

ATS-Friendly Cover Letter Checklist

Use this checklist **before submitting any job application** to ensure your cover letter is ATS-safe, readable, and recruiter-ready.

STEP 1: ATS BASICS (FOUNDATION)

- ☐ I understand that my cover letter will be scanned by ATS before a human sees it
- ☐ My goal is relevance and clarity, not design or creativity
- ☐ I avoided graphics, icons, charts, tables, and text boxes

STEP 2: JOB DESCRIPTION & KEYWORDS

- ☐ I copied the **exact job title** from the job posting
- ☐ I identified **core skills and tools** mentioned in the description
- ☐ I noted common action verbs (e.g., manage, analyze, coordinate, teach)
- ☐ I naturally included relevant keywords in my cover letter
- ☐ I did NOT stuff keywords unnaturally

STEP 3: ATS-SAFE STRUCTURE

- ☐ My cover letter follows a simple structure
- ☐ Header is plain text (Name, phone, email, location)
- ☐ I used a clear greeting (e.g., Dear Hiring Manager)
- ☐ Body contains **3–4 short paragraphs only**
- ☐ Content flows from introduction → experience → value → closing

STEP 4: OPENING PARAGRAPH CHECK

- ☐ I mentioned the **exact job title** in the first paragraph
- ☐ I clearly stated why I am a strong match
- ☐ I included at least **1–2 relevant keywords** early
- ☐ My opening avoids generic phrases like “I am writing to apply...”

STEP 5: BODY PARAGRAPH OPTIMIZATION

- ☐ I linked skills directly to real tasks or results
- ☐ I included relevant tools, systems, or methodologies
- ☐ I used numbers or impact where possible

- ☐ My content complements my resume (does not repeat it word-for-word)
- ☐ My tone is professional, direct, and clear

STEP 6: FORMATTING & FILE TYPE

- ☐ Font used: Arial, Calibri, or Times New Roman
- ☐ Font size is between **10.5 – 12 pt**
- ☐ Text is left-aligned
- ☐ Line spacing is single or 1.15
- ☐ No emojis, colors, or special symbols
- ☐ File format is **.DOCX** (or PDF if explicitly allowed)

STEP 7: FINAL ATS VERIFICATION

- ☐ My cover letter keywords match my resume keywords
- ☐ Job title is consistent across resume and cover letter
- ☐ My file name is professional and specific

Correct file name example:

- ☐ `FirstName_LastName_JobTitle_Cover_Letter.docx`

FINAL CONFIDENCE CHECK

- ☐ This cover letter can be read cleanly by ATS software
- ☐ A recruiter can quickly understand my value
- ☐ My letter is tailored for THIS job—not generic
- ☐ I am confident it will pass ATS screening

 **If all boxes are checked, your cover letter is ATS-ready.**

Print this checklist, keep it on your desk, or save it as a PDF—and **never submit a weak cover letter again.**

ATS COVER LETTER SELF-AUDIT SCORECARD (0–100)

Use this scorecard **after writing your cover letter**. Be honest—ATS systems are.

1 STRUCTURE & READABILITY (25 POINTS)

- ☐ Single-column, no tables or text boxes (5 pts)
- ☐ Clear header with name, phone, email (5 pts)
- ☐ 3–4 short paragraphs only (5 pts)

- ☐ Standard font (Arial, Calibri, Times New Roman) (5 pts)
- ☐ Left-aligned, clean spacing (5 pts)

Subtotal: ____ /25

2 KEYWORD & ROLE ALIGNMENT (30 POINTS)

- ☐ Exact job title used in opening paragraph (10 pts)
- ☐ Core skills from job description included naturally (10 pts)
- ☐ Keywords align with resume keywords (5 pts)
- ☐ No keyword stuffing or repetition abuse (5 pts)

Subtotal: ____ /30

3 CONTENT QUALITY & RELEVANCE (25 POINTS)

- ☐ Opening paragraph shows immediate relevance (5 pts)
- ☐ Skills are linked to real tasks or experience (10 pts)
- ☐ Industry-specific terminology used correctly (5 pts)
- ☐ Content is tailored for this role, not generic (5 pts)

Subtotal: ____ /25

4 TECHNICAL & SUBMISSION SAFETY (20 POINTS)


- ☐ File format is .DOCX (or PDF if allowed) (10 pts)
- ☐ Professional file name used (5 pts)
- ☐ No images, icons, headers, footers, or graphics (5 pts)

Subtotal: ____ /20

 **FINAL SCORE:** ____ /100

HOW TO INTERPRET YOUR SCORE

- **85–100** → ATS-Strong (Excellent submission)
- **70–84** → ATS-Safe (Minor improvements needed)
- **50–69** → ATS-Risky (Likely ranking issues)
- **Below 50** → ATS-Fail (Rewrite before submitting)

 *If your score is below 85, revise before applying.*