



COVER LETTER WRITING GUIDE

What is the Purpose of a Cover Letter?

Your cover letter is one of the ways to market yourself to a potential employer by highlighting the skills, experiences, and qualities that make you a strong fit for that company and position.

4 Steps to Writing a Compelling Cover Letter:

1. Before writing your cover letter, research the company.

What are its mission and values? What clients does the organization serve? What challenges does it face? What are the company's goals? What are they known for? What are their recent achievements?

Understanding the organization helps you position yourself as someone who will contribute to its success.

2. Before writing your cover letter, use the job description as a guide.

Closely review sections such as “Desired Qualifications” and “Job Responsibilities.” *What key words are used? What specific skills are being sought? What capabilities are necessary in order to be successful in the position? Identify the top 2-3 things the employer is looking for in a candidate.*

3. Prove it: align your skills and experiences with the job description.

Your goal is not to *tell* an employer that you have the skills/experiences they're looking for, but to *prove* it using specific examples. Using the top 2-3 things the employer is looking for, ask yourself: “What have I done that demonstrates I possess this skill, experience, or quality?”

4. Follow the cover letter format to structure a professional letter.

Now it's time to start writing! Use the format and section-by-section details on the next page.

Key Things to Remember:

- **Focus on the company's needs.** A common mistake is focusing on what you hope to gain out of the experience instead of what you will bring to the organization. Employers are interested in how you will help their company achieve its goals, NOT what the position can do for you!
- **Tailor each cover letter to the position.** You will write a unique, tailored cover letter for each position to which you apply. Express what excites you about the specific company/position.
- **One page: keep it concise.** Focus only on the skills and experiences that are most relevant to the position. The letter should be one page maximum and should include plenty of white space. Do not discourage the employer from reading the letter because it is too long/“text-heavy” or includes irrelevant information.
- **Use key words.** Incorporate exact wording from the position description into your cover letter – don't make the recruiter guess whether “managed finances” is the same thing as “allocated funds.”
- **Proofread.** And then proofread again. Spellcheck is not foolproof! Have 2 people review your cover letter to ensure that there are no spelling or grammatical errors you may have overlooked.
- **Take the initiative.** Unless an employer specifically requests that you do not send a cover letter, include one (even if it is not required). Taking the time to write a cover letter demonstrates your genuine interest and gives you the opportunity to expand on the most relevant information from your resume.

Use the same header that's on your resume for a consistent look.

FIRST NAME & LAST NAME

Street, Apt. • City, ST Zip • telephone • email • LinkedIn address

Date

Ms. / Mr. First and Last Name

Title

Company

Street

City, State ZIP

Address your cover letter to a specific person if possible. If you don't have that info, do some research! If you can't find it, you can omit the first 2 lines.

TIP: Begin your letter with an interesting opener that will grab the employer's attention. Do NOT start with "My name is ___ and I'm applying for ___." The first line of your cover letter should make you stand out from other applicants and encourage the employer to keep reading!

Dear Ms. / Mr. Last Name:

If you don't have the name of a specific person, use- Dear Hiring Manager:

Paragraph #1: INTRO

The following information should be included in the first paragraph:

- Start with a HOOK. Demonstrate research of the company. Why are you interested in this position/company? Be specific and tie your interest back to your experience (ex: a company initiative that is related to work you do with a student organization). Do NOT simply cut and paste a blurb from the website.
- The position for which you are applying (if you are not applying to a specific position, include your areas of interest within the organization).
- If you learned about the position/company through a personal connection (ex: a recruiter, GW alum, guest speaker in one of your classes, family friend), mention the person's name if they are OK with that; DO NOT exaggerate the relationship. If you are writing to someone you already know, remind them of how you know each other.
- Where you go to school, what degree you're earning, & what year you are.

Paragraph #2: PROVE YOU HAVE RELEVANT EXPERIENCE (This can be 2 short paragraphs)

- Choose 2-3 specific examples you can include that *prove* to the employer that you have the top 2-3 things the employer is looking for based on the job description.
- Do NOT start the paragraph with a "filler sentence" (ex: "I believe my internship and academic experience have prepared me well for this position"). Your first sentence should get to the point quickly and should include something interesting that makes the employer want to keep reading (ex: "In my recent Entrepreneurship class, I created a business plan with a team for a gaming app called Pokémon Go that also promotes activity/exercise").
- Do NOT copy the bullet points from your resume! Your cover letter allows you to talk about your accomplishments in more of a narrative/story form and can include more detail than your resume bullet points.
- Your examples can come from work experience, internships, campus leadership positions, course projects/papers, volunteer experience, or entrepreneurial activities.
- You can divide this section into two paragraphs if you have a great deal of relevant experience, but make sure that the MOST relevant experience appears first. You can also use bullet points to emphasize your relevant qualifications in this section, but do not copy/paste from your resume.

Paragraph #3: CLOSING

- Briefly summarize your qualifications for the "final sell."
- State that you are very interested in the organization and would appreciate the opportunity to interview.
- Thank them for their time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Your First and Last Name

Use the same header that's on your resume for a consistent look.

MARTHA WASHINGTON

2350 H St. NW, Washington, DC 20052 | 202-994-2787 | mwashington@gwu.edu

December 1, 2017

Daniel Mack
 Progressive Policy Institute
 1200 New Hampshire Ave. NW
 Washington, DC 20036

Address your cover letter to a specific person if possible—do some research to find that info! If you can't find it, you can include a generic title such as Internship Coordinator.

If you don't have the name, use Dear Hiring Manager/ Internship Coordinator (for internships).

Dear Mr. Mack:

My grandfather was an activist. His stories first exposed me to progressive values at a young age, which were then fortified by my elementary school teacher. She spoke of people coming together to advocate for important causes, specifically those relating to promoting public education and building technical skills for immigrant children and those with disabilities. I have continued their legacy through my commitment to volunteer work and public policy coursework. When I saw the Public Affairs internship posted on Handshake, our GWU jobs database, I was excited because of the opportunity to support your organization's emphasis on advocating for progressive causes related to education. I am impressed because of your demonstrated success in implementing ideas into policy and promoting bipartisanship in the government. One of the Progressive Policy Institute's projects focuses on reinventing American education and ensuring that it adapts to the developing knowledge economy. I would like to support that effort.

Hook—demonstrate research of company and connect it to your own interests.

-The position for which you are applying.
 -Where you found the position.
 -Personal information—where you go to school, your degree, year in school.

As a junior at GW studying political communication, I am looking to gain practical policy experience related to education. My coursework in political communication and my experience at the GW Writing Center as a writing consultant have prepared me for the kind of work needed for this position. I have strengthened my verbal and written communication skills. Meeting with more than 10 students daily who often have pressing deadlines, I edit a variety of written works, including research papers, literature and book reviews. I demonstrated verbal communication skills by acting as a coach for students, empowering them to become better writers and understand effective writing techniques. Because of my genuine dedication and care for them, students often return to the writing center to meet with me, and I take great pride in developing these relationships. My experience writing concisely and editing student work will allow me to draft op-eds and press releases and compose social media messages for the Progressive Policy Institute.

-Choose 2-3 specific examples that *prove* to the employer that you have the top 2-3 things they are looking for based on the job description—this can be done in 2 paragraphs.
 -Don't just copy bullet points from your resume—tell a story and give more detail.

-Bring your experience back to employer—how can your experience make you successful?

Being a writing consultant also requires great attention to detail. This strength has been reinforced through my coursework in Newswriting and Reporting, International Security Policy, and Media and Foreign Policy. These courses have allowed me to see the application of course material to real-world issues. Currently, in International Security Policy, one of my main assignments is to compile newspaper clippings and mediated content related to an international security issue of our choice. I chose to focus on the global reactions to the rising threat of nuclear war. I often organize over 50 clippings per day into categories based on country and the nature of the response, so that I will be able to reference the content in my final paper.

-Experiences can be projects in courses, too! Highlighting courses that are relevant to the position shows that you have both the skills and the educational background to succeed.

My experience writing in a variety of formats and in coursework directly supports my strong candidacy for the Public Affairs Internship at the Progressive Policy Institute. I would appreciate the opportunity to further discuss my qualifications in an interview. I am available to work a total of 24 hours per week on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Thank you for your time and consideration.

-Briefly summarize your qualifications for the "final sell."
 -State your interest in the company and you would appreciate the opportunity to interview.
 - Share your availability.
 -Thank them for their time and consideration.

Sincerely,
 Martha Washington

MARTHA WASHINGTON

2350 H St. NW, Washington, DC 20052 | 202-994-2787 | mashington@gwu.edu

1922 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20052

March 24, 2018

Susan Smith, Internship Coordinator
United Nations World Food Program
2175 K Street, NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20037

Dear Ms. Smith:

Hunger strikes a special chord with me. As a teenager living in Morro Bay, California, I worked at my father's fish market, and we would make it a priority to help alleviate hunger in our community. On the market's 30th anniversary, we served free fish and chips to the homeless. Volunteering with my dad will always be a part of my childhood memory, and I have become passionate about expanding my efforts globally. Although handing out food is a great start, eliminating hunger requires significant infrastructure and community improvements. I am interested in the UN World Food Program's Food Assistance for Assets initiative, focusing on bringing degraded land back into use and training community members to be self-sufficient. I want to contribute to this effort and was incredibly pleased to see your posting for a Communications and Marketing Intern on GWU's job board, Handshake. Given my experience as an Events Coordinator for GW UNICEF in addition to my marketing and global organizations coursework, I am a good fit for this position given its emphasis on social media and marketing.

As an Events Coordinator for GW UNICEF, I revamped our social media campaign for our Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF event. In addition to expanding our presence to Instagram, I conducted a social media audit to determine the effectiveness of previous marketing strategies. My skills in audience analysis and developing SMART goals illustrates my analytical skills and work ethic. By posting videos of volunteers describing their experiences, keeping followers up to date on goal progress with weekly posts, and developing profile picture frames, I was able to not only increase our Facebook engagement rates by 35%, but also gain 400 followers on Instagram in a two-month time frame. My experience curating fun and interactive content will allow me to effectively contribute to campaigns at The UN World Food Program.

In addition to polishing my marketing skills in extra-curricular activities, my Marketing to Global Audiences course has been invaluable. One of the UNWFP's goals is to more effectively advertise their volunteer opportunities to different countries. I learned the importance of cultural differences both within and across different countries when devising marketing strategies. Lastly, in my global organizations course, I wrote a 20-page research paper on the partnership between Biodiversity International and the UN to alleviate food insecurity. I examined how both organizations trained communities to become more self-sufficient in operating irrigation systems and practicing crop diversification.

My social media experience and coursework related to marketing and global organizations directly supports my strong candidacy for the Communications and Marketing Internship at UNWFP. It would be my privilege to support your work to alleviate hunger. I look forward to hearing from you so that I can share my qualifications in more detail. Please contact me at mwash1922@gwu.edu with any questions. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Martha Washington