

FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS IN DESIGN

# COVER LETTER GUIDE FOR DESIGN STUDENTS

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# OVERVIEW

As part of your job and internship application materials, you may be asked to submit a cover letter. While your resume focuses on skills, and the portfolio (for programs where this is a common document) includes your project illustrations, a cover letter provides an opportunity to tell your story. The cover letter serves as your narrative which highlights your skills, knowledge, and experiences — and why these are a good match for the particular job and employer you are interested in. It allows you to more fully explain who you are, why you're interested in the role, why you are a strong candidate, and what value you can bring to the organization.

Cover letters need to be customized to each position and company/firm/organization. Employers can tell when a letter is generic and not specific, and not customizing a letter can be a missed opportunity to engage the reader. You will also want to describe why you are interested in the position and the specific company/firm/organization. Providing specific examples from your experiences in the cover letter is important. Keep in mind that not all positions require you to submit a cover letter. If the letter is optional, it can still be helpful to submit one as part of your application. Cover letters should be **one page maximum** and be a standard font size 10-12pts. Be sure to use the same size and type of font that you use in your resume, so that they appear as a cohesive set of materials. On the following pages is an outline and format of the cover letter.

Please note: you do not have to follow this exact format or structure — this is meant to give you a general overview that you can adapt for your specific applications.

# COVER LETTER OUTLINE

Your Name

Email and Phone Number

City and State

Today's Date

Person's Name at Company

The person's title to whom you are writing

Organization/Company Name

City and State

Dear Dr./Ms./Mr. Last Name:

If possible, find the name by searching Handshake, the company's website, or Google the "the organization name Recruiter LinkedIn" to try finding the name.

If you can't find a name, use "Hiring Manager" or "Recruiter"

First Paragraph:

- Indicate the position you are applying for and how you found it (career fair, Handshake, company's website, etc.)
- Introduce yourself and here you can mention the current academic program in which you are enrolled.
- Look at the job posting and provide a sentence that includes 2-3 key skills and experiences that the employer is looking for (based on the job posting) which make you qualified for the position. You will then talk more in depth about these experiences in the next part of the cover letter.
- If you have connected with someone at the employer for networking, this might be a good place to mention this as well or you can mention it in the last paragraph.

### Middle Paragraph(s):

- 1-2 paragraphs that highlight key accomplishments related to the skills/experiences you mentioned in the introductory paragraph.
- Indicate how these examples demonstrate and support you as a candidate for the position.
- How will you be successful in the role? What can you contribute as a member of their team?
- Remember not to repeat everything in your resume exactly but instead highlight and expand on your key accomplishments, projects, and experiences.
- Be specific with your examples and not general

### Last Paragraph:

- Answer what do you know about the company and why are you interested in the company? Do your research and mention why the company appeals to you. This can be a great place to name drop a contact you have made at the company through your networking (e.g., a Penn alum) if you haven't already mentioned it in the first paragraph of the letter.
- Express your interest in having the opportunity to discuss the position further through an interview.
- Offer additional materials (e.g., I am happy to share X with you if this would be helpful).
- Thank the hiring manager for their time in reviewing and considering your application and that you look forward to hearing from them to discuss the position further.

Sincerely,

Your name (type it here)



# EXAMPLES

The following are excerpts from cover letters serving as examples of the various cover letter sections. Remember that your paragraphs will include **your own words, examples, skillsets and experiences.**

## INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

### INTRODUCTION PARAGRAPH EXAMPLE I:

I am writing to apply for a Preservation Architect position at DBVM Architects, which I found through Preservenet webpage. Based on more than 3 years of my education and professional experience in architectural conservation, I am confident and excited to bring my knowledge and skills to the position at DWVM Architects.

#### **Advice we might provide for this:**

Education, professional experience, knowledge, and skills are very broad terms, and will be hard for the reader to picture – consider providing a snapshot of relevant skills. For example:

Based on more than 3 years of my education and professional experience in architectural conservation, where I worked on projects ranging in size from X-Y, and buildings spanning 200 years, I am confident and excited to bring my hands-on knowledge and skills working in interdisciplinary teams to the position at DWVM Architects.

## INTRODUCTION PARAGRAPH EXAMPLE II:

It is with keen interest that I am responding to Jimmy Ly's request for applicants for the Real Estate Transaction Services internship. I am drawn to this internship opportunity because of the EDC's great reputation and because of the variety of world class projects the corporation has completed. As a master's candidate in City and Regional Planning concentrating in Public/Private Development at the University of Pennsylvania, School of Design, and with my strong communication, writing and research skills, I believe I have the knowledge and enthusiasm necessary to be the next Real Estate Transaction Services intern.

### Advice we might provide for this:

"the next Real Estate Transaction Services intern" is a slightly unusual way of framing this. For example, it could say: "...enthusiasm necessary to be a successful Real Estate Transaction Services intern."

## INTRODUCTION PARAGRAPH EXAMPLE III:

I am a Master's of Architecture candidate at the Weitzman School of Design at the University of Pennsylvania and am seeking to apply for a summer internship position with Perkins & Will. I am particularly interested in the collaboration of architecture and environmental building design, and would like to ask for the opportunity to be exposed in this specific department. Interning at Perkins & Will would allow me to continue my pursuit for civic and cultural projects, and I feel confident that I could substantially contribute to the work of your office while strengthening the skills I will need for a career in civic design.

### Advice we might provide for this:

The statement "I feel confident that I could substantially contribute to the work of your office" isn't really supported by any statement in the opening paragraph. Making sure to include a brief summary of skills and knowledge may be helpful.

## **INTRODUCTION PARAGRAPH EXAMPLE IV:**

I am writing to apply for the position of Development Manager with The Women's Institute for Housing and Economic Development. I have three years of comprehensive career and academic experience in real estate finance and development, with a focus on affordable supportive housing. Additionally, with a strong background in team management and excellent verbal, written and visual communication abilities, my knowledge and skill set are a great match for the position. I admire The Women's Institute's work and mission, particularly its emphasis on service-enriched housing, and would be eager to further the firm's efforts as a member of its staff.

## **MIDDLE PARAGRAPH(S)**

This section of the cover letter will provide the specific experiences/examples. Look carefully at the job posting and select 2-3 skills which are mentioned in the posting. The examples you provide should describe when you have demonstrated those skills in your experiences/projects.

### **MIDDLE PARAGRAPH EXAMPLE I:**

I will graduate from the University of Pennsylvania's Master of City & Regional Planning program in May with a concentration in Public/Private Development and a certificate in Real Estate Design & Development in partnership with the Wharton School. Business coursework in real estate investments and corporate finance, combined with more socially driven curricula in progressive development and urban economics, has prepared me to address housing needs through vetted financial solutions.

I have a proven ability to work collaboratively in guiding complex affordable real estate projects through the pre-development process and into construction. At Diamond & Associates, I have utilized my knowledge of development budgeting and gap financing to successfully secure \$900,000 in capital funds for a 60-unit elderly residence. In collaboration with senior staff, I have worked under strict deadlines on multiple 9% and 4% LIHTC submissions, creating and updating draft pro formas and liaising with public officials and investors. As part of these efforts, I have aided many clients, all of which are mission-based organizations, in funding the inclusion of extensive supportive services in their development programs. My data analysis and marketing communication skills have been valuable in preparing a well-received investor prospectus for a multifamily acquisition and rehabilitation opportunity, for which I conducted and presented a full market analysis. Lastly, I have assisted in document completion and compilation for client closings and placed-in-service packages.

With S. B. Friedman Development Advisors, I acquired fluency in public financing mechanisms, commercial and institutional development, and community revitalization. I

participated in field work, due diligence, and file management for a successful \$55M New Markets Tax Credit application, as well as for multiple tax increment financing district designations. At Boston Public Schools, I managed a large pools of consultants and brokers, reviewing performance and implementing interventions to ensure contract adherence. Additionally, I collaborated with non-profit partners, including Project Bread and The Food Project, to provide both internal and external nutrition education programs.

### **Advice we might provide for this:**

Try to avoid too many passive statements. Instead of “my education has prepared me”, try “with my education, I am able to/I can”

### **MIDDLE PARAGRAPH EXAMPLE II:**

My education has provided me with the skills necessary to perform thorough financial analyses of development projects, which is a skill that the EDC is looking for in their intern. For my Property Development class at the University of Pennsylvania, I composed an operational pro forma for a residential project in Philadelphia. The process involved a site and market analysis, zoning research, property appraisal, and the use of spreadsheets, all of which are skills that I will utilize as an intern. I am currently working on pro formas for projects that utilize the 4% and 9% LIHTC, respectively.

While working at IVI Assessment Services, a CBRE Company, I have become well-versed in the real estate due diligence process. Working on multiple projects at a time, from conception to completion, I utilized writing and analytical skills to provide clients with an understanding of a project’s compliance with applicable municipal regulations within their time-sensitive research period. As an intern, I will utilize familiarity with project management duties in order to assist project managers in closing land sales.

### MIDDLE PARAGRAPH EXAMPLE III:

My work experience has exposed me to various aspects of architecture including renovation, real estate marketing, and designing mixed-use parking structures. Above all, my most recent experience at Tim Haahs & Associates has pushed me in design the most. In a field where structure tends to dominate and investment in design is highly unlikely, incorporating aesthetics is not a priority in the parking industry. Nevertheless, projects such as the Miami Design District City View Garage and Newark's Parking Proposal have challenged me to appreciate the dualities in architecture, understand feasibilities, and value collaborative design and teamwork. My seemingly eclectic experience in architecture gave me clarification in my interest for civic and cultural projects, and I hope to begin my work in this field with Perkins & Will.

**Comment:** This example above is a good one since it connects past experiences directly with the job they're applying to.

I have learned the value of working collaborative and have enjoyed the process and challenge of growing professionally, My involvement in LiNK, Global Architecture Brigades, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has given me perspective into the inner-workings of the business infrastructure. I have learned to develop my leadership and management skills as Project Manager of LiNK and as a Residential Advisor for the Illinois community even as I have cultivated my passion for working with communities and helping those in need.

#### **Advice we might provide for this:**

Lots of passive statements here – consider more active approaches to talking about these experiences.

### **MIDDLE PARAGRAPH EXAMPLE IV:**

I completed my master's degree in Historic Preservation with a focus on Conservation Science in May \_\_\_\_\_. Having benefited from practical opportunities offered by the program, I am confident conducting field investigation for documentation and conditions assessment on scaffolding or in a crawl space. For example, I documented the roof structure and bell tower structure of Our Mother of Sorrow, a Catholic church in West Philadelphia. Meanwhile, with a particular interest in historic construction materials and technology, I completed my master's thesis on historical research on lime based building technology and investigation of a treatment option of using nanolime consolidant for friable lime plaster at Mission San José de Tumacácori. As I enjoy performing material testing and preparing a conservation plan, recently I have been practicing a polarizing microscopy skill in petrography at the PennMuseum.

As a project leader, my current work at the Architectural Conservation Laboratory (ACL) involves managing project progress and writing reports. The works I completed for the project includes reviewing archival resources, performing plaster characterization as well as developing a program to assess conditions and to determine proper treatments. Throughout the project a graphic representation is considered principal communication tool, therefore I constantly use and feel comfortable using drawing and graphics software like AutoCAD, Illustrator, and Photoshop at the office. Having 10 years of experience using AutoCAD, I have assisted students of various levels in using AutoCAD and advised how to improve drawing sets.

## **LAST PARAGRAPH**

In this paragraph, you will describe why this firm/organization/company appeals to you. You will have to conduct some research on their website. As you read through, see how they describe the company itself and what some of their highlighted projects are. Express how you look forward to discussing the position further and offer additional materials. Be sure to thank the hiring manager for their time and consideration.

### **LAST PARAGRAPH EXAMPLE I:**

I was greatly impressed by a range of historic preservation projects completed at the company and excited to work with design professionals. Based on my academic and professional experience, I am confident that working as a Preservation Architect at DBVM Architects will be an opportunity to bring my knowledge and skill to apply in various projects and enable me to learn from a variety of challenges. I would be thrilled to have the opportunity to discuss the position with you further. Thank you for your consideration.

### **LAST PARAGRAPH EXAMPLE II:**

After speaking with Jimmy and Christopher at the recent Zell/Lurie Career Fair, I am further convinced that the EDC is an exciting work environment I can contribute to. I welcome the opportunity to meet with you personally to discuss my qualifications further. Please feel free to contact me at phone number or email. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

### **LAST PARAGRAPH EXAMPLE III:**

These experiences have formed an excellent foundation on which to build my Architectural career and I would be most interested in the opportunity for professional learning and growth in a highly innovative and collaborative environment at AtelierTen. I would love to be a part of the team to work on diverse project types as well as contribute in research, analysis, and technical writing on topics including daylighting, energy and water use, sustainable materials and more. I would bring forth my enthusiasm and experience of environmental building design and learn and enhance my knowledge of highly innovative and sustainable solutions that incorporate a mix of technologies. Thank you for taking the time to review my resume and work samples. I look forward to hearing back from you soon.

### **LAST PARAGRAPH EXAMPLE IV:**

I want to join Hines because I am passionate about the real estate development and eager to sharpen my analytical and problem-solving skills. I hope to gain exposure to facets of real estate development and investment across a wide spectrum of high quality projects, and Hines provides such an exposure. Furthermore, Hines emphasizes on mentorship and team work which I value deeply. I am convinced that Hines is the perfect place for me to grow my capabilities and insight in real estate development and investment as an analyst and problem solver, and I am confident that I can contribute to the firm with exceptional dedication. I hope to have the opportunity to be interviewed by you to further demonstrate my qualifications. Thank you so much for your time.



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## FINAL TIPS

- Proofread your letter for correct spelling and grammar
- Remember to avoid using passive voice in your sentences. A more effective cover letter is written in an active voice.
- Use varying sentence length
- Keep the letter to one page maximum

## SERVICES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

- Schedule an appointment with us in Career Services to review your cover letter. Appointments can be made on our Handshake platform or by calling 215-898-7530. We look forward to working with you!  
<https://upenn.joinhandshake.com/>
- Big Interview (this platform has cover letter samples and information about writing persuasive cover letters in the resume curriculum)  
<https://careerservices.upenn.edu/resources/big-interview/>
- Career Services Website  
<https://careerservices.upenn.edu/channels/prepare-application-materials/>
- Weitzman School of Design Office of Professional Development and Career Resources  
<https://www.design.upenn.edu/information/career-resources>

**HAVE MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT  
COVER LETTERS?**

**MAKE AN APPOINTMENT TO SPEAK  
WITH A CAREER ADVISOR**