that make me the perfect fit for this position:

Here are some examples that differentiate weak and better summary statements:

Summary Statements



Weak

Better

Image from r/datascience - My Guide To Writing A Killer Cover Letter

Over the last 3 years, I've worked at Uber and helped solve problems in the ML space.

Over the last 3 years, I've worked on applied ML problems in rider personalization to help increase Uber's revenue in the X vertical by 15% annually.

Over the last few months, I've helped launch a few products that have been well received.

Over the last 9 months, I've helped ship over three core products by collaborating with the engineering team and improving our NPS by 2 points.

Over the past year, I've worked on fraud solutions that have helped our merchants save money.

Over the past year, I've built out a fraud analytics tool that has helped our clients save over \$100k and become our team lead for analyzing impression log data.

Over the past 2 years, I've helped make Microsoft Azure services easier to use and also implemented some new features.

Over the past 2 years, I've increased feature usage and feedback ratings at Microsoft Azure by 80% and 10%, and shipped a new platform capability, providing a consistent troubleshooting experience for over 100 Azure services.

Avoid jargon and get specific. Half the words, twice the examples. Ideally with a few numbers sprinkled in.

Quick Note: The summary statement is also great to add to the top of your LinkedIn bio.

(ii) Skill & Qualification Match

Go back to your table matching your qualifications to the requirements. Pick the two most important ones.

We're going to link your qualifications to a theme. And then use that to transform your boring bullet points into exciting sentences.

Here are eight common interview story themes:

1. Leading People
2. Taking initiative
3. Affinity for challenging work
4. Affinity for different types of work
5. Affinity for specific work
6. Dealing with failure
7. Managing conflict
8. Driven by curiosity

Let's say we ended up with the below table when analyzing a specific job description.

Use their language		Role: Product Manager	
Advertised Requirements		My Qualifications	
Work with clients to define vision and scope of the project and effectively communicate the vision to the creative and development teams.		Conducted Feature-Mapping and Requirements Gathering sessions with prospective and existing clients to formulate Scope and Backlog. Responsible for managing and creating backlog, writing stories and acceptance criteria for all managed projects.	
Collaborate with the development team to define, design , accept and adapt features; Ensure each iteration delivers expected results.		Wrote and prioritized backlog and held Project Kickoff sessions between design and development . Scheduled and ran all Scrum ceremony meetings. Tracked release, burn-up charts, and business KPIs.	
Proactively manage and prioritize a backlog according to business value, complexity, and expectations.			

And let's take our first qualification:

Conducted Feature-Mapping and Requirements Gathering sessions with prospective and existing clients to formulate Scope and Backlog. Responsible for managing and creating backlog, writing stories and acceptance criteria for all managed projects.

Let's figure out how we can link this to one of the interview story themes:

Let's figure out how we can link this to one of the interview story themes:

Mapping qualifications to themes (Ex #1)

Example Qualifications

Conducted Feature-Mapping and Requirements Gathering sessions with prospective and existing clients to formulate Scope and Backlog. Responsible for managing and creating backlog, writing stories and acceptance criteria for all managed projects.

Link

This person likely had to ask a bunch of questions and probe for information.

This person had to do both technical work and non-technical work

Themes

- Leading People
- Taking initiative
- Affinity for challenging work
- Affinity for different types of work
- Affinity for specific work
- Dealing with failure
- Managing conflict
- Driven by curiosity

And here's another example:

Mapping qualifications to themes (Ex #2)

Example Qualifications

Held talks with executives and focused on presenting confidently and making data driven decisions to help clients grow their revenue. Also coordinated requests internally between different teams, helping prioritize effectively.

Link

This person led a bunch of projects with different stakeholders to completion.

This person had to prioritize and say no to different teams.

Themes

- Leading People
- Taking initiative
- Affinity for challenging work
- Affinity for different types of work
- Affinity for specific work
- Dealing with failure
- Managing conflict
- Driven by curiosity

So what we've done here is abstracted some themes from this person's actual qualifications.

I know this isn't super scientific. More themes than just one work for most qualifications. But the goal is to help you solidify the type of story you want to tell.

And now that you have your theme, you can use it to guide your body paragraphs using this format:

Body paragraph format

- 1/ **Theme** ----> The one you just mapped from your qualifications.
- 2/ **Context** ----> Set the scene.
- 3/ **What did you do?** ----> Be as specific as possible.
- 4/ **Why it matters** ----> What have you gained?

Example Role: Solutions Engineer

Example Theme: Driven by curiosity

I've always been intellectually curious about understanding how things work. As an Account Manager at a machine learning startup, I wanted to push myself and understand the technical elements of my day to day. I enrolled in an online Software Engineering school and have since built multiple full stack web applications. These technical skills that I've built up have helped me become the go-to person on my team to help debug technical issues and also explain complex concepts to different team members.

Some more examples:

Image from r/datascience - My Guide To Writing A Killer Cover Letter

Example Role: Data Scientist

Example Theme: Taking Initiative

I like to go above and beyond in whatever I do. As one of the youngest data scientists at my startup, I had the opportunity to help investigate fraud analytics within our company's platform. Instead of just reporting my findings to my boss, I created a full company wide document pertaining to our best practices and effective ways to combat fraud after doing a week of extensive research. This helped my team members respond to hundreds of client requests by just referencing the document and also helped completely pivot the company's fraud strategy.

Example Role: Product Manager

Example Theme: Managing Conflict

Producing great work often requires fierce debate. As a Product Manager at X, I learned to invite discussion and different viewpoints rather than just focusing on the metrics. For example, instead of just taking our high email popup conversion rates for granted, I consulted our UX Designer who argued that the numbers were misleading. By focusing on our higher level vision of being customer obsessed, I was able to make a decision that made everyone feel aligned and helped improve our product, even though the initial path forward was unclear.

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(vi) Why do you want to work there?

Pick your two most favorite aspects about the company that you already found when doing your research. I like to pick one value driven one and one industry or current topic related. If you use their product, though, that should be first on your list.

If you want to check out some examples for this, you can do that [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

Now that you've got two reasons, it's time to craft together a simple paragraph that weaves them together:

Third, I've been following [COMPANY] for a couple of months now and I resonate with both the company's values and its general direction. The [Insert Value] really stands out to me because [Insert Reason]. I also recently read that [Insert topical reason] and this appeals to me because [Why it appeals to you].

Realize that this part is your chance to bring out what you like about the company. And if you can't really think of anything, maybe you need to rethink why you're actually applying.

(vi) Conclusion

Simply state what you want and why you want it:

I think you'll find that my experience is a really good fit for [COMPANY] and specifically this position. I'm ready to take my skills to the next level with your team and look forward to hearing back.

Thanks,

Your name

Putting it together

Combing everything, here's what my cover letter for my current job looked like:

My Cover Letter

Intro
Statement

I am a customer focused and creative Technical Account Manager with over 2 years of experience interested in learning more about Adyen's Implementation Team.

Transition
(including
Summary
Statement)

Over the last two and a half years, I've helped my company generate over \$10M in revenue by leading meetings with executive leaders and also built a variety of web applications on the side.

And now I'm excited to continue my journey by contributing and growing at Adyen. There are three things that make me the perfect fit for this position:

Skill &
Qualification
Match

First, I've always been intellectually curious about understanding how things work and the technology sector. As an Account Manager at a Machine Learning startup, I wanted to push myself and understand the technical elements of my day to day. I enrolled in an online Software Engineering program on the side and 2 years later, I've built multiple full stack web applications that interact with web APIs like Twitter and Clearbit. These technical skills that I've built up have helped me become the go-to person on my team to help debug technical issues.

Second, I have plenty of experience leading meetings with high level executives. I've managed delicate situations pertaining to data privacy sharing, successfully upsold additional revenue streams on the back of data analysis, and run Quarterly Business Reviews where I've had to think quickly on my feet. As the company scaled from 50 to 250 employees, I've also taken on increased responsibility including the mentoring of junior team members.

Why the
company?

Finally, I'm excited about Adyen's vision and core values. As a global citizen (I've lived on 3 continents), I recognize the importance of diversity towards innovation and want to work at a company that embodies this. Having worked with multiple clients in the Fintech space over the past year, I've also become interested in payments and the opportunity to help some of the fastest growing companies in the world continue to scale.

Wrapping
up

I think you'll find that my experience is a really good fit for Adyen and specifically this position. I'm ready to take my skills to the next level with your team and look forward to hearing back.

Thanks,
Shikhar

(ii) Transition

I like to link the intro in my cover letter to the first skill-qualification match by having a summary statement and attaching it to a generic sentence:

The Transition

Over the last X years / months, I've [Cover your most relevant role / professional achievement with a clear sense of the impact you made].

And now I'm excited to continue my journey by contributing and growing at [COMPANY]. There are three things that make me the perfect fit for this position:

The first sentence summarizes what you will bring to the company. The second helps flow into the experiences you're about to write about.