



NYU | WAGNER

COVER LETTER
WRITING



COVER LETTER WRITING GUIDE

OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. IDENTIFYING THE EMPLOYER'S HIRING NEEDS	1
III. COVER LETTER COMPOSITION	
Content	2
Structure	3
Format	4
Additional Pointers	4
IV. APPENDIX: SAMPLE COVER LETTERS	
Sample 1	
Sample 2	

INTRODUCTION

THE POWER OF A COVER LETTER

In combination with a well-crafted resume, a cover letter is a marketing tool designed to persuade an employer that you possess the skills and qualifications to warrant further consideration — via an interview— for a given position.

A strong cover letter introduces who you are, articulates why you are interested in working for a specific organization, and emphasizes the value that your relevant experiences and qualifications (as outlined in your resume) can bring to the employer. A cover letter is not meant to be a duplicate version of your resume in paragraph form. Rather, it should lend context to the content of your resume; it should tell a story that draws parallels between an employer’s hiring needs and your most relevant qualifications, professional attributes, and interests.

It is also a preliminary writing sample that employers will use to assess your communication skills and quality of your work. To this end, a poorly constructed cover letter, or one with grammatical or typographical errors, will undoubtedly be used to screen you out of the selection process. With the power to make you stand out among equally or even more qualified candidates, your cover letter should be nothing less than impeccable. The following guide will help you to achieve this goal.

IDENTIFYING THE EMPLOYER’S HIRING NEEDS

Every employer has a unique set of hiring needs that determines what she/he looks for in an employee, and by extension, in a cover letter. Your cover letter must clearly highlight the aspects of your education, experience, skills, and qualifications that are most relevant to each employer’s hiring needs.

- ❖ Create a customized and targeted version of your cover letter in response to every position.

In each cover letter, highlight only the information that is most relevant to each employer’s hiring needs. Identify the employer’s hiring needs by researching the following elements:

THE EMPLOYER’S FIELD OF PRACTICE

Information about the employer’s field of practice can be found on its website and in published research, media coverage, and marketing materials. Through your research, identify:

- The organization’s mission and vision
- How they describe their work
- How the organization differentiates itself from others in the field
- How the department to which you are applying fits into the organization

Use this information to develop a set of organizational characteristics that will help you demonstrate your knowledge of and commitment to the organization’s work within the introduction and conclusion of your cover letter.

THE EMPLOYER’S POSITION REQUIREMENTS

Information about the employer’s position requirements can be found in the job description and in job descriptions for similar positions at peer organizations. Through your research, identify:

- The responsibilities and tasks associated with the position
- Degree, experience, and licensure requirements
- Technical skills required to perform job functions

Use these position requirements to frame a discussion of your relevant skills and experiences within the body of your cover letter.

Once you have identified an employer’s hiring needs, you can begin crafting a cover letter that draws direct parallels between these needs and your relevant education, experience, skills, and qualifications.

CONTENT

Your cover letter should discuss the most important aspects of the education, experience, skills, and qualifications that are listed in your resume. You will know what is most important and relevant to the employer by:

1. Creating a complete list of the organizational characteristics and position requirements that you gathered from your background research.
 2. Arranging your list in order of importance, based on your understanding of the employer’s priorities.
- ❖ **Note:** Usually, employers highlight their priorities by listing the most important position requirements and organizational characteristics first. Priorities may also be repeated throughout the job description, website, and other publications. The most relevant aspects of your education, experience, skills, and qualifications—the content of the cover letter—are those that relate directly to the most important items on your prioritized list of hiring needs.

FRAMING YOUR COVER LETTER CONTENT

As previously mentioned, your cover letter should lend context to the content of your resume by telling a concise story that addresses the following three criteria (on which employers base their hiring decisions):

1. **CAN YOU DO THE JOB?—** Employers want to know if you possess the requisite experience and skills to successfully perform the job’s functions. A cover letter that successfully answers this question highlights the most important knowledge and skills that you’ve gained through relevant work experience (including jobs, internships, Capstone, and volunteer work), education, and research. It also demonstrates how and when you have performed job functions (e.g. project management, outreach, research) that are directly related to the employer’s position requirements.
2. **WILL YOU DO THE JOB?—** Employers want to know if you are committed to the issues and populations that drive the organization’s work. A cover letter that successfully answers this question emphasizes the degree to which your relevant work experience (including jobs, internships, Capstone, volunteer work), education, and research are related to the employer’s mission and field of practice.
3. **WILL YOU FIT IN?—** Employers want to know if your personality and work style match the culture of their organization. A cover letter that successfully answers this question conveys shared organizational values as well as universally positive attributes, such as a positive outlook and professionalism. It also incorporates industry specific language or jargon, which demonstrates your understanding of the issues, policies, stakeholders, and other factors that impact the organization’s work.

STRUCTURE

Your cover letter should be a brief document with all of the relevant information about your interests and qualifications seamlessly integrated into three or four short paragraphs. The following is a sample cover letter outline:

1ST PARAGRAPH: INTRODUCTION

State the position for which you are applying, where you heard about it, and if applicable, the name of the person who referred you. Think about the organization's characteristics that you gathered from your background research. Briefly state an important detail about their work that you find particularly interesting or compelling. This statement should demonstrate your knowledge of the employer's field of practice and your shared interests. Finally, state that you are an ideal candidate for the position. See the example below:

I am writing to apply for the Program Coordinator position at The Building Bridges Women's Center (BBWC) posted on the NYU Wagner Career Directory. My in-depth experience in workforce development and commitment to women's economic empowerment dovetails with BBWC's long, successful history of preparing teenage mothers to enter the workforce. I am uniquely qualified to help advance BBWC's work through superior career coaching and innovative program development.

2ND PARAGRAPH: PROFESSIONAL/ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Focus on the aspect of your experience (professional or academic) that is the greatest asset to you in applying for this position. Lead with a topic sentence that establishes a connection between this aspect of your background and the employer's hiring needs. Follow-up by discussing the specific responsibilities, accomplishments, research, analysis, and/or technical skills that are directly related to the position requirements. See the example below:

My professional background is a direct match to your stated employment needs. In my current role as Program Associate at the Manhattan Resource Center (MRC), I provide comprehensive career counseling to unemployed young adults and teenage mothers who live in New York City Public Housing. I also manage the organization's employer recruitment program, successfully developing and implementing an employer cultivation initiative that increased MRC client recruitment by 40% over two years.

3RD PARAGRAPH: ADDITIONAL PROFESSIONAL/ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Focus on the aspect of your experience (professional or academic) that you did not discuss in your second paragraph. Again, refer to the position requirements outlined in the job description. Describe your professional or academic experience in a way that highlights how you have gained and used the required skills. See the example below:

In addition to my professional experience, I am currently pursuing a Master of Public Administration degree at NYU's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. Through my education, I have honed invaluable management skills, including budget analysis, evaluation, and research. I make full use of these skills in my current position, leading efforts to design, implement, and evaluate the MRC's internship and mentoring programs. I am eager to leverage these skills to support the BBWC's goal of enhancing programs through evidence based practice.

4TH PARAGRAPH: SYNTHESIS/CONCLUSION

Conclude the cover letter by restating the most pertinent information in a concise sentence or two. You may want to:

- Stress your commitment to what the organization does
- Mention your high level of motivation
- Restate that you have the professional and academic qualifications to do the job

Tell the employer that your resume is enclosed. Include your telephone number and email address. Thank the employer for their time and consideration and state that you look forward to hearing from them. See the example below:

Given my professional background, academic experience, and commitment to the workforce development field, I am confident that I would be an excellent addition to your team. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and talk more about the position. Please review the attached resume and feel free to contact me at 222-666-7777 or jane.candidate@nyu.edu to schedule a follow up interview. Kind regards,

FORMAT

Your cover letter must look flawless! A single error in a cover letter may cause the employer to assume that you are careless in your work. Proofread your cover letter. Proofread it again. Have at least two other people proofread your cover letter. Then, proofread your cover letter at least one more time.

PAGE LENGTH

Generally, your entire cover letter should be one page and no more than three or four short paragraphs long.

FONT & MARGINS

- Use consistent and clear fonts. Resist the urge to be fancy. “Times New Roman” or “Arial” are safe bets.
- Avoid the use of italics. They can be difficult to read.
- Do not use a font size smaller than 11.
- Maintain a sufficient amount of white space on the page so that your resume is easy to read.
- Use consistent margins; they should never be smaller than 0.5 inches.

ADDITIONAL POINTERS

- All resumes should be accompanied by a cover letter unless the employer explicitly states otherwise.
- Cover letters should be addressed to the hiring person, rather than “to whom it may concern” or the HR department.
- Pay close attention to the spelling of names and position titles.
- Use spell check and proofread your cover letter every time it is modified.
- If you send a cover letter as an attachment, send it as a PDF document to ensure that the formatting does not change.
- If you send a cover letter as an email message, make sure that it is concise and easy to read.

SAMPLE COVER LETTERS

January 15, 2017

Ms. Melody Cooley
Moody's Investor's Service
56 Broadway
New York, NY 10003

Dear Ms. Cooley:

I am writing, at the suggestion of your colleague Mark Stevenson, Senior Director of Diversity, to express my interest in the Senior Associate Position within the Moody's Healthcare Group. As an experienced healthcare administrator, I understand and appreciate the value that Moody's adds to the healthcare industry as the leading provider of credit ratings and research. With my strong analytical and financial skills, I am ideally suited to help the Healthcare Group maintain this quality standard.

In my current position as the Logistics Manager at NYU Langone Medical Center, I prepare and monitor a \$1.2M non-salary operating budget for 14 separate cost centers within the Nursing Department. This involves conducting detailed analysis of the monthly financial reports for each cost center; formulating and substantiating budget management recommendations; and reporting outcomes in written and oral form to senior administrators. I am also responsible for the examination of changes in patient acuity, census, and other trends in order to ascertain total cost ramifications of proposed equipment purchases and supply utilization practices.

In addition to the aforementioned, I have spent the past two years enhancing my expertise in quantitative research and analysis through the pursuit of an MPA in Healthcare Finance at NYU's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. I am also taking supplemental finance coursework at the NYU Stern School of Business.

Through my education and experience, I possess an in-depth knowledge of the healthcare field, as well as highly relevant research and finance skills that directly lend themselves to your stated employment needs. I have enclosed my resume for your review. If you have any additional questions, feel free to call me at 646-234-5678 or email me at r7@nyu.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

March 25, 2017

Kerry Weaver
Director of Development
Brooklyn Botanic Garden
1000 Washington Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11225

Dear Ms. Weaver:

I am writing in response to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden's Grant Writer position, posted on the Career Directory of NYU's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. The Brooklyn Botanic Garden (BBG) has always offered an impressive diversity of cultural programming for children and adults, and I would embrace the opportunity to leverage my grants management and development experience to further enhance the quality and financial viability of these programs.

During my tenure at the Guttman Foundation, I worked closely with a range of nonprofit agencies, including Brooklyn based arts and culture organizations, to write grant proposals for review by the Foundation's Board of Directors. As a result, I understand the criteria upon which funders decide to support programs, and I have successfully advised several nonprofits on ways to access additional funds by improving the quality of their grant proposals. I am also experienced in monitoring program budgets and tracking reporting requirements, skills that would undoubtedly serve me well as a grant writer.

Prior to obtaining my Master of Public Administration degree in Nonprofit Management, I gained additional fundraising experience as a freelance event planner. In this role, I helped over 25 nonprofits to coordinate large scale fundraising events, manage donor/contact databases, and manage volunteers.

With my passion for the BBG's mission, fundraising experience, and ability to work with staff at all levels of an organization, I am confident that I can be an asset to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden's Development Team. I have enclosed my resume for your review. Please feel free to contact me at 718-555-9311 or Sharon.fundraiser@nyu.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,