



NYU | WAGNER

COVER LETTER
WRITING



COVER LETTER WRITING GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS A COVER LETTER?

A cover letter is a narrative summary of your candidacy for a specific role and organization that includes information listed in your resume, as well as your motivation and interest in the specific opportunity.

WHAT A COVER LETTER IS NOT

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.

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 clear, tailored, and unique to you. 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 they look 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:

1. 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 issue area and mission
- The population(s) that they serve
- The geographical region(s) in which they work
- 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.

2. 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.

COVER LETTER COMPOSITION

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. **IS THERE ORGANIZATIONAL FIT?** — 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 and networking. 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:

Dear Ideal Employer,

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,

- ❖ **NOTE:** When applying for multiple jobs, you may find yourself using similar language and examples in different cover letters. Rather than rewriting each cover letter, you can save and track your commonly used examples in an Excel or Word Doc. You can then edit the language for each new letter.

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. Consider your industry/field. "Times New Roman" or "Arial" work well.
- Avoid the use of italics. They can be difficult to read.
- Do not use a font size smaller than 11.
- 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, though it is not critical to have a specific person's name. You should search the organization's website and LinkedIn to best determine who the hiring manager is. If a name is not provided or cannot be found, consider using "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Selection Committee" rather than "To Whom It May Concern," or "Dear Sir/Madam."
- Pay close attention to the spelling of names and position titles.
- For US-based employers, cover letters should not include information about age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, children, or personal hobbies.
- If you send a cover letter as an email attachment, send it as a PDF document to ensure that the formatting does not change.

SAMPLE COVER LETTERS

November 1, 2021

Melody Cooley
Assistant Commissioner of Planning and Development
NYC Department of City Planning, Brooklyn Office
16 Court Street, 7th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11241

Dear Ms. Cooley,

I am writing in response to the Department of City Planning's opening for an Assistant Borough Planner in Brooklyn, posted on the NYC Careers website. As a Brooklyn resident and urban planning professional, I share the DCP's goal of working with the community to meet its needs and support sustainable, long-term growth. I would be thrilled to use my skills and experience to help improve my community as part of the DCP, and I appreciate your consideration for the position.

Through my capstone project at NYU's Wagner School of Public Service, I am working in collaboration with classmates to build an affordable housing toolkit for Enterprise Community Partners. This experience has helped me to build an in-depth understanding of housing policy in New York City and the ways in which it can be leveraged to support positive outcomes for the community. The project also involves synthesizing research and communicating recommendations to the client, preparing me for the research and advising responsibilities of the Assistant Borough Planner.

Additionally, as an intern with NYC Housing Preservation and Development, I helped coordinate projects involving both internal and external stakeholders. This role included liaising with public and private partners, helping me develop my communication skills in a city planning context. I also used my strong organizational skills and attention to detail to manage and distribute various reports and files, responsibilities that will support my work at the Department of City Planning.

My passion for my community, combined with my education and professional experience, make me an ideal candidate for the Department of City Planning. I would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the department as an Assistant Borough Planner and hope to speak with you further regarding this position. I can be reached at 212-998-0000 or i.m.pact@nyu.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely
I.M. Pact

October 25, 2021

Community Service Society of New York
633 Third Ave, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10017

Dear Hiring Manager,

I am writing to express my interest in the Education and Youth Policy Intern position on the Policy, Research, and Advocacy team. I recognize the valuable work that the Community Service Society does to provide education and employment opportunities for New York City's youth. With my strong background in policy analysis and communications as well as my knowledge of the education landscape, I am ideally suited to help the Community Service Society continue to make a meaningful impact on the futures of young people in New York City.

Through various roles at the University of Michigan, I developed a strong foundation in both qualitative and quantitative research. As a Program Assistant at the Ginsberg Center, I developed volunteer feedback surveys that led to programmatic changes to increase student engagement. As an Undergraduate Research Assistant, I analyzed statewide education data sets in a collaborative effort to further policy research on the impact of charter schools on student outcomes. Combined with my commitment to supporting equitable education policy, these experiences working directly with research methods have positioned me to make positive contributions to the Community Service Society.

In addition to my analytical skills, I am also developing strong policy communications skills through my coursework at NYU Wagner. In my Introduction to Public Policy course, I have written various forms of policy communications including memos, op-eds, and stakeholder analyses focusing on local and federal education issues. These projects have helped me develop an in-depth understanding of education policy priorities and will support a seamless transition to the communications responsibilities of the role.

Through my education and experience, I possess a thorough understanding of education policy, as well as highly relevant analytical and communications skills that will help support the Community Service Society's mission of fighting poverty and supporting equitable opportunities for youth. I have enclosed my resume for your review. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my qualifications with you in more detail; feel free to call me at 212-992-0000 or email me at ima.gogetter@gmail.com. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Ima Go-Getter

October 28, 2021

Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital
2301 Enterprise Drive
Westchester, IL 60154

Dear Selection Committee,

I am writing in response to the opening for a Project Manager at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital. I admire the mission of Lurie Children's to provide high-quality, responsive care to children and their families, and I would embrace the opportunity to leverage my experience in the healthcare industry as well as my education in health management to support the organization's goals.

In my current role at Rush University Medical Center, I collaborate with members of various teams across the organization, helping me develop a strong understanding of healthcare systems and the ways in which different departments interact. My work involves partnering with individuals across the organization, including senior leadership, to optimize internal processes and maximize efficiency. Additionally, this work requires excellent organization and time management in order to meet deadlines, equipping me with the skills to manage competing priorities as a Project Manager.

In addition to my professional experience, my education in health administration makes me an ideal fit for Lurie Children's. My coursework at NYU Wagner includes courses such as Strategic Management for Healthcare Organizations, which have allowed me to build a detailed knowledge of healthcare systems and gain applicable skills related to strategic planning and implementation in a healthcare context. Through courses and projects, I have also strengthened my interpersonal communication and leadership abilities, preparing me to lead and collaborate with interdepartmental project teams.

With my passion for health management, project planning experience, and relevant educational background, I am confident that I can be an asset to the hospital. I have enclosed my resume for your review, and I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you further regarding this opportunity. Please feel free to contact me at 773-123-0000 or job.seeker@gmail.com. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jo B. Seeker

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

As you write and revise your cover letters, you have access to a wide range of resources across NYU.

The NYU Wagner Office of Career Services (OCS) provides direct support to students and alumni of Wagner via:

- [Career Advisement](#): Schedule a 30-minute appointment with a Career Services advisor via the Career Directory. Career advisors can review your resume and cover letter with you and discuss ways to best highlight your unique skills and experiences.
- [Wagner Career Directory](#): Wagner's online job database – Use it to search and apply for jobs, internships, and fellowships, and to RSVP for career events.
- [Career Guides](#): Comprehensive guides for all areas of career development, including resumes, networking, interviewing, salary negotiation, and more!
- [Professional Development Resources](#): A collection of job boards, professional associations, and other helpful industry resources to assist in your career exploration. Learning more about your chosen field will help you tailor your resume for specific opportunities.

Additionally, all NYU students and alumni can access these campus-wide resources:

- [NYU Wasserman Center for Career Development](#): NYU's central campus career office provides advising, professional resources, and events available to all NYU students and alumni.
- [NYU Handshake](#): Handshake is the NYU Wasserman Center's online job and event database. Use it to search and apply for jobs, internships, and fellowships, and to RSVP for career events.
- [NYU Wasserman Cover Letter Guide](#): Includes samples.
- [Building A Great Cover Letter](#): How-to video from the Wasserman Center with step-by-step instructions