

# Cover Letter Best Practices and Checklist

The cover letter is a **separate document to support the résumé**. It's not a place to repeat items stated in the résumé, but to elaborate on unique qualifications that make you a strong candidate. This is where you tell why you're excited to work at the organization and what specific experience you bring to it, and where you talk in depth about your top two or three qualifications. Expectations for cover letter format and content vary, but here are some common principles. Don't neglect the cover letter! It can help you show your passion for the organization and the preparation you've done in applying specifically to them.

## Tips

- Proofread at least three times.
- Read it aloud.
- Print it out and have at least two people review format and content.
- Match the header (your name and contact information) to your résumé's to maintain a consistent, polished look.
- Be careful of your tone; strike a balance between professional, genuine excitement and humility. You don't want to sound like you lack confidence or that you are prideful.

## Do

- Be concise, original and direct.
- Promote yourself.
- Focus on the positives.

## Don't

- Be vague, too wordy, boastful, presumptuous, deceptive.
- Summarize your résumé.

## Sample

First Name Last Name  
Email Address | Phone Number | Physical Address or LinkedIn URL  
Date

First and Last Name of Recruiter  
Their Position/Title  
Organization  
Street Address  
City, State Zip

Dear [Director or Coordinator \_\_\_\_\_] or [Hiring Manager]:

**Opening paragraph.** State your reason for the letter: the position you are applying for, how you heard about it and your interest. Do your research on the company so you have a clear sense of how your skills align and why you want to work there.

**Second/third paragraph.** List examples and illustrate how and why you are a qualified candidate. Describe relevant work, volunteer, educational or personal experiences not listed in your résumé or expand on what was listed. Focus on results and achievements that tell the story of who you are and what you offer as a candidate.

**Closing paragraph.** Share your desire to meet with them/follow up in person, preferably for an interview. Thank them and tell them you can be reached at any of your provided contact information.

Sincerely, Best regards, etc.

Your signature

Your full name

# Cover Letter Checklist

## OVERALL FORMAT AND EDITING

- ☐ I wrote one page in correct business letter format: left justified, no indents starting paragraphs, single-spaced, line breaks between paragraphs and sections, 10 - 12 pt font.
- ☐ I had at least two people review the letter for spelling, errors and to make sure it is tailored to the opportunity.
- ☐ The tone is confident and positive, showing genuine interest and highlighting my abilities. It is not boastful; it is not negative about me or the company.

## MY ADDRESS BLOCK OR HEADER (2-4 LINES)

- ☐ My name, address (optional), city, state and ZIP code (optional), phone number, and professional email address are included in my header, each on its own line with no spaces between lines.
- ☐ I placed my header in one of three locations: 1) at the top of the letter before the date, formatted identical to my résumé header, 2) at the top of the letter before the date, formatted as a left justified block or 3) at the bottom of the letter below my signature, formatted as a left justified block.
- ☐ I left one line of space between my header and the date or start of the letter.

## DATE FORMAT

- ☐ I positioned the date at the top of the page before the organization's address (format: September 14, 20XX).

## EMPLOYER/ORGANIZATION ADDRESS (3-4 LINES)

- ☐ I included the name and title (if known) of the individual I am sending the letter to.
- ☐ I included the name of the organization.
- ☐ I included the street address with city, state and ZIP code of the organization. All lines are in a left-justified block.

## SALUTATION (1 LINE)

- ☐ I used a standard business letter greeting: 'Dear' and then either first last name or title (Dr./Mr./Ms.) and last name, followed by a colon (e.g., Dear Dr. Wu: or Dear Jamie Phelps:).
- ☐ When I didn't know the name of the individual, I used a title as a substitute (Dear Hiring Manager, Dear Human Resources Manager); I avoided using 'To Whom It May Concern.'

## INTRODUCTION (1 PARAGRAPH)

- ☐ I identified the position for which I am applying. I specified if I was referred by a person (called out by name), have had any connection to the organization or notable interactions with recruiters/employees.
- ☐ I briefly highlighted why I am interested in the position and organization.
- ☐ I demonstrated my strengths to the reader in a summary of one-to-two-line powerful statements.

## MAIN BODY (2-3 PARAGRAPHS)

- ☐ I identified my strongest/most relevant qualifications, skills and in-demand abilities.
- ☐ I avoided repeating a list of skills from my résumé. I wrote a narrative with details and results I achieved to provide compelling evidence and examples to supplement my résumé.
- ☐ I incorporated keywords and phrases from the position description and/or organization's website.
- ☐ I elaborated on why I am interested in the position, company/organization, industry and/or location.
- ☐ I focused the letter on the organization's needs and what I offer, not what I want to get from them.
- ☐ I avoided self-deprecating language or anything that questions my value or qualifications as a candidate.

## CLOSING (1 SHORT PARAGRAPH)

- ☐ I thanked the reader for taking time to read the letter.
- ☐ I reinforced my desire to work for the organization and my fit for the position.
- ☐ I identified next steps (availability for interview) and/or described how I will follow up with the employer.

## SIGNATURE

- ☐ I ended the letter with a conventional closing such as 'Sincerely' or 'Best regards' followed by a comma.
- ☐ I included my first and last name 3-4 spaces below the closing. If I submit a paper copy, I'll write my signature within this space above my name.

## M.S. Cover Letter: Civil Engineering

October 15, 2020

GeoPacific Engineering  
14835 SW 72<sup>nd</sup> Avenue  
Portland, OR 97224

Dear GeoPacific Internship Hiring Committee:

Currently, I am a graduate student pursuing my master's degree in Civil Engineering with a specialization in Construction Engineering Management at Oregon State University. With three years of experience in the field, I believe my practical skillsets and academic background has prepared me to be a valuable intern at GeoPacific Engineering.

After completing my undergraduate degree in Civil Engineering at Visvesvaraya Institute of Technology in India, I worked in the civil industry as a project and design engineer, where I learned to effectively coordinate a \$9M project with fellow engineers, sub-contractors, clients, and other stakeholders. My position duties included submission of weekly reports, requests for laborer payments through official documentation, and keeping clients and subcontractors abreast of project developments. I sent out detailed reports and estimates of materials utilizing graphics and document-based delivery methods from the daily on-site reports – honing communication and reporting skills. Becoming proficient at managing time effectively and adapting quickly between competing priorities will allow me to be a valuable addition to your intern team.

While attending OSU, I have actively pursued opportunities to engage in student leadership experiences and with other professionals in the field to enhance my English language skills and knowledge of American culture. Currently, I serve as a graduate representative for the American General Contractors, where I share the responsibility for providing ideas for events and meeting speakers. As an undergraduate, I was a member of the Economics Club and led a group of juniors to organize cultural events and acquire the necessary funding. Additionally, I worked to sponsor a festival named "Civil Era" which was held by the civil engineering department. Being an involved member of a cohesive team working to achieve goals has been an important part of my life, and I hope to continue to collaborate with other professionals throughout my career.

I am confident that I can be a productive and effective member of your internship team and hope to hear from you soon to discuss how my qualifications would benefit your company and its clients.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours respectfully,

Vihaan Chadha

# OLIVIA GRANT

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May 9, 2020

Jennifer Brown  
HR Administrator  
Urban Labs - Poverty Lab  
33 North LaSalle Street, Suite 1600  
Chicago, IL 60602

Dear Ms. Brown:

My family believed that immigrating to America would remove barriers for us to financial success. Unfortunately, this is not always the case for many who live here. According to a report by the United Nations in 2018, the United States is one of the wealthiest and most innovative nations in the world, yet it has about 40 million people living in poverty; with the highest youth poverty rate in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, as well as one of the shortest life expectancies when compared to other wealthy democracies in the world. As someone from a low-income family, I understand the importance of addressing the issue of poverty in our nation, and I am determined to use my research skills to promote economic opportunity for all. With my background in education and research, I am enthusiastic to apply for the **Research Assistant** position at the Poverty Lab to improve social mobility.

I am a natural researcher at heart, and last summer I quickly learned valuable research skills as I co-led a team that included a graduate research assistant, artificial intelligence researchers, and two undergraduate interns. In the end, our paper was selected to be published at a premier conference called ACM Intelligent User Interfaces. Since then, I have come to realize that public service is my calling, and I began a research project on how to better support college students academically.

Currently, I am investigating the differences in how students approach studying and its impact on their academic performance. In collaboration with three researchers, we have created a survey instrument, recruited study participants, and passed the IRB review for our three studies. Additionally, I am gaining crucial experience as an academic success coach in Oregon State University's Academic Success Center, where I help students overcome obstacles which are affecting their ability to achieve their educational goals. By understanding the barriers impeding social mobility, I am constantly learning best practices in research, from doing literature reviews to performing statistical analysis, and ensuring the policies I suggest are evidence-based.

My desire to utilize my strong background in research and Ph.D. in Public Policy with a focus on evolving policy challenges in the area of social mobility makes me uniquely qualified for this position. I look forward to speaking with you soon to discuss my qualifications and passion for policy research.

Sincerely,

Olivia S. Grant

# YUAN CUI

y.cui1@gmail.com | XXX-XXX-XXXX | linkedin.com/in/yuan.cui.health

April 10, 2020

Re: Academic Advisor Position

Dear Search Committee:

It is with great excitement that I submit my application for the position of Academic Advisor within the College of Public Health and Human Sciences at Oregon State University. For the past six years I have worked at the university, as both a student and professional employee, honing my skills working with students, families and utilizing emerging technology. I fervently believe in the power of higher education and its potential to break down barriers to opportunity and would consider it an honor to support your students in their educational pursuits in the position of academic advisor. Students who pursue their degrees in the College of Public Health and Human Sciences have unique values and seek to support the needs of others – changing lives and improving circumstances, with the goal of helping all individuals live to their fullest potential. Assisting students to achieve their personal, educational and professional goals is a passion of mine.

I began my professional career in 2016 working in early childhood education as a lead classroom teacher at Moss Street Children's Center. My experiences supervising student employees, managing classroom operations, and establishing a welcoming and inclusive environment for children and families have been invaluable. I believe that these experiences will help me relate to students in the College of Public Health and Human Sciences. I can provide insights into the unique challenges of working in a human service profession through my understanding of the complexity of being a young professional, meeting the diverse and individual needs of children and families, and working collegially with fellow teachers and administrators.

Additionally, my Master of Education in College Student Services Administration (CSSA) from Oregon State University has provided me with competency in the areas of higher education institutional operations, student development, promotion of social justice on-campus, and meeting the needs of diverse student populations. I believe it is important to advocate for the needs of student groups who have historically been underrepresented and face barriers to retention, success and completion. This lens will help me ensure that all students have access to resources and support that enhances their success in the College of Public Health and Human Sciences and assists them in advocating for their distinct individual needs.

In closing, I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to apply for this position. I believe my unique professional experiences and desire to support all students in their educational pursuits align with the values promoted by the college and university. Looking forward to speaking with you soon to further discuss my qualifications.

Best regards,

Yuan Cui