

# RESUME AND COVER LETTER WRITING

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# THE RESUME

## INTRODUCTION

The resume is one of the most important elements of your job search. It is used as your introduction to an employer as well as a marketing tool designed to persuade an employer of your qualifications for a given position.

Written with the employer in mind, the resume is not your entire work history, but instead tells a specific story about you that highlights the *relevant* experiences, skills, education, and interests that a *particular employer* needs. As an introduction to an employer, the resume summarizes where you've been, where you are, and projects where you're headed with respect to your field of interest and/or a particular kind of job.

Given today's tight job market, it is essential to carefully consider designing a resume that will entice a potential employer to want to interview you. In combination with a well-crafted cover letter, the resume can help you get a job interview. A poorly constructed resume, on the other hand, will be used to screen you out of the interviewing process.

With so much at stake, your resume should be nothing less than impeccable. Paying close attention to the following three factors will add up to a resume that works:

- **FOCUS:** Targeting your resume to a field of interest and/or type of work
- **CONTENT AND LANGUAGE:** Deciding what goes in and how to say it
- **PRESENTATION:** How the resume looks

## FOCUS

Be prepared for most employers to only give your resume a quick 10-15 second scan. Consequently, you want your resume to immediately tell the employer that you can meet their specific hiring needs. Because different employers have different needs, various versions of your resume may be needed. Focus your resume elements (education, experience, professional affiliations, etc.) to have *relevance* to a specific field of interest and/or a particular kind of job.

Examples of field of interest focus are: access to healthcare, public education, or transportation. In a resume, field of interest focus can be demonstrated through:

- Relevant academic degrees, specializations, and course work
- Work, internship and Capstone experience in organizations within your field of interest
- Relevant student group membership
- Volunteer work with organizations within your field of interest
- Relevant professional association membership
- Significant publications related to the field of interest

Examples of job focus are: program administration, financial management, policy analysis, or fundraising. In a resume, job focus can be illustrated by:

- Relevant academic degrees, specializations, and course work
- Internships associated with a particular kind of job function
- Previous job titles and skill sets used to perform duties
- Appropriate managerial responsibilities for either entry, mid, or senior level positions
- Relevant computer skills and foreign languages

If you don't have the experience you need for an employer to look at your resume favorably, you may need to gain relevant experience while at Wagner.

## CONTENT AND LANGUAGE

Your resume is not intended to be an all-inclusive history of your life. Deciding what goes in your resume and how to say it should be dictated by the staffing needs of the potential employer. You want to highlight experiences that will be of value, and *it is okay to de-emphasize or omit experiences that are not relevant to a potential employer.*

### EMPLOYERS WILL BE LOOKING FOR:

- **Experience in the field** (e.g. urban planning, hospital administration, housing, international development, workforce development)
- **Management level** (e.g. do you supervise others, are you responsible for a budget or finances, do you set policy, are you responsible for operations or oversight)
- **Skill sets** associated with a kind of job or a field (e.g. supervising, analyzing, budgeting, strategic planning, public speaking, motivating, researching, writing, fundraising, regional understanding, fluency in languages, GIS)
- **Accomplishments** that specify the result or impact upon the organization and illustrate your contributions to the agency. Consider an activity to be an accomplishment if any of the following were satisfied:
  - Equal results were achieved with fewer resources
  - Things were made easier, simpler, or were done more quickly
  - Potential problem issues were resolved with little or no increase in time or money
  - Something new was achieved for the first time

Some areas in which you can discuss your accomplishments include:

- Planned a program or designed a program/training process to improve, reduce, or change outcomes
- Improved quality, productivity, teamwork, etc.
- Increased funding, revenue, resources, outreach, support, etc.
- Reduced costs, turnover, problems, etc.

Whenever possible, present your accomplishments in numerical terms, using percentages and dollar amounts as appropriate.

Examples of accomplishments written for a resume are:

- Launched program for 4,000 Hispanic patients to facilitate access to medical treatment, reducing linguistic and cultural barriers to health care services.
- Co-wrote and received \$7,000 grant from Eurasia Foundation that provided agency with computer, copier, and fax machine.
- Initiated winter series of workshops, which increased programmatic income 38% and helped solve organizational cash flow problems.
- Increased revenues 15% by reviewing third party payments for irregularities.

Review the job description for which you are applying and identify key phrases and jargon. If possible, include this vocabulary in your resume. This is a quick and easy way of showing employers that you have the direct education, experience and qualifications they are seeking.

## THE RESUME ELEMENTS

Your resume should include your:

- Name and contact information
- Relevant education
- Relevant experience, including Capstone
- Any other information that will infer that you are a viable candidate, such as relevant professional associations, languages, computer skills, significant awards, or publications

### **Name and Contact Information**

This section consists of your name, address, home and/or cell phone number (be certain to have a professional message recorded), and e-mail address (avoid using email addresses that in any way might be construed as inappropriate or unbecoming). If you have letters that should come after your name that designate a relevant degree, license or certification, include them.

<p><b>IMA GO-GETTER</b> 295 Lafayette Street New York, NY 10012 Tel: 212-998-1212 E-mail: address@nyu.edu</p>
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If you are looking for ways to save space at the top of your resume, you can string your contact information on one line:

<p><b>IMA GO-GETTER</b> 295 Lafayette Street ~ New York, NY 10012 ~ Tel: 212-998-1212 ~ E-mail: address@nyu.edu</p>
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### **Education**

If you are entering a new field and your education is more relevant to the kind of job you want to get than your experience, then you should list your education first.

List the full names of your graduate and undergraduate institutions in reverse chronological order (the most recently attended school should be listed first). You can include relevant specializations, relevant coursework, positions of leadership, academic honors, and relevant research. Include the locations of the schools and the dates you graduated or expect to graduate.

<p><b>NEW YORK UNIVERSITY</b> <b>Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service</b> Master of Public Administration, Expected May 2006 Focus: Nonprofit Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Relevant coursework: Strategic Management, Managing Human Resources, Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations, Fundraising, Nonprofit Law, Conflict Management and Negotiation</li><li>• Member Nonprofit Network</li></ul>	<p>New York, NY</p>
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## Experience

If your work experience is a greater asset to you than your education, then list your work experiences first.

The information in this section should relate as much as possible to your field of interest and the kind of job you want to get. You should include relevant work experience, internships, and your Capstone.

For each position you list, you will need to include the organization name, position title, division/ department (if applicable), city, state (postal abbreviation), and dates of employment.

7/95 – 8/99	<b>PRESBYTERIAN MEDICAL CENTER</b> <b>Director of Billing, Department of Surgery</b>	Bronx, NY
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Managed department's billing system and specialty billing office through which revenues in excess of \$30 million flowed annually.</li><li>• Provided operational assistance to 35 faculty practices in revenue enhancement and cost reduction opportunities.</li><li>• Trained and developed front-line and senior staff on compliance policies and procedures related to Medicare/Medicaid enrollment, managed care plans, and GAAP standards.</li><li>• Converted department from multiple billing systems to standardized/centralized system.</li></ul>	

You should use the reverse chronological format for your positions, and then, within each position, list the most relevant and substantial elements first. You can get a feel for what is relevant by looking at job announcements for positions that interest you – employers tell us what is important by what they say in the job description or announcement.

## How to include Capstone projects

Be sure to acknowledge the experience as part of an NYU team-based project. For most Capstones, your title should be *Project Associate*:

9/05 – Present	<b>NEW YORK CITIZENS HOUSING AND PLANNING COUNCIL</b> <b>Project Associate, NYU Advanced Project in Urban Planning</b>	New York, NY
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Serve on 4-person team consisting of NYU Wagner graduate candidates to identify recommendations for commercial development of Woodside, Queens in response to citywide and regional needs.</li><li>• Analyze current urban design elements, land use, and housing conditions.</li><li>• Conduct demographic analysis, including review of population and employment trends in order to determine present and future needs of area and forecast economic growth.</li></ul>	

If you are in a Research Capstone, use the following as a guide:

9/05 – Present	<b>NYU ADVANCED PROJECT IN APPLIED RESEARCH IN PUBLIC FINANCE AND POLICY Researcher</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Serve on a five-person team consisting of NYU Wagner graduate candidates to analyze the effect of cost and quality of college education on individual's success upon graduation using panel data</li><li>• Develop regression models from restricted use data and conduct statistical analysis using SPSS</li><li>• Produce written reports of findings</li></ul>
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### **Additional/Optional Elements**

List any other experiences, affiliations, skills, or achievements that would be useful for the employer to know about you. Create a heading for it and place it in your resume. These additional elements might include:

- Relevant computer skills
- Fluency in foreign languages
- Relevant volunteer experience or community involvement
- Professional association memberships
- Additional non-degree training or professional development
- Significant research or publications
- Presentations related to your work
- Relevant certification or licensure
- An overview that clearly and concisely states your overall professional experience and area of expertise, indicating extensive experience in a senior level managerial role in a particular field (Recommended only for people with a minimum of 5-7 years of relevant work experience)

### **WHAT NOT TO INCLUDE**

- An objective statement
- References available on request
- Salary history or requirements
- GPA
- Undergraduate activities unless you have very little relevant work experience
- Personal information, such as height, weight, marital status, or health status

### **USE OF SPACE**

After you've put all of your elements down, look at the page with a fresh eye and see which elements take up the most space on the page. You have control over what the reader will pay attention to, and you want the reader to spend the most time on the things that are most relevant to them. If one job has 3 bullets and another job has 5 bullets, then the reader will subconsciously assume that the job with 5 bullets is more important. If a previous job is more relevant than your current job for the position to which you are applying, then that previous job should take up more space on the page with more bullets. Remember that it is the *quality* of what is written on your resume which matters, not the *quantity*.

## LANGUAGE AND SYNTAX

Resume language and syntax is different from other written materials:

- Begin each statement with an action verb
- Use the present tense for all things related to your current position and the past tense for things in previous positions
- Avoid pronouns (I, my, she, they, their, our) and articles (the, a)
- Use jargon and acronyms only if you are absolutely sure that the reader is familiar with the terms – try to use words and phrases from the job description for which you are applying

## THE RIGHT WORD IN THE RIGHT PLACE

Action verbs that address your **planning** skills include:

Conceived	Formulated	Projected
Created	Initiated	Reorganized
Designed	Innovated	Revised
Developed	Instituted	Scheduled
Devised	Invented	Solved
Engineered	Justified	Systemized
Established	Laid out	Tailored
Estimated	Organized	Transformed
Experimented	Originated	
Formed	Planned	

Action verbs that address your skills in **directing** employees include:

Administered	Determined	Ordered
Approved	Directed	Prescribed
Authorized	Guided	Regulated
Conducted	Headed	Specified
Controlled	Instructed	Supervised
Decided	Led	Trained
Delegated	Managed	

You illustrate **investigative** skills with the use of these action verbs:

Analyzed	Evaluated	Reviewed
Assessed	Familiarized	Searched
Calculated	Investigated	Studied
Computed	Observed	Verified
Correlated	Proved	
Discovered	Researched	

Action verbs that suggest you have skills in **assuming responsibility** include:

Accepted	Developed	Operated
Achieved	Doubled	Overcame
Adopted	Established	Performed
Arranged	Evaluated	Prepared
Assembled	Experienced	Presented
Assumed	Gathered	Produced
Attended	Halted	Received
Audited	Handled	Reduced
Built	Improved	Reviewed
Checked	Implemented	Simplified
Classified	Initiated	Sold
Collected	Installed	Transacted
Compiled	Integrated	Tripled
Constructed	Maintained	Used
Described	Made	Utilized

Action verbs that embody an ability to provide effective **service** include:

Carried out	Explained	Provided
Committed	Facilitated	Purchased
Delivered	Furnished	Rewrote
Demonstrated	Generated	Sent
Earned	Inspected	Serviced
Exchanged	Installed	Submitted
Expanded	Issued	Transmitted
Expedited	Procured	Wrote

**Interactive** skills with people are suggested by the use of these action verbs:

Advised	Coordinated	Negotiated
Aided	Counseled	Participated
Apprised	Helped	Promoted
Clarified	Informed	Recommended
Coached	Inspired	Represented
Conferred	Interpreted	Resolved
Consulted	Interviewed	Suggested
Contributed	Mediated	Unified
Cooperated		

## PRESENTATION

Your resume must look flawless.

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

Use bullets. Employers prefer them. Bullets:

- Give the eye a chance to rest
- Give the eye an opportunity to focus
- Are a great way to highlight responsibilities, skill sets, and accomplishments
- Allow you to easily re-arrange specific items so you can target your resume to a specific employer or sector

Use consistent fonts. Don't get fancy. "Times New Roman" or "Arial" are safe bets. Don't let the font size go lower than 10.

Keep consistent margins; margins should never be smaller than .5

Keep lots of white space on the page – remember it's the *quality* of what is written that matters, not the *quantity*.

Use 8 1/2" x 11" white or off-white, high quality paper. Use only white paper when faxing your resume. Use black ink.

Generally speaking, unless you have more than 7 years' experience in the field, your resume should be on one-page.

## IMA GO-GETTER

295 Lafayette Street  
New York, NY 10012  
Tel: 212-555-1212

E-mail: address@wagner.nyu.edu

**Education:** **NEW YORK UNIVERSITY** New York, NY  
**Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service**  
Master of Public Administration, May 2001  
Specialization: Financial Management and Public Finance

- Relevant coursework: Financial Management for Public Service Organizations, Cost Accounting and Analysis, Debt Financing, Public Economics and Finance, Statistics
- Wagner Finance Society member

**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO** San Diego, CA  
Bachelor of Arts: Political Science, 1997

**Experience:**  
9/00 – 5/01 **NEW YORK CITY OFFICE OF NEW MEDIA** New York, NY  
**Project Associate, NYU Advanced Project in Public Policy Analysis and Management**

- Serve on 5-person team consisting of NYU Wagner graduate candidates to review online municipal service delivery at NYC Office of New Media.
- Survey webmasters from municipalities across the country and analyze online magazines to ascertain costs and benefits of interactive service delivery.
- Write Java script software program to determine which municipal services should be offered online and evaluate criteria to measure performance of web-based services.

5/00 - 8/00 **NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE** New York, NY  
**NYCServ Consolidated Technology Project Intern**

- Acted as liaison with IBM to facilitate citywide e-government initiative that integrated internet technologies to enhance New York City's revenue collection systems.
- Performed reconciliation and variance analysis for project's \$80 million capital and expense budgets.
- Trained city employees on new releases of systems applications.
- Managed and organized user acceptance testing for new releases of systems applications and determined application modifications based on user feedback.
- Established and maintained project timelines based on contract specifications.

9/97 - 8/99 **UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE** Washington, DC  
**Paralegal, Outstanding Honors Program: Antitrust Division**

- Evaluated and reviewed anti-competitive effects of merging telecommunications agencies.
- Researched and conducted analysis of market share data.
- Interviewed customers to learn about industries and assessed public opinion of mergers.
- Wrote detailed analysis recommending investigation or approval of mergers.

5/96 - 8/96 **UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS** Washington, DC  
**Civil Rights Analyst Intern**

- Conducted interviews and wrote analysis to aid attorneys in assessment of potential discriminatory effects of voting changes on Section V of 1965 Voting Rights Act.

**Computer Skills:** Excel, SPSS, PowerPoint, Microsoft Word

**HEEZA DO-GOODAH**

295 Lafayette Street ♦ New York, NY 10012 ♦ 646-555-1212 ♦ address@nyu.edu

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- EDUCATION:** New York University New York, NY  
**Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service**  
**Master of Urban Planning**, Expected May 2006  
Specialization: **International Economic Development**
- Wagner International Public Service Association member
- University of Kansas Lawrence, KS  
**Bachelor of Arts in Community Development/Applied Economics**, May 2001
- EXPERIENCE:**
- 9/05 – Present World Bank Institute New York, NY  
**Project Associate, NYU Advanced Project in International Finance and Planning**
- Serve on 4-person team consisting of NYU Wagner graduate candidates examining intergovernmental fiscal transfer systems
  - Evaluate local decision making of resource allocation towards poverty alleviation efforts in East Africa and Latin America
  - Analyze policy and management issues by investigating the interface between community and local governments within a fiscal decentralization framework
- 11/04 – 8/05 United Nations Capital Development Fund New York, NY  
**Evaluation Intern, Local Governance Units**
- Prepared all necessary documentation required to send Consultant Missions to eight countries for the impact assessment of organizational programming
  - Reviewed mid-term and final evaluation reports and debriefing minutes to extract recommendations made by evaluation teams throughout Africa and Asia
  - Analyzed compliance and made recommendations by comparing mid-term and final evaluation missions recommendations to operational responses
  - Assessed responses from Operational Units to missions' evaluations through interviews, questionnaires, financial flows and project correspondence with Program Managers
- 6/04 – 8/04 Trickle Up Program Port-au-Prince, Haiti  
**Program Evaluator/Field Intern**
- Evaluated program implementation and effectiveness of partner agencies throughout Haiti related to client selection, business sustainability and training
  - Assessed program impact on quality of life changes through interviews with grant recipients
  - Summarized current state of the Haitian program and made recommendations based on findings to improve service delivery in a final report and presentation
- 6/01 – 12/03 United States Peace Corps Sergoit, Kenya  
**Volunteer, Urban & Regional Planning**
- Provided technical assistance to address issues of small business planning
  - Mentored and trained staff in the areas of strategic planning, organizational development, program planning and implementation
- VOLUNTEER:** Habitat for Humanity
- LANGUAGES:** French, Haitian Creole, Swahili, Korean

**OCS Resume Format  
Sample Resume III:**  
Work experience is relevant  
and significant, and is  
placed before education.

## **JO EXPERIENCED GRADUATE**

269 Mercer Street  
New York, NY 10003  
Tel: 212-555-1212

E-mail: [address@wagner.nyu.edu](mailto:address@wagner.nyu.edu)

### **Experience:**

10/00 - Present **ST. LUKE'S-ROOSEVELT HOSPITAL CENTER** New York, NY

#### **Senior Billing Manager, Department of Neurosurgery**

- Responsible for planning, establishing, and monitoring infrastructure of an internal business/billing operation for newly created Department of Neurosurgery, Center for Cranial Base Surgery, and Division of Spine and Minimally Invasive Surgery.
- In charge of implementing and maintaining computerized billing system which helped department realize 25% increase in 2001 collections.
- Continually interact with surgeons and support staff to develop and implement strategies to maximize revenue, optimize operations, create relevant database dictionaries, and update encounter form and fee schedule information.
- Manage staff responsible for accounts receivable of five neurosurgeons.
- Use financial reports to monitor gross charges, net revenue, patient volume, and revenue projections.

8/91 - 9/00 **MOUNT SINAI MEDICAL CENTER** New York, NY

#### **Manager, Billing and Accounts Receivable Department (8/93 - 9/00)**

#### **Financial Specialist, Department of Otolaryngology (8/91 - 7/93)**

- Supervised staff of 3 billing officers and 2 payment processors
- Managed collections of eight attending neurosurgeons using monthly accounts receivable reports and applying strategies to target specific patient accounts for follow-up.
- Increased collections 50% and maintained level of performance for five years.
- Investigated and resolved situations causing improper or delayed insurance payments.
- Assisted department with operational, compliance, and IDX billing system functions.
- Functioned as liaison to the International Services and Finance departments.
- Assisted with testing and implementation of automated billing system.

1/87 - 7/91 **GROUP HEALTH INCORPORATED** New York, NY

#### **Quality Assurance Analyst**

- Audited medical claims for compliance and gathered data for statistical analysis to determine frequency of claim errors based on productions levels.
- Developed and implemented coding standards, policies, and procedures that reduced reimbursement errors and improved accuracy of claims 25%.

**Education:** **NEW YORK UNIVERSITY** New York, NY

#### **Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service**

Master of Public Administration: Health Policy and Management, May 1999

- Served on 6-person team that assisted MIC Women's Health Services understand their patients' needs, address an eroding patient base, and improve service.

#### **LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY**

Bachelor of Science: Computer Science, June 1987

Brooklyn, NY

**Membership:** American College of Healthcare Executives  
Metropolitan Health Administrators' Association

# THE COVER LETTER

## THE PURPOSE OF A COVER LETTER

In combination with the resume, cover letters should develop sufficient interest on the part of an employer to warrant a personal interview with you. A good cover letter:

- Introduces who you are by emphasizing the *relevance* and *value* that your skills, experiences, education, background, and interests will bring to this organization, and
- Clearly articulates why you are interested in working for this specific organization

The process involved in writing a good cover letter helps you organize your thinking and forces you to consider your qualifications for a job. Understanding what a given employer is looking for and your ability to reflect that understanding through a cover letter is crucial. If you get this “on-paper presentation” right, you will facilitate the next step in the job search process, which is the “in-person presentation” - or the interview.

In addition, as employers are increasingly interested in good communicators, cover letters are a litmus test for assessing the writing and communication skills of job applicants. Poorly structured cover letters, or those with typographical, grammatical, or spelling errors, are used as criteria to screen candidates out of the process.

In short, cover letters represent a vital marketing tool that clearly defines what it is that you bring to the table. This makes cover letters too important to take for granted.

## CONTENT: DEVELOPING TALKING POINTS

Every job is defined by a unique combination of elements that the employer requires. Your work and internship history, academic background, career interests, and even what you believe in must all be presented in the context of what the organization does and what they are looking for in a given candidate. For this reason, *successful cover letters are never generic* – they must be targeted to the set of required elements and skills outlined in the job description.

Since cover letters should be on one page and just a few paragraphs long, deciding what not to include will be made easier if you put your energy into pinpointing what must be included. Before you actually begin writing the cover letter, you should first identify the required elements, and then consider which set of elements should be emphasized in your cover letter.

In order to objectively extract **talking points** from a given job description, you can approach the process analytically by taking the following series of steps:

**Step 1:** Conduct research on the targeted organization.

- Find out what their mission is – what they do, how they do it, and why they do it. Even if you are familiar with the agency, find out how *they* describe what they do.
- You should be clear about *how* the department for which you are applying fits into the overall mission.
- Also, find out how the agency differentiates itself from others in the field.

The goal here is to develop a set of *organizational talking points* you can refer to later, mainly in the introduction and conclusion of the cover letter. You can do this research by reviewing websites, brochures, marketing literature, annual reports, organizational directories, trade journals, etc.

**Step 2:** Deconstruct the job or internship description.

- Identify the required qualifications and skills outlined in it.
- Underline the requirements and task descriptions.

The goal here is to extract the *raw description requirements* that you can then reduce to manageable *refined description requirements*.

**Step 3:** Consolidate and prioritize the *raw description requirements* you have extracted from the job description.

- Infer what you think the employer considers is most important among the requirements outlined in the job description.
- Usually, employers give away their priorities by listing the most important tasks and job requirements first, by repeating the same tasks throughout the job description, or by highlighting similar elements in different ways.

You will probably end up with a list of 5-10 *refined description requirements*. By focusing on these elements, you will be able to write a cover letter that emphasizes qualities for which the employer is looking.

**Step 4:** Plug yourself in by comparing your background and drawing parallels to the *refined description requirements* you have culled from the job description. Take a look at your relevant:

- Work experience (this includes internships and Capstone projects)
- Academic experience (Wagner degree, program, specialization, and relevant coursework; other degrees; study abroad, etc.)
- Industry knowledge (your knowledge of recent developments, trends in the industry, who the different players are, etc.)
- Skill sets (managerial, financial, analytical, research, evaluative, public speaking, language, technical/computer, communication, team building, etc.)
- Your beliefs/values (shared commitment to what the organization does and how it does it)
- Volunteer experience
- Leadership roles (awards, student organizations, etc.)

You should arrive at a set of *required talking points* that should be used in the body of your cover letter.

If you follow these steps, you will begin to objectively identify how qualified you will be in the employer's eyes. It is unlikely that many candidates will have all of the required elements for a particular position. The closer you are, however, the better the "fit."

## WHAT THE EMPLOYER WANTS TO KNOW ABOUT YOU

After you have pulled together, prioritized, and translated the organizational and job description particulars into talking points, and considered in what proportion each element should be reflected back to the employer, you can begin to consider what to convey through the cover letter.

In essence, you should convey an understanding of how you represent a “fit” to the organization and the position for which you are applying. You need to frame your presentation in a way in which the employer can respond. Good writing is critical, and it must be done in the context of what the employer is looking for.

Nearly all employers are looking for three things in a candidate. Little else matters. They want to know:

### **(1) Can you do the job**

Employers want to know if you’re qualified for the job. You must highlight the skills and experiences the employer has emphasized as being most important for the given position and/or are relevant to the organization or industry. Skills that matter most to an employer are found in the position description, as well as your knowledge of what the organization does, how the organization does what it does, and the environment in which the organization operates. Use the exact words and phrases mentioned in the job description to explicitly indicate that you meet the specific requirements. The *required talking points* and *organizational talking points* you developed should be used as reference points.

### **(2) Will you do the job**

In a cover letter, you must demonstrate motivation and express your commitment to what a given organization does. In public service, commitment to issues counts. If you can express your commitment - and relay your understanding of the issues surrounding your area of interest - you can substantially elevate your candidacy in the eyes of the employer. Use your *organizational talking points* and accomplishments from your resume to underscore your high level of motivation for the job.

### **(3) Will you fit in**

From this perspective, employers want to know if you are someone they want to invite into their world. Cover letters should convey shared values, a positive outlook, a respectful demeanor, a polite tone, and an ability to get along with others.

Pay attention to news/items of interest, as well as the jargon you saw when you conducted the organizational research. Try to incorporate these and make references in your letter. Acknowledge the organization’s recent accomplishments. This will indicate that you’ve done research on the employer and demonstrate your interest and commitment.

## COVER LETTER STRUCTURE

Generally, cover letters should not exceed one page or five paragraphs, and they should be written in concise business language. While there are different schools of thought on how long a cover letter should be - short and sweet vs. considered, sophisticated, and expressive - the length should be driven by how much you have to say that is relevant to the position - no more, no less. Usually, four paragraphs should do it.

### 1st Paragraph: Introduction

- Introduce yourself by stating the position for which you are applying and where you heard about the position. If someone referred you to this organization, mention that person's name in the first paragraph.
- Refer to your *organizational talking points* – communicating elements of shared interest can hold the attention of the reader.
- You should state that you have the requisite combination of skills to be an asset to the organization. Your challenge in succeeding paragraphs is to back this up.

### 2nd Paragraph: Professional or academic background

- If your cover is longer than three paragraphs, it is important to concentrate on either your academic background or your professional background in your second paragraph. This will help you stay focused.
- If you are a full time student and/or are more relevant to the organization from an academic perspective, then your second paragraph should be an academic paragraph. For example: “I am currently a graduate student at New York University’s Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, specializing in...”
- Refer to your *required talking points* and highlight how you have the required skills to contribute to the organization. As graduate students, you should be expressing more than stock sentences, like “I have strong research skills.” You should be able to explain how and what you have researched. You must make a direct link between what you are referring to and what the employer is looking for. Give specific examples. Remember, cover letters are not written in a vacuum.
- If you are writing a three paragraph cover letter, it is okay to make this a combination academic/professional paragraph.

### 3rd Paragraph: Professional, academic, or “wildcard”

- If your 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph was academic, then this should be your professional background paragraph.
- Again, refer to the *required talking points*, and highlight how you have the required skills to contribute to the organization.
- This is also an area where you can speak to skills you possess that are not necessarily professional or academic – wildcard elements that may need to be expressed. They may be industry related or stand-alone: technical and IT skills, regional understanding, languages, communication skills, etc.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Paragraph: Synthesis/Conclusion

- By way of conclusion, you should wrap it all up by synthesizing a number of elements already outlined in your cover letter.
  - You may want to stress your commitment to what they do.
  - Or your high level of motivation.
  - Mentioning the agency's stature in the field can be effective, too.
  - You may also consider restating that you have the professional and academic qualifications the employer needs.
- Let them know that your resume is enclosed.
- Include your telephone number and email address.
- Thank the employer for their time and consideration and that you look forward to hearing from them.

#### ADDITIONAL POINTERS

- Whenever you send a resume to a potential employer, it should be accompanied by a cover letter.
- Whenever possible, cover letters should be addressed to the hiring person rather than HR or Personnel. Pay close attention to spelling and job titles when addressing the contact person.
- Typographical and spelling errors can cost you a job. Use the spell check every time you modify your cover letter, proofread it at least three times, and, if possible, ask someone else to look at it with a fresh eye.
- Don't forget to sign original letters and keep copies of all correspondence.
- Use good quality white or off-white paper for your resumes and cover letters.
- Make sure your name and phone number are on the cover letter in case it gets separated from your resume.
- If sending your cover letter via email, it is okay to send the letter as the text of the email message or as an attachment. If sending your cover letter as an attachment, keep the text of your email message professional and brief. Remember to attach your resume to the email.

## SAMPLE COVER LETTERS

March 20, 2005

Bruce Wayne  
CARE USA  
151 Ellis Street  
New York, NY 10040

Dear Mr. Wayne:

James Gordon, the commissioner at your agency, suggested I apply for the Program Manager for Countries in Crisis position at CARE USA. I have a strong commitment to serving individuals and families in the poorest communities of the world, and I believe my educational background coupled with my internship experience make me a good fit for this position.

I am specializing in international public management at NYU's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. In addition to taking classes in Managing Humanitarian Challenges and Conflicts, International Economic Development, and Program Development for International Organizations, I gained practical experience with emergency humanitarian programming and microenterprise ventures through two internships while at school. At Mercy Corps, I assisted with interventions for populations living in conflict/post-conflict and post-natural disaster contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa. At Trickle Up, I facilitated basic business training for entrepreneurs in Zambia and formed partnerships with lending institutions to ensure financial services are available to support microenterprise ventures in the future. My duties at both agencies required me to routinely provide monitoring, evaluation, and reporting for our programs.

I believe that my coursework and program management experience in international settings would be of great value to CARE USA. I am submitting my resume for your review and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to further discuss my background and qualifications. Feel free to contact me at 646-555-1212 or [ivegotitall@nyu.edu](mailto:ivegotitall@nyu.edu). Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

March 5, 2005

Claudia Jean Cregg  
HR Rotational Associate  
Pfizer Global Manufacturing  
1234 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10020

Dear Ms. Cregg:

I am writing to apply for the Urban Renewal Intern position at Pfizer Global Manufacturing, as posted by the Office of Career Services at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at NYU. I understand that Pfizer has been working for over a decade on revitalization efforts in the neighborhoods close to its Brooklyn manufacturing plant, and that you are currently looking for an intern to research and oversee activities related to your continued urban renewal efforts. I think you will find that my education in urban planning combined with my diverse employment background makes me a good match for this position.

I am currently a first-year graduate student at NYU Wagner and expect to receive my Master of Urban Planning degree in May, 2007. My coursework in urban economics, urban planning and development, housing policy, land use law, and statistics has prepared me in understanding the legal, economic and organizational aspects required for change through a comprehensive urban renewal effort.

Prior to entering graduate school, I worked as a senior legal assistant at the law firm of Sidley Austin Brown & Wood, where I wrote and conducted extensive research on environmental and bankruptcy law issues. In addition, my experience as an engineering consultant at Stone & Webster Environmental Technology & Services allowed me to develop my analytical and writing skills by assisting clients in complying with complex environmental regulations. I have experience interacting with all levels of an organization and enjoy working collaboratively as well as independently.

I am very interested in the opportunities Pfizer presents to create positive change in distressed neighborhoods. Enclosed is my resume for your review. Please feel free to contact me at (212) 555-5143, or by email at [stupendousintern@nyu.edu](mailto:stupendousintern@nyu.edu) with any questions you may have. I look forward to having the chance to discuss Pfizer's philanthropic efforts in the local urban environment. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

June 25, 2005

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

Dear Ms. Weaver:

I am writing this letter to express my interest in the Grants Writer position posted on the Idealist website. The Brooklyn Botanic Garden has always had an impressive diversity of programming offered to children and adults alike. I have over 5 years of experience in grant writing and development and would embrace the opportunity to further enhance the beauty and reputation of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden by becoming a part of your organization.

During my tenure at the Guttman Foundation, I have worked closely with a range of nonprofit organizations collaborating on the development of grant proposals for review by the Foundation's Board of Directors. Consequently, I have a keen understanding of how a successful grant proposal is drafted and those essential, compelling elements that ensure a program's support. I also have experience tracking grant-reporting requirements, writing project descriptions, and coordinating grant administration activities. Additionally, I have an understanding of project budgets as well as narrative program reports.

I have experience fundraising for a Brooklyn cultural nonprofit organization, as well as in the coordination and production of large-scale events, database development, the management of volunteers, and logistics coordination. I am a creative fast learner who thrives in a deadline driven environment. I have experience interacting with all levels of an organization and enjoy a collaborative work situation.

I have a Master of Public Administration in Public and Nonprofit Management and am committed to working for organizations dedicated to innovativeness and diversity. I am confident that I can be an asset to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. I have enclosed my resume for your review. Please feel free to contact me at 718-555-0987 or by e-mail at [llovetofundraise@nyu.edu](mailto:llovetofundraise@nyu.edu). Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

January 15, 2005

Mel Cooley  
Analyst  
Moody's Investors Service  
56 Broadway  
New York, NY 10003

Dear Mr. Cooley:

I am writing to apply for the Senior Associate position within the Healthcare Group at Moody's that I read about in the Career Directory of NYU's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. Having worked in the field of healthcare over the past three years in various capacities while pursuing my MPA in Healthcare Finance at NYU, I have gained a great deal of in-depth knowledge of the healthcare industry. I am also currently taking courses in Finance at the Stern School of Business. I am now interested in working for an organization, such as Moody's, where I would be able to apply my strong analytical and financial skills along with the industry knowledge I have attained over the last few years.

In my current position as a Logistics Manager, I prepare and monitor a \$1.2M non-salary operating budget for 14 separate cost centers within the Nursing Department. I am responsible for the detailed analysis of the monthly financial reports for each cost center, and I must present my analysis in an oral and written report to our senior administrators on a quarterly basis. Additionally, through my examination of changes in patient acuity, census, and other trends, and analysis of expense reports and corresponding documentation, I am responsible for ascertaining total cost ramifications of proposed equipment purchases and assessing supply utilization needs and practices.

My prior experience at Health Management Systems also provided me with the opportunity to apply my analytical and quantitative skills. While employed at Health Management Systems as a Project Manager Assistant, I worked closely with our account managers and programmers, assisting with the delivery of financial management support services to various hospitals. One of my many duties included analyzing the monthly billing cycle to ensure that the financial reports corresponded with the input data.

There are several reasons for my interest in working at Moody's. For one, with over 60,000 ratings on short and long term obligations of some 16,000 issuers in the United States, Moody's rating coverage in the municipal credit market is unparalleled. Moody's is clearly the leading provider of credit ratings and research, and the prospect of working in such a leading firm is very exciting. Furthermore, my strong educational background, demonstrated ability to handle multiple tasks, and high motivation level would also allow me to complement the existing team of healthcare experts. By having the opportunity to contribute in the research of the health care industry and credit markets, I would be able to assist the firm in providing the highest quality rating coverage.

I have enclosed my resume for your review. If you have any questions, feel free to call me at 212-234-5678 or email at [looknofurther@nyu.edu](mailto:looknofurther@nyu.edu). Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

April 3, 2005

Larry Tate  
Open Society Institute  
5 Fifth Avenue, 55<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10055

Dear Mr. Tate:

I am writing in response to the Program Associate position in the Education and Urban Debate Programs, as posted in the Foundation Center's Philanthropy News Digest. My interest in working in philanthropy, focusing on education issues, stems from my work in public policy and my personal experience as a student of the New York City public school system. I share the philosophy of the Open Society Institute's Youth Initiatives Debate Program, which values the importance of promoting the critical thinking skills, civic engagement and leadership potential of socio-economically disadvantaged youth. I feel that my background and your requirements are a good match and I would like to apply my skills to help the Open Society Institute implement its Youth Initiatives.

My desire to learn more about the philanthropic field and its inner workings compelled me to transition from my full-time employment as a policy associate for a nonprofit agency and accept an internship position with the New York Community Trust. As an intern in the Education, Human Justice and Arts program area, I review numerous grant proposals, assist program officers in writing dockets, and conduct site visits. I also evaluate and monitor the performance of grantees and prepare interim and final grant reports and grant summaries. Working in the nation's largest community foundation has exposed me to many of the major issues affecting public education in New York City as well as innovative solutions to achieve systemic change within the City's school system.

Previously, as a fellow for the National Puerto Rican Coalition, Inc. (NPRC), I worked closely with high school and college students to develop and implement youth leadership initiatives. I recruited and supervised interns to carry out youth outreach efforts and to develop advocacy and cultural workshops for various campus-based conferences. As co-editor of the student newsletter of NPRC, I reported on emerging trends in higher education and discussed strategies for student involvement in the public policy process. Personally, the opportunity to gain a college education was made possible for me through the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP), a program that gives economically challenged students with the potential to succeed in college, an opportunity to earn a college degree. This opportunity has shaped my drive, determination and strong work ethic. It has also instilled in me a life-long commitment to help young people from low-income backgrounds acquire the skills needed to succeed in college.

I am currently a graduate student at NYU's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service with a specialization in policy analysis. Enclosed please find my resume for your review. I am confident that you will find that my professional and academic skills along with my personal commitment to enrich the educational experiences of young people are valuable qualities that will be an asset to the Education and Urban Debate Programs. I can be reached at 917-876-5432 or [imtheoneforyou@nyu.edu](mailto:imtheoneforyou@nyu.edu). I look forward to meeting with you and discussing this further.

Sincerely,