

# Cover Letters

## A Guide for First-time and Experienced Job Seekers



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## WHAT DOES IT DO?

- a. Identifies the position for which you are applying and how you learned of it.
- b. Indicates *why* you are applying.
- c. Describes how your skills match the position requirements.
- d. Provides *affect* – an *affective* portrait of you – and *subliminal* reasons why they should interview you.
- e. Requests information on next steps and repeats availability, phone, email.

## COVER LETTER GUIDELINES

### *Style*

- Targeted: Be specific. If possible, indicate a special reason for wanting to work for that particular employer. Discuss your interest and skills for the industry or career field
- Persuasive: The letter should be problem-solving oriented referring to how you can meet the employer or job needs rather than simply listing accomplishments or your desires
- Tone: Be clear and concise. The letter should expand upon the resume and add personal flavor. Give the impression of confidence, but not conceit. It is best not to be clever or cute, but you may choose to be creative, depending on the type of employer to whom you wish to appeal.
- Accuracy: Use correct grammar, punctuation and spelling. Make certain there are not mistakes. Have career counselors and/or individuals you know critique your letters.

### *Appearance*

- Individualized: Address the letter to an individual rather than to Dear Sir/Madam whenever possible. Call to get a contact if one is not known. This is important for follow-up. You should follow-up your letter with a phone call to confirm that it arrived and to demonstrate continued interest.
- Paragraphs: Be brief; keep them short enough to encourage reading.
- Paper: Use high quality bond paper with matching envelopes.
- Print: Type or laser-print your letter using block or semi-block basic letter styles. The page should be well-balanced.
- Signature: Remember to sign your letter.

**Note:** There has been a dramatic increase of letters and resumes sent through email and the web application sites. Regardless of the communication mode being used, strong letters will produce a positive first impression. Students who send exceptional letters, on paper or electronically, are noticed and strongly considered for opportunities.

# COVER LETTER FORMAT

Your Address

Date

Contact Person

Title

Department

Employer's Name

Address

Dear Mr./Ms./Mrs./Dr. (Contact Person):

## Paragraph One: Introduction

- Brief
- Mention exact source of job information
- Upbeat and confident tone

## Paragraph Two: The Why Paragraph

- Mention three reasons why you are qualified for the job (cross-reference with your resume)
- All three points must awaken employer's curiosity
- Prioritize three points strategically (weakest second)
- Keep tempo of the sentence fast and smooth

## Paragraph Three: The Descriptive Paragraph

- Choose strongest point from previous paragraph and provide in-depth description
- Use quantifiables
- Add information of interest NOT on the resume

## The Rest of the Letter: Who are you?

- Commit a fourth paragraph to some punchy things about yourself- the *affective* portrait. Make the employer curious to meet you for *additional* reasons.
- Fifth paragraph: next steps- contact information and follow-up
- Closing: very positive, emphatic, confident tone... But: soft-touch on direct requests

Sincerely/Regards,

Your Signature

Your Name Typed

## **SELF-DESCRIPTIVE WORDS**

**(Add personal qualities to the letter)**

Active	Determined	Mature	Respective
Adaptable	Diplomatic	Objective	Self-reliant
Aggressive	Disciplined	Optimistic	Self-Starter
Alert	Discrete	Perceptive	Sense of Humor
Ambitious	Economical	Personable	Sincere
Analytical	Efficient	Pleasant	Sophisticated
Attentive	Energetic	Positive	Systematic
Broad-minded	Enterprising	Practical	Thorough
Consistent	Enthusiastic	Productive	
Constructive	Extroverted	Proficient	
Creative	Independent	Realistic	
Dependable	Logical	Reliable	
Detail-Oriented	Loyal	Resourceful	

## **ACTION WORDS**

Accelerated	Developed	Led	Proved
Adapted	Demonstrated	Managed	Recommended
Administered	Directed	Motivated	Reduced
Analyzed	Eliminated	Organized	Reinforced
Approved	Established	Originated	Reorganized
Coordinated	Expanded	Participated	Revamped
Conceived	Expedited	Performed	Reviewed
Conducted	Founded	Pinpointed	Revised
Completed	Generated	Planned	Scheduled
Controlled	Headed	Programmed	Set-up
Created	Influenced	Proposed	Structured
Delegated	Implemented	Provided	Supervised

## GUIDELINES FOR OBTAINING REFERENCES

An important component of your job hunt is good references. While that may seem obvious, some students neglect to follow the steps necessary to obtain them. When asked for references, they may reel off the names of professors or former employers without considering the importance of what they are being asked to provide. Observe the following guidelines and the reference check will never undo all the work you have done in your job search.

- ✓ OBTAIN PERMISSION – **Never** give the name of someone whose permission you do not have!
- ✓ KNOW WHAT THE REFERENCE WILL SAY ABOUT YOU – It is perfectly acceptable to ask a potential reference if he/she can give you a strong recommendation. If he/she cannot, he/she will tell you so and you are free to find someone who can recommend you highly. Identify people who are **enthusiastic** and **easy to talk** to since most reference checking is done by phone.
- ✓ PROVIDE YOUR REFERENCES WITH ADEQUATE INFORMATION – Whenever possible, give your references a description of the job for which you are applying. If a complete job description is not available, tell your references the kind of positions for which you are applying and using their name. If asking for a written reference, give the person adequate time to prepare a letter; **do not** ask the day before you need it.
- ✓ REMIND YOUR REFERENCES OCCASIONALLY – Someone may give you permission to use his name, and not intend it as a perpetual request. Periodically ask your references if it is still all right to use their names. This is especially true when using former professors as references. As memorable as you are, you may fade in professorial recollection. **You do not** want a potential employer to hear: “...well, I think I remember her.”
- ✓ TAILOR YOUR REFERENCES TO THE JOB SOUGHT – Develop separate lists of references for each type of position you are seeking. A systems professor may be best in one instance, and a financial analysis professor in another. **Your reference lists should not be static.**
- ✓ MAKE SURE YOUR REFERENCES ARE PROFESSIONAL ONES – References **should be** supervisors or faculty members who know you in a professional context. (Some organizations, especially government agencies, will ask you for personal references, in addition to your professional ones. So make sure you do have a friendly next-door neighbor, just in case.)
- ✓ PREPARE A LIST OF REFERENCES – Use a style and paper to match your resume; prepare a list of references that includes: name, position title, business address, business phone number, and relationship (how the person knows you). Contacted your references and prepare your list of references; you will be in a position to respond immediately to an employer’s request for references.
- ✓ TIMING AND FOLLOW-UP – **Do not** offer your list of references until asked. It may change as you proceed through the interview process. **Remember** to thank your references after each call and try to get feedback. When you get a job, inform your references and thank them again for their assistance.

## **LETTER OF INQUIRY**

**Purpose:** To inquire about possible job openings and also to request information or literature from a company or organization for which you would like to work. It's purpose and strategies are very similar to the cover letter. Be sure to research the company, especially whether there is a webpage for opportunities. Try to identify some connecting factor between you and the organization where a "fit" seems likely. If the letter of inquiry is directed towards setting up an interview, do not assume the employer will contact you. You should say something like, "I will contact you in two weeks to learn more about upcoming employment opportunities with (name of organization)." Then mark you calendar to make the call.

### **Paragraph One**

- Indicate your interest and reveal your source of information.

### **Paragraph Two**

- Outline your strongest qualifications
- Focus on broader occupational and organizational dimensions to describe how your goal would match the environment

### **Paragraph Three**

- Do some personal marketing
- Comment to the employer that you have the personal qualities and motivation to contribute to the organization

### **Paragraph Four**

- Suggest an action plan
- Request an interview and indicate that you will call during a specific time period to discuss interview possibilities

### **Closing**

- Express appreciation to the reader for his or her time and consideration and sign the letter

## **AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

### **Thank you Letter**

- Express your appreciation for the opportunity/ experience
- Highlight a specific topic you discussed during the interview or indicate some skill/experience that will set you apart from the other applicants
- Sign the letter

## **AFTER YOU RECEIVE THE OFFER**

### **Letter of Acknowledgement**

- Acknowledge receipt of the offer
- Express your appreciation for the offer
- Notify the company of the date you expect to make your decision
- Sign the letter

### **Letter to Decline an Offer**

- Decline the offer
- Express your appreciation for the offer and the company's interest in you
- Sign the letter

### **Letter of Acceptance**

- Accept the offer
- Refer to the offer letter
- Indicate your travel plans and confirm your start date
- Express your appreciation and your pleasure in joining the company
- Sign the letter

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**SAMPLE COVER LETTER – Allegheny County Housing Authority**

10 Washington Ave.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

March 31, 2010

C. Lindsay Granite, Director of Human Resources  
Allegheny County Housing Authority  
625 Stanwix Street, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Dear Ms. Granite:

I am writing to express my strong interest in the Hope VI/Mixed Finance Project Coordinator position recently posted on your website. I will be graduating this May from the H. John Heinz III College, School of Public Policy Management at Carnegie Mellon University with concentrations in Community Development and Financial Management. As you will see from my resume, I have the requisite skills you are looking for to be successful in this position. More importantly, I have the passion and drive to make a difference in the housing situation for low-income or otherwise disadvantaged people living in Allegheny County.

Combined with this passion is my knowledge of budgeting and fiscal policy. I am very comfortable with the preparation and analysis of financial statements, cash flow management, and budget design. In addition, I have experience with strategic planning, having crafted an actual five-year plan for a local non-profit education agency. Finally, I spent my summer internship learning how to research and write grant proposals for the Allegheny Intermediate Unit.

My interest stems from a project I am currently completing for the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Bureau of Hunger and Housing Services. I am working with a student team to develop recommendations for an outcomes-based evaluation process to be used by service providers that contract with DHS. I am knowledgeable about current nationwide trends and the myriad factors that play into how and why a person becomes homeless or needs temporary housing. I am impressed by the ACHA's level of commitment to helping the most vulnerable become more self-sufficient through innovative and progressive programs.

I would love the opportunity to discuss my qualifications with you in more detail. I can be reached by phone or email, both listed on my resume. Thank you for your time and consideration; I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Susie A. Student

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**SAMPLE COVER LETTER – Oregon Department of Human Services**

200 Holly Lane  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

April 13, 2010

Jean Q. Public  
Department of Human Services  
Recruitment and Retention Unit  
500 Summer Street NE, E22  
Salem OR 97301-1099

Dear Ms. Public:

I am applying for the position of Fiscal Analyst II. My experiences and interests are an excellent match for the Department of Human Services.

I am interested in bringing my strong analytic and quantitative background to the Department of Human Services. My academic training and problem solving skills would be an excellent match for the policy and fiscal issues your department focuses on every day. My previous international work experience and a rigorous applied graduate curriculum have provided me with ample opportunity to refine my oral & written communication, leadership, and teamwork skills. As a result of my diverse background and experience I feel equally comfortable evaluating programs, assessing client needs, and analyzing budgets.

Currently I am studying in an intense 12 month accelerated masters program as a Peace Corps Fellow at Carnegie Mellon University designed to sharpen my problem solving abilities. With courses focused on econometrics, technology, finance, and program evaluation I can easily communicate with diverse groups of people. I am able to systematically dissect problems, strategically think through various solutions, choose the best course of action, and implement it under difficult situations.

I believe in setting lofty personal goals and working tenaciously until they are achieved. During my two years spent as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Philippines, I designed and implemented a microfinance and new business development program. I constantly faced challenges regarding language, culture, environment, and limited resources, but through creativity and a strong work ethic, I was able to succeed under difficult circumstances. First, I was able to determine the appropriate program parameters to fit the needs of the community. Second, I was able to gain the confidence of the community and lead them from the project's inception to the complete transfer of management responsibilities to the community.

It is a combination of learned skills, technology capabilities, and a commitment to public service which I can bring to the Department of Human Services. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Sincerely,

John Smith

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**SAMPLE COVER LETTER – Arts / Federal Government (NEA)**

600 Penny Lane  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

April 3, 2010

Phyllis Diller-Waddles, Human Resource Specialist  
Office of Human Resources  
National Endowment for the Arts  
1100 Pennsylvania, NW, Room 627  
Washington, DC 20506

Dear Ms. Diller-Waddles:

I am submitting my federal resume for the position of Executive Assistant advertised in announcement #2611. I learned about this opening from Monica Jingleheimer-Schmidt, NEA Fellow and an alumna of my graduate school, the H. John Heinz III College at Carnegie Mellon University. I trust that you will find me an ideal candidate for this position due to my personal background and professional experiences.

While working towards a master degree in public policy with an emphasis on arts management from Carnegie Mellon University, my education has been complimented by a two-year apprenticeship at Pittsburgh Opera. This arrangement has given me the opportunity to apply what I have learned in academia - policy, management, and technology - directly to my work at the Opera, allowing me to synthesize theoretical knowledge with practical experience.

In addition to my strong administrative skills, I am especially proud of my role in the planning and execution of the Maecenas XXI Gala. This event raised \$370,000 for Pittsburgh Opera's productions and outreach programs, and was rated by Pittsburgh Post Gazette as one of the top five events in 2009. I would also like to call to your attention my master's thesis, which identifies new strategies for increasing cultural participation through audience development and diversification. My thesis team's client was The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, a presenting organization dedicated to the economic revitalization of Pittsburgh. Both these accomplishments have provided a wealth of experience that will enable me to effectively and efficiently provide the necessary assistance to the Senior Deputy Chairman, specifically in the areas of administrative support, written and oral communication, research and analysis, event planning, project management, and technological proficiency.

Throughout my employment at the Opera and other organizations, I have consistently demonstrated an industrious work ethic while working individually or as a member of a team, strong written and oral communication skills, the ability to manage multiple projects simultaneously, and solid leadership potential, all while maintaining a positive attitude and sense of humor. If selected, I intend to incorporate these personal characteristics into duties and responsibilities associated with the position of Executive Assistant.

I am eager to build upon my past experiences at the National Endowment for the Arts in a capacity that would allow me to put into action my management and administrative skills as well as my enthusiasm for the arts. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to discussing my qualifications with you in greater depth.

Sincerely,

Paul Harrison

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**SAMPLE COVER LETTER – Entertainment Industry**

May 5, 2010

Kelly Taylor  
Office of Human Resources  
Spelling Studios  
555 Central Avenue  
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

Dear Ms. Taylor,

I am extremely interested in an internship opportunity at Spelling Studios for the upcoming fall semester. I am a big fan of the work Spelling Studios produces, and I'd love to be a part your organization!

I am currently a graduate student at Carnegie Mellon University, earning a Masters of Entertainment Industry Management. The program is new and can best be described as "an MBA for the entertainment industry". We spend time studying marketing, economics, programming, trends in the industry, technology influences, finance, and management theory. The website does a much more eloquent job of outlining the degree, and I invite you to take a look if you get a chance. It can be found at [www.artsnet.org/meim](http://www.artsnet.org/meim).

I recently completed an internship with Brainer Studios (in Brooklyn, NY) and am eager to find a position here on the West coast. I think you'll find that I am an incredibly hard worker and willing to do whatever is necessary to get the job done. I have several years of professional experience both in and out of the entertainment industry. I possess exceptional organization and communication skills; I'm technically savvy and am a very competent at multi-tasking. My resume is attached for your consideration.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on the telephone or meet in person to further discuss internship opportunities at Spelling Studios. Thank you for your consideration.

All the best,

Brandon Walsh

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**SAMPLE COVER LETTER – Healthcare**

1102 Springfield Ave.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

April 25, 2010

Joe Cardiac  
American Heart Association  
Columbus, Ohio  
Job Code: ADV-OH-AHA

Dear Mr. Cardiac:

Please accept my application for the Advocacy Director position in the Columbus, Ohio office advertised on your website. I will graduate from the H. John Heinz III College at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) in May of 2010 with a Master of Science in Health Care Policy and Management. My experiences and education, combined with my career aspirations, position me to help achieve the mission and goals of the American Heart Association.

Over the last four years, I have dedicated my work and studies to the research of health policies that deal with the access to and funding for underserved populations' health and welfare programs. Through my experiences, I have gained a comprehensive working knowledge of Medicare, Medicaid, universal health coverage, electronic medical records, smoking cessation programs, and many other health issues and the political debates surrounding them. My qualifications are built on a solid foundation of classroom skills and real-world experiences. The skills I have acquired leave me poised for a career in advocacy. I feel confident that with this background I will be able to face any challenges as Advocacy Director with the strength and resolve to accomplish the goals of the American Heart Association.

This past summer during my internship with Consumer Health Coalition, I had an opportunity to help organize a grassroots consumer advocacy campaign against a \$300 million cut to Pennsylvania's Medicaid budget. A network of non-profit organizations, lead by Consumer Health Coalition, devoted themselves to an extensive lobbying effort. The team at Consumer Health Coalition and I recruited Medicaid beneficiaries as consumer advocates and extensively researched alternatives to budget cuts. We also facilitated local press conferences with consumer advocates who spoke of the devastating effects that reduced health services would have on their lives. I attended the legislative meetings with the Medicaid beneficiaries in Harrisburg, PA; and after they presented their stories, I discussed funding alternatives for Medicaid with the legislators. Our proposed alternative funding included increasing taxes on tobacco products, which is a portion of the advocacy work that the American Heart Association pursues. I thoroughly reviewed the Campaign for Smoke Free Kids literature during my research. Our efforts resulted in a reduction of the proposed cuts to \$130 million; this was seen as a tremendous success. The American Heart Association campaign against tobacco products is extremely comprehensive; and I am excited about furthering all of the American Heart Association's efforts for increased funding support and research on cardiovascular diseases.

My thorough knowledge of the American Heart Association's mission and my commitment to a career in consumer advocacy is evidence of my future success as Advocacy Director. I am available to meet with you in Columbus at anytime. I can be reached at (412) 123-4567, or via email at ldorn@cmu.edu. Thank you very much for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Laura Dorn

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**SAMPLE LETTER OF INQUIRY**

125 Pearl Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15215  
(714) 555-0987  
October 1, 2010

Richard Patterson  
Human Resources Manager  
Urban Redevelopment Authority  
16399 W. Bernardo Drive  
Washington, D.C. 92717

Dear Mr. Patterson,

I was informed of your organization through a recent conversation with a professor in the Master of Science in Public Policy and Management program at Carnegie Mellon University. Through this conversation I became interested in learning more about Urban Redevelopment Authority as I have had prior experience in this field. Therefore, I would like to inquire about any positions that may be available within your organization in which my skills and experience would be an asset.

As a graduate student at Carnegie Mellon University's H. John Heinz III College, I have developed applicable analytical, quantitative, and management skills. I have been able to use these skills in an area of my interest with graduate project experience in urban redevelopment. I have had intensive experience as a Team Leader in the Department of Research for the Urban Development League of Pittsburgh. Here I was given the lead in guiding and advising a Research Team that addressed the barriers of employment among the "hard-to-employ" welfare-to work population in the Pittsburgh region. I managed the research findings of the other participants and translated the results to the Program Director.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss how my education and experience are consistent with your needs. I would also benefit greatly from additional literature that your organization may offer. Please take the time to review my qualifications in the enclosed resume, and I will contact you within two weeks to discuss the possibility of arranging an appointment at your convenience. In the meantime, I can be reached at (717) 555-0987, or via email at [eseaton@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:eseaton@andrew.cmu.edu). Thank you very much for you time. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Seaton

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**SAMPLE THANK-YOU LETTER**

125 Pearl Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15215

November 1, 2010

Mr. Richard Patterson  
Human Resources Manager  
Urban Redevelopment Authority  
16399 W. Bernardo Dr.  
Washington, D.C. 92717

Dear Mr. Patterson:

I appreciated the opportunity to discuss the Team Researcher position with you on October 29, 2010. I found the information very valuable and it has only increased my excitement about the description of the position. I am excited about the possibility of once again putting my experience and education in Urban Redevelopment to use.

We discussed the importance of immediate action to change an urban issue discovered through research. I have had recent experience researching methods on how to introduce a specific demographic back into the work force. The major accomplishment of this project was that I had the opportunity to lead a group developing work-related trainings to immediately address this situation. Through the workshops, a 15% increase in employment occurred in the welfare to work population of Pittsburgh.

Please let me know if I can provide you with any additional information. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Your signature

Elizabeth Seaton

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**SAMPLE LETTER TO DECLINE AN OFFER**

125 Pearl Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15215

January 30, 2010

Mr. Richard Patterson  
Human Resources Manager  
Urban Redevelopment Authority  
16399 W. Bernardo Dr.  
Washington, D.C. 92717

Dear Mr. Patterson:

Just a brief note to thank you for the employment information you sent to me earlier this month and your offer to make me a part of your team. I am grateful for your interest, and impressed by the benefits package. Unfortunately, after a careful review and a tour of your facility, I've learned that my current interests are directed more towards work in research rather than management.

Please keep me in mind should you have or hear of any situations in which my background in research would be more appropriate.

Thank you for thinking of me. I look forward to our continued conversations.

Best regards,

Elizabeth Seaton

