

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

The Heller School
FOR SOCIAL POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

CAREER
Development Center

Career Guide

The Cover Letter

Presenting yourself in writing

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The Cover Letter

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Purpose of the Cover Letter

Whenever you apply for a job or internship, you will almost always include two things: A **Cover Letter** and a **Resume/CV**. The *Cover Letter* is your chance to explain to the Hiring Manager why you are the right person for the job, while the *Resume* is a summary of your professional and educational background.

The **Cover Letter** is often the *first thing* the Hiring Manager will read about you. The Hiring Manager will decide whether to read your resume and invite you for an interview—and to take your application seriously—based on their reading of your Cover Letter. Thus, the Cover Letter is extremely important!

This guide will help you understand:

1. What makes a *Strong Cover Letter*, and what makes a *Weak Cover Letter*
2. How to analyze a *Job Description* before you write your Cover Letter
3. How to construct a *Compelling Narrative* about why you should be invited for an interview
4. How to *Match* your background to the job requirements

To ensure successful negotiations, it is important to understand the basic components.

A *Strong* Cover Letter and a *Weak* Cover Letter

A Cover Letter gives voice to your resume. It personalizes your background so that the Hiring Manager can understand your *motivations* for applying for the job, and what specific *contributions* you can make to meet the organization's needs.

A **STRONG** Cover Letter does the following:

- Gives a compelling account of your relevant skills and reasons for applying
- Responds directly to the job advertisement
- Demonstrates a solid understanding of the organization's goals and mission
- Uses precise and correct grammar, spelling, punctuation (the letter is proofread!)
- Is concise
- Is addressed to a particular person (usually the Hiring Manager)
- Makes the Hiring Manager want to learn more about you, through your resume or an interview

A **WEAK** Cover Letter does the following:

- Describes your resume in detail
- Makes grammar and spelling mistakes
- Is longer than 1 page (typed, single-spaced)
- Is generic
- Is addressed to "Sir/Madam" or "To Whom it May Concern"
- Every sentence starts with "I"
- Explains why you want the job, not how you can meet the organization's needs

Remember: Your Cover Letter is like a **magnifying glass** that helps you focus the reader's attention on the aspects of your background that are directly relevant to the job.



Before Writing Your Cover Letter

So you've found The Perfect Job and now you can't wait to apply. Before you dive head-first into writing your Cover Letter, it's important to spend some time understanding yourself and the job to which you're applying.

- **Why are you applying for this job?**
 - Think of 3-5 compelling reasons that you are right candidate. Jot them down. This will become the narrative backbone of your Cover Letter. The more clarity you have on these reasons, the more confident you will come across in your cover letter.
- **What do you know about the organization?**
 - Make sure you read about the organization's mission and goals. Do you agree with them? Do your personal and professional goals match with the organization's?
- **Who do you know at that organization?**
 - Draw on your personal, professional, and alumni networks to find someone at that organization. Talk to them to learn more about the organization and get some advice from them on applying for this job. Find out if they would be comfortable serving as an internal reference for your application.

Analyzing the Job Description, Analyzing Yourself

After the initial excitement of scanning a job description and realizing you are PERFECT for the job, it's worthwhile to take some time to really scrutinize the description; read *between the lines* to find out precisely what the organization is looking for.

- 1) Look at the list of **Basic** and **Preferred Requirements**. Put a *check-mark* beside all requirements you do have and a *question mark* beside all the ones you're not sure about. Do you have ALL of the Basic Requirements (as they are written) for the job? Do you have SOME or MOST of the Preferred Requirements? If so, you're in good shape! If you are missing some of the Basic Requirements, understand that you may not get called for an interview. 
- 2) Look at the **Job Responsibilities**. Are you interested in these tasks? Would you enjoy doing them? Would they provide enough of a challenge for you? 
- 3) Look at the website and read about the specific **Project** or **Department** for which this job is written. Does the project excite you? Do you agree with the goals of the project or department? What kind of language or key words do they use to describe the project? Become familiar with their language so you can try to emulate it in your cover letter.

*Paying attention to these details will become evident in your Cover Letter, and will impress the Hiring Manager that you have been careful, considerate, and thorough in your job application. **You will find that the extra 30 minutes it takes to review these details are very well-spent!***

Writing the Cover Letter: Basic Format

The Cover Letter requires a fine balance between your *story* and your *skills*. Use professional language: write as though you are having a focused conversation with an educated person, not as though you are writing for an academic audience. In general, 3-4 paragraphs are recommended, as follows:

Introductory Paragraph 1: 2-3 sentences in which you introduce yourself, express your interest and knowledge of the organization, and one or two compelling reasons you are qualified for the job. Demonstrate your enthusiasm for the job and the organization.

Paragraph 2: 4-6 sentences in which you match your background to their requirements, using specific, detailed, and concise language. Subtly weave in your reasons for applying for this job. Personalize the job requirements so that your personality shines through.

Paragraph 3 (optional): 3-4 sentences in which you demonstrate your knowledge of the organization by complementing your background with their goals and specific interests. Offer evidence that you “speak the same language” as they do.

Concluding Paragraph 4: 2-3 sentences in which you reiterate your interest in the position, and that you would welcome the opportunity to meet in person to discuss your qualifications and the job challenges.

Other types of Cover Letters

The Cover Letter is your chance to let your voice come through. So, if the format described above does not ring true to your style, consider alternative formats that fit your voice. Depending on the job to which you are applying, you can be more creative with the cover letter. You may, for example, choose to have 5 paragraphs, with each one addressing a different set of skills and requirements mentioned in the job advertisement. You may also choose to include a paragraph that highlights your background through bullet points. Whatever you decide, *remember the 5 general rules of thumb for cover letters:*

- 1) Mention compelling reasons that make you the right candidate.
- 2) Demonstrate your knowledge of—and commitment to—the organization.
- 3) Pay attention to the job description to address the organization’s requirements.
- 4) Highlight pertinent features of your professional and academic background as they relate to the job.
- 5) Weave in relevant details of your personal motivations and story to create a convincing case.

The Appendices in this Career Brief are examples of different types of cover letters. Take a look and decide which style suits your personality best.

An important note: Proofread your letter. Read it aloud so you can hear how it sounds. Have multiple people read it to double check for grammar and spelling mistakes. When you are comfortable with your cover letter and resume, submit them and keep those fingers crossed!

Deconstructing the Cover Letter: Introductory Paragraph 1

Use the first paragraph to demonstrate your knowledge of the organization and your enthusiasm for the job. Also offer a taste of who you are by suggesting a reason you are applying for this job (your narrative). Examine this example from a candidate applying for a job at *For the Children*.

Dear Dr. Cleary,

I have been following For the Children's work since beginning my graduate program in Education Policy in 2005, and I was thrilled to see your announcement for the Program Officer position in Education and Curriculum. I have been inspired by For the Children's focus on participatory approaches to community development and child well-being, and thus focused my own academic and professional efforts on the same purpose. My background in child development, youth services, and as a certified teacher, is very well-matched to your requirements.

Notice how the candidate does the following:

- Mentions his graduate training in a subtle way
- Offers a specific aspect of the organization that makes it unique
- Demonstrates that he has the necessary background to fulfill their needs
- Gives a clear narrative: he has been "inspired" by their work and has "followed it" for years
- Shows good organizational fit: he is committed to the same approach they use
- Shows confidence in his belief that his background is "well-matched" to their needs

Deconstructing the Cover Letter: Paragraph 2

Paragraph 2 is the “heart” of the Cover Letter. It should offer snapshots of the relevant aspects of your background and it should be interlaced with personal anecdotes about who you are and why you are right for the job. It should directly respond to the requirements in the job description to (1) indicate that you have examined it carefully and understand what they are looking for and (2) make it easy for them to see that you are worthy of an in-person interview. Examine this example:

I have deliberately pursued the work that I love and at which I excel. For example, while interning with the Education Aspire Center in Barcelona, I acquired skills in curriculum development to meet the psychosocial needs of refugee youth. As Program Coordinator at Unicef, I was awarded a promotion for designing mobile education services through “School Vans,” which traveled throughout the city of Nairobi offering math and reading lessons to street children. My skills in curriculum development and using innovative technology for hard-to-reach populations, both in Spain and Kenya, will certainly meet your needs for culturally-sensitive educational programming for at-risk youth. And, growing up in a family that loves international travel has made me sensitive to diversity. My international background and focused skills in Education and Curriculum will, I believe, fit well with For the Children’s culture.

Notice how the candidate does the following:

- Explains how he is connected to his work on a personal level (he “loves” and “excels” at it).
- Elaborates on experiences that are precisely relevant to the job description (and omits those that are not relevant)
- Repeats specific parts of the job description and demonstrates that he possesses those skills
- Continues to expand on his clear narrative by presenting personal anecdotes that relate to the organization’s culture and job functions. This will set him apart from other candidates.
- Demonstrates excellent understanding of organizational culture by mentioning its emphasis on cultural diversity and international work



Deconstructing the Cover Letter: Paragraph 3 (Optional)

If you have room, Paragraph 3 should be used to further demonstrate your fit with the organization. Use specific language from the organization's or project's website to make your case compelling.

I appreciate For the Children's commitment to hiring seasoned and certified teachers to serve vulnerable children's educational needs. This approach sets For the Children apart from others doing similar work. Having taught middle school in Korea and the United States for 7 years, I am very familiar with how students learn, what drives them to achieve, and what challenges exist to potentially impede their learning. I want to be part of a group that innovates on behalf of children's development. The Program Officer position is an opportunity for me to use a toolkit gained through 9 years of work experience and graduate study, to contribute to a cause in which I strongly believe: the promotion of healthy child development through participatory education.

Notice how the candidate does the following:

- Shows deep appreciation of the organization's *specific* approaches
- Reiterates a commitment to that same approach by indicating a clear credential (7 years teaching experience)
- Uses the organization's language to demonstrate a pledge to a common purpose (the promotion of healthy child development through participatory education)
- Clearly and consistently emphasizes his narrative ("I want to be part of a group that innovates on behalf of children's development")
- Gives the Hiring Manager a reason to want to learn more about him

Deconstructing the Cover Letter: Concluding Paragraph 4

The Concluding Paragraph is generally the shortest paragraph. Invite the Hiring Manager to look at your resume and suggest meeting in person to discuss the job requirements and your qualifications. It is very important to thank them for their time!

Thank you very much for your consideration. I have attached my resume for your perusal. If I can provide any additional materials—such as a writing sample or references—to help you evaluate my candidacy, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to meeting with you to discuss the challenges of this exciting position, and my qualifications to work with For the Children.

Sincerely,

Elliot Nakumbo

Notice how the candidate does the following:

- Thanks the Hiring Manager
- Offers to be in touch and send further materials (shows that he is prepared for the next stage!)
- Ends with "Sincerely" (or "Yours,")

Putting It All Together

Now examine the entire letter. Notice how each paragraph leads into the next; they transition smoothly. Notice how in each paragraph, the candidate inserts his own personal story to make a compelling case for being invited for an interview. Notice the candidate's excellent understanding of both the organization and the specific job description. Put yourself in the Hiring Manager's shoes:

Would you be intrigued enough by this candidate to read his resume and invite him for an interview?

Dear Dr. Cleary,

I have been following For the Children's work since beginning my graduate program in Education Policy in 2005, and I was thrilled to see your announcement for the Program Officer position in Education and Curriculum. I have been inspired by For the Children's focus on participatory approaches to community development and child well-being, and thus focused my own academic and professional efforts on the same purpose. My background in child development, youth services, and as a certified teacher, is very well-matched to your requirements.

I have deliberately pursued the work that I love and at which I excel. For example, while interning with the Education Aspire Center in Barcelona, I acquired specialized skills in curriculum development to meet the psychosocial needs of refugee youth. As Program Coordinator at Unicef, I was awarded a promotion for designing mobile education services through "School Vans," which traveled throughout the city of Nairobi offering math and reading lessons to street children. My skills in curriculum development and using innovative technology for hard-to-reach populations, both in Spain and Kenya, will certainly meet your needs for culturally-sensitive educational programming for at-risk youth. And, growing up in a family that loves international travel has made me sensitive to diversity. My international background and focused skills in Education and Curriculum will, I believe, fit well with For the Children's culture.

I appreciate For the Children's commitment to hiring seasoned and certified teachers to serve vulnerable children's educational needs. This approach sets For the Children apart from others doing similar work. Having taught middle school in Korea and the United States for 7 years, I am very familiar with how students learn, what drives them to achieve, and what challenges exist to potentially impede their learning. I want to be part of a group that innovates on behalf of children's development. The Program Officer position is an opportunity for me to use a toolkit gained through 9 years of work experience and graduate study, to contribute to a cause in which I strongly believe: the promotion of healthy child development through participatory education.

Thank you very much for your consideration. I have attached my resume for your perusal. If I can provide any additional materials—such as a writing sample or references—to help you evaluate my candidacy, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to meeting with you to discuss the challenges of this exciting position, and my qualifications to work with For the Children.

Sincerely,

Elliot Nakumbo

Formatting Tips

There are a few guidelines we recommend for formatting your cover letter. No matter what format you use, *you* should be comfortable with the way it looks and ‘feels’. Here are some tips that reflect strong cover letter formats:

- Single-space your letter and use a minimum of 11 point font. Double space between paragraphs. Use 0.8—1 inch margins all around.
- Create a letterhead for yourself which includes your name, address, one email address, and one phone number
- Put the address of the organization to which you are applying at the top.
- Include the date at the top.
- Address your letter to an individual. If no name is given on the job description, call the Human Resources department to find out to whom the letter should be addressed. If the job description says “No Phone Calls Please,” respect that and do not call. Instead, consider addressing your letter “To the Hiring Manager” or “To the Hiring Committee”. Avoid “To Whom It May Concern” and “To Sir/Madam”.
- Consider **bolding** key words that mirror the job description.
- Keep your entire letter to just one page.

Overview: Cover Letter Quick Tips

- Spend time scrutinizing the Job Description so you understand what they are looking for.
- Be clear on your story or narrative: Why do you want this job? Why are you right for it? Why should they want you for this job?
- Write your letter paragraph by paragraph. Keep your paragraphs short and your sentences dense. Remember, you don’t have a lot of space so use it wisely!
- In your Cover Letter, there is no need to discuss every job and experience you have on your resume. Just emphasize the relevant ones.
- Double check your spelling and grammar. Have a few of your friends read it to see if the language is consistent. Have it checked by the Office of Career Services.
- Use formal conversational English. Do not write in the academic style you’re taught in graduate school.
- Don’t be afraid to toot your own horn! This may be your only shot to get your resume read. Be confident and show them what you got!
- Normally, cover letters are sent electronically. Send them as an attachment to an email, not in the body of the email. In the body, write something simple like, “Please see attached my application for the Program Officer Position. I look forward to hearing from you. Sincerely, John Doe.”
- If sending your cover letter electronically, it is recommended that you save your file as a pdf. Pdf will retain your particular formatting changes.

Appendix 1 Sample Cover Letter: What Not to do



Bad example

Mr. Getme A. Jobs
37 Hiring Blvd, #455
Montecarlo, CA

Hi Mr. Jobs, ①

I saw your job posting on hotjobs.com. I would like to apply. I am a strong candidate because I believe in your organization's mission and I have a really good set of skills that I can use to make a really significant contribution to this position. Plus, I have been looking to make a transition to public policy work and I am seeking a job such as this one to help my career move forward. ②

As you can see from my resume, I have 7 years of professional work experience. I was a tour guide for the Smithsonian museum system in Washington, DC. I also taught Civics in a public high school in Arlington, VA. I interned at Senator Kerry's office and did a lot of campaign work during his run for Democratic Presidential nominee in 2004. I am very interested in politics and I feel very connected to the energy and vigor that comes from being on Capital Hill. So, I also worked on Capital Hill as an intern; I did administrative work on multiple re-election campaigns. Campaign work was interesting, but what I am really committed to in the long-run is policy analysis.

I learned a lot ③ about policy analysis during my MPP at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University. I took courses in Policy Design, Issues in Social Policy, Policy Implementation, and Applied Econometrics. I now want to apply the skills and knowledge I gained in these courses to a full-time job. ④

I am a hard-worker, and team player, and I know, that your organization values these ⑤ traits. I would welcome the chance to speak with you in person to discuss my qualifications for this job.

Thanks. ⑥

Notyet Employed

① "Hi" is too informal. Always use a proper salutation. This candidate also forgot to include the date: a real no-no!

② This is a very generic paragraph, showing no evidence that the candidate knows anything substantial about the organization. Saying that this job will move your career forward is also unnecessary and trivial. Make each word count!

③ Almost every sentence starts with "I". This paragraph repeats the resume without matching his experience to the job.

④ List your coursework in your resume, not your cover letter. Saying you want to apply your skills does not demonstrate your potential contribution to the organization.

⑤ Instead of saying you are a hard-worker or team player, *demonstrate* it. Secondly, this letter does not mention that the resume is attached, nor does it include any contact information.

⑥ Notice the three grammar and spelling mistakes in this paragraph alone! It cannot be stressed enough: proofread, proofread, proofread!

Appendix 2

Sample Cover Letter: SID MS (Communications)



Good example

May 28, 2009

Management Sciences for Health
784 Memorial Drive
Cambridge, MA 02139

Dear Dr. Monyo:

It is with great enthusiasm that I submit my application materials for the Director of Strategic Communications position. I admire MSH's commitment to improving the health of the world's most vulnerable people, and I believe my background, skills and energy would be an excellent match for this job. 1

My resume demonstrates how my prior work experience complements the description for this job. I have more than 12 years experience in communications. I started my career in Washington DC as a freelance journalist, writing articles on various topics (family planning, reproductive health, women's rights, and community health) for multiple periodicals (including *The New York Post*, *The Chronicle*, and *HotWire*). After 2 years, I transitioned to the Peace Corps in Namibia for three years, where I designed a media campaign to raise awareness of a new, effective, and low-cost prophylaxis for malaria. My position with AmeriCares gave me an incredible window from which to view the health and humanitarian challenges facing people around the globe. While there I traveled to Niger to document a food crisis, and handled media relations for two major natural disasters: the tsunami of 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005. My contributions have always been in the way of using media and communications outlets to make the processes that serve vulnerable populations more effective. So, I subsequently sought out further opportunities that would allow me to contribute to communications initiatives to enhance the health and well-being of at-risk communities. 2

I left AmeriCares to pursue graduate studies in International Development. During the first year of my two-year program, I continued to work with AmeriCares as a consultant to support its communications and development efforts. During this time I created a sustainable monthly newsletter to be sent out to potential donors and stakeholders. From September 2008 through May 2009, I worked in Senegal, serving as a Project Manager of Media Relations in an NGO focused on the basic right to health care. This month, I received my M.A. in Sustainable International Development from the Heller School of Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University. Working with MSH would be a tremendous opportunity for me to contribute my communications expertise to an organization that is committed to responding to a world in need. 3

I believe I have much to offer MSH and the people you serve: superior communications skills, practical experience in development and a deep belief in the power of partnership and collaboration. I hope you will give me the opportunity to discuss this with you further. I can be reached by phone at 913-555-0768 or via e-mail at uptonlucy@workemail.com. Many thanks for your consideration. 4

Sincerely,

Lucy Upton

1 The very second sentence demonstrates a shared commitment to the organization's mission. The candidate speaks confidently about her background.

2 The candidate focuses only on those experiences that are relevant and offers details on how those experiences will benefit MSH. She also describes her motivation for pursuing a particular line of work, which fits nicely with the job description.

3 The narrative—*motivations and reasons for applying*—are compelling and clear. This gives voice to the resume and adds personality and energy to the letter.

4 In her concluding paragraph, the candidate does an excellent job of summarizing the main points of her background and strengths. This helps the reader recall the important aspects of her candidacy, setting her apart from the other candidates.

Appendix 3 Sample Cover Letter: MPP (Non-Profit)



Good example

Maya Chakraborti
180 College Ave
Brandeis, MA 02454

May 6, 2010

Lisa Jones
Consulting Associate
Nonprofit Hiring Group
Boston, MA 02110

Dear Ms. Jones:

I received notification through the alumni network of the Heller School for Social Policy and Management that the Give Back Foundation has an opening for an Associate Program Officer. I have come to know the Give Back Foundation and their Senior Program Officer Tracy Smith well over the past three years through my association with Boston Foundation. I truly admire their strong commitment to make higher education accessible to as many people as possible, and I would be thrilled to bring my five years of experience in the foundation and development fields to work there. ¹

As the first Program Officer in the history of the Catholic Schools Foundation, I restructured a 20 year old grant process that has resulted in more equitable and effective funding for our grantees. This process has also received a great deal of support from our donors and is helping to enhance our long-term fundraising strategies. For example, this past year I began partnering our guidance counseling program with the nationally recognized Boston Connects program at Boston College. Through this work I was able to bring in \$250,000 from corporate foundations that did not support our scholarship program but were very enthused about the new guidance program. ²

An ongoing discussion at Boston Education Funders is how foundations are reorganizing their funding strategies to be more effective. One of my greatest strengths is the ability to plan strategic growth while at the same time staying focused on short-term goals. This skill was enhanced during my work in fundraising at the College of the Holy Cross where I set a new record of \$1 million in major gifts and pledges from non-alumni parents. At the same time, I introduced an annual giving program for the library that increased non-donor participation by 25%. ³

Having worked with underserved populations in the inner city schools the Catholic Schools Foundation serves, I would welcome the opportunity to continue this work at the college level. Please feel free to contact me at (617) 222-2222 or maya@work.com if I can provide additional materials to help you evaluate my candidacy. I look forward to speaking with you. ⁴

Sincerely,

Maya Chakraborti ⁵

¹ If you have an internal reference for the job, mention him/her in the first paragraph. It suggests that you have already been vetted, making you a memorable candidate who is worthy of a closer look.

² Maya offers impressive details of her work experience that would not have been evident from reading her resume alone.

³ She outlines specific accomplishments that are exactly in-line with this job.

⁴ The candidate quantifies her experience in grant writing. This will be extremely valuable for this fundraising job; it gives an idea of the candidate's scope of work.

⁵ She offers to provide additional materials, showing that she is prepared and confident in her candidacy.

Appendix 4 Sample Cover Letter: SID MA (Program Cycle)



Good example

Lee Cohen

①

19 Brewer Street —Detroit, MI 55585 —Mobile: 912-555-4415 —Lee.cohen@work.com
www.theleecohen.com

American Jewish World Service
45 West 36th Street
New York, NY 10018

Dear Ms. Forbis:

July 23, 2010

I am writing to apply for the position of Program Officer, East Africa, at the AJWS, a position I learned about on your website. I believe that my competitiveness as a candidate can best be understood in terms of four factors.

②

First, I have significant experience working with non-governmental organizations, most recently helping an NGO based out of southern Haiti evaluate its education program by developing and administering statistical and qualitative surveys, implementing monitoring tools such as a logical framework, and conducting site visits to learn first hand from the intended beneficiaries if the education program's stated outputs were having real, measurable results.

Second, my extensive training using a multitude of tools to collect, manage, analyze, and present a wide range of data will allow me to communicate effectively with both your African partners and colleagues in the New York office. Having had a Liberal Arts education for my Bachelor's Degree and subsequently interning in the publishing industry helped me refine my narrative and formal writing skills; my two Master's Degrees in Education and Sustainable International Development, respectively, helped me round out my education, focusing on more quantitative methods of understanding and reporting information. These degrees, coupled with my work history, have allowed me to become highly trained at interpreting and presenting data in meaningful, multi-faceted ways.

③

Third, one of my most prized assets has always been my ability to work well both in a team environment and individually. My wide range of past jobs has given me the opportunity to work with a variety of people from all over the world, and I am passionate about learning from other people's perspectives and re-assessing my own beliefs and assumptions. In addition, as an international development practitioner I've often found myself working in remote locations where being able to work independently, sometimes without the benefit of knowing the local language, is necessary; so too is the ability to be highly flexible, patient, and have the ability to use one's imagination when confronted with seemingly insurmountable problems (the hurricane season in Latin America and the Caribbean is a great example!).

④

Finally, I share and admire AJWS' approach to international development. True, sustainable development must come first and foremost from indigenous entrepreneurs. By partnering directly with these future (and current) leaders, AJWS has put itself in the best possible place to help people escape poverty traps and take ownership of their future. I am excited at the opportunity to work with an organization that shares this very core belief regarding development work, and hope I can utilize my extensive background in development to further AJWS' programs in East Africa.

⑤

Sincerely,
Lee Cohen

① This is a very nice and clean letterhead. Notice there is just one email address and just one phone number.

② Lee has decided to structure his cover letter like a shortened 5 paragraph essay. This makes for great readability, and shows a clear and logical writing style.

③ Weaving in educational with professional experience, Lee shows that his preparation meets the job requirements. He also shows how his background can serve the company's needs to "communicate effectively with...African partners and...New York colleagues."

④ This whole paragraph is dedicated to "intangible" skills. He demonstrates his flexibility and capacity to adapt to change, which will be important for this particular job.

⑤ The candidate demonstrates his commitment to and understanding of the organization's missions and goals confidently.

Appendix 5 Sample Cover Letter: MPP (Research)



Good example

33 Middle St. #3
Waltham, MA 02451
(315) 271-5578; charles@waltham.edu

Kevin Bolduc
Vice President of Assessment Tools
Center for Effective Philanthropy
675 Massachusetts Avenue, 7th Floor
Cambridge, MA 02139

April 6, 2010

Dear Mr. Bolduc:

I am writing to express strong interest in your recent posting for a Manager in the Cambridge office. I learned of the position through a personal referral from Claudia Jacobs at the Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy at Brandeis. My background in quantitative analysis and applied research, experience supervising staff and managing multiple stakeholders, and strong writing and project management skills will enable me to be a major asset to your organization. 1

My advanced training in statistics, public policy analysis, and other methods provides a strong foundation for complex research tasks. A variety of independent research projects provide evidence of my ability to complete high-quality, self-directed work. For example, I recently completed a paper using the national Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) to examine the evidence for a relationship between past incarceration and a lack of financial assets, using multiple logistic regression techniques. I also employed time-series and survival analysis to test these relationships longitudinally. 2

I also bring the ability to handle complex work while maintaining a strong focus on leadership and collaboration. For example, I designed and oversaw a comprehensive capacity-building program for a growing non-profit agency while maintaining relationships with funders and community partners. The multiple new funding streams I secured and business partnerships I developed with IT, design, and management consulting firms demonstrate my ability to get tangible results. I also supervised and served as a mentor to younger colleagues, helping them develop their skills and create deliverables through tasks such as grant writing and database development as well as direct service work. 3

My variety of work experience has also honed my skills in professional writing, presentations, and project management. This experience includes both interacting with and working in philanthropy, first as a grant writer and later while conducting and presenting research for an Eos Foundation-led investment initiative in inner-city Boston. In addition, I have played a key role in social program evaluations, including serving as lead author for the evaluation of an inmate life skills training initiative.

Overall, I have both a passion for impacting “on the ground” social issues as well as and understanding of the role of data in decision making. I have been following the impressive work of CEP for years, especially regarding its emphasis on robust and advanced research methods to demonstrate positive changes in organizational growth. I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss my potential fit with CEP. I will follow up with your office promptly to discuss this possibility. Thank you for your consideration. 4

Sincerely,
Charles Francis

1 In just three sentences, the candidate explains how he learned of the job, was referred to this job, and his relevant skills.

2 Technical expertise is key to this job. Describing his statistical skills in detail shows that he has scrutinized the job description and has paid attention to detail.

3 He offers concrete examples of his intangible skills. This is a great strategies for those skills that are hard to measure or quantify.

4 Charles ends on an enthusiastic and hopeful note, offering that he will get in touch with them. This makes life easier for the Hiring Manager!

Appendix 6

Sample Cover Letter: SID MA (Practicum)



Good example

See the Career Brief on “Making the Introduction” for more information and tips!

Van Truong

67 Eustis Street | Cambridge, MA 02138 | Van.truong@tmail.edu

Judith Comalo
CARE—Uganda
103 Linking Road
Box 98
Kampala, Uganda

Dear Ms. Comalo,

January 3, 2010

As a current graduate student in International Development, I am engrossed in learning about the program cycle and how it can be used to design sustainable interventions to meet the needs of vulnerable populations. I recently read a case study conducted by CARE-Uganda, and was fascinated by CARE’s sustainable approach to rehabilitating former child soldiers. I am writing to explore the possibility of joining CARE for a 6-9 months practicum to learn more about your operations and to contribute to your program design process.

From 2007 to 2009, I worked at a center for AIDS orphans in Cambodia. While there, I learned about the potential deleterious effects that orphanhood can have on a child’s development. What, if anything, can substitute for a parent’s care? How can learning happen without access to formal education? What trauma might ensue from being considered—at least in social terms—“invisible”? These are the questions I sought to explore during my two years there. To begin with, I designed a rehabilitative and educational program for children in the center that was catered specifically for their psychosocial development. From a theoretical standpoint, the program considered the effects of trauma and the potential for non-formal education to make vast improvements in their literacy and numeracy. Given the budding positive outcomes of this program, I made a commitment to a career in which I could contribute to the well-being of vulnerable children through educational and psychosocial program development.

As part of my MA degree in Sustainable International Development from The Heller School for Social Policy & Management at Brandeis University, I have a tremendous opportunity to dedicate 6-9 months of my 2nd year to a “professional practicum.” The practicum is an opportunity for students to apply theories and skills gained from the previous 9 months of rigorous academic training to the field, in an organization that meets their professional interests. I believe my background experience and interests are well-suited to make a meaningful contribution to CARE. When might you be available to discuss the practicum and my potential involvement with CARE? Please do not hesitate to email me or call me at +617.789.5555 anytime. I have attached my resume, and an overview of the practicum policies. I am available for my practicum starting in September, 2010. I very much look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Van Truong

1 The candidate clearly expresses that this letter’s purpose is to start a discussion about potential involvement, not to apply for a job. She shows a connection to the organization by demonstrating previous knowledge of its work.

2 For practicum cover letters, this paragraph is optional. Since you are making an introduction, you may want to keep the letter brief to ensure that it is read in its entirety.

3 Posing questions creates an excellent effect in cover letters: it demonstrates interest and curiosity, and a commitment to problem-solving. The candidate eloquently describes how she sought to answer/solve these pressing problems.

4 While writing a letter for a practicum, you must explain the parameters set forth by the academic program.

5 Asking a question necessitates an answer! The recipient might be more likely to respond to Van’s question than if she had left it open.

Appendix 7
Sample Cover Letter: MBA Graduate
Sample Cover Letter: SID MA (Practicum)



Good example

John Doe
Associate Director, Redevelopment Project
City of Boston
One City Hall Plaza
Boston, MA 02201

Jane Smith
jsmith@jobs.com
MS 555, Waltham MA
02454

Dear Mr. Doe,

January 5, 2010

I am excited to be submitting an application for the position of Senior Project Manager for Performance, and to be reconnecting with you after our conversation this summer about the budget process for the City of Boston. I recently completed my Masters in Business Administration at the Heller School of Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University. I focused on learning how to improve management systems and operations while maintaining a commitment to the mission of the organization and the people delivering that mission. The position of Senior Project Manager for Performance combines my interests in improving the City of Boston for all residents, working with a wide range of departments, and the challenges of service delivery. My background has prepared me to not only to fulfill the requirements of this position, but to go beyond them by bringing my commitment and energy to the job.

My past experience at CBT and with IDEO has given me opportunities to increase performance management. Over the summer, my teammate and I provided in-depth analyses and recommendations of impact measurement methods and best practices. I continued this effort by focusing on one particular project where I successfully navigated the many perspectives at IDEO and connected with their constituents to provide valuable feedback both to IDEO and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

My work at CBT started in project management and quickly expanded to include endeavors in the larger office context. The initiatives that I enjoyed most involved working with people at different levels of management to bring greater efficiency to the project management process.

With the skills I have learned at school, and the six years I have spent working in the field of project management I am well equipped to fulfill the responsibilities of the Senior Project Manager for Performance. I am passionate about the goal of the redevelopment initiative, and look forward to spending my days collaborating across departments to bring about fantastic results and a committed team. I look forward to the opportunity to speak with you further about what I can bring to the position and the City of Boston. I can be reached at 617-555-1212.

Happy New Year!

Sincerely,
Jane Smith

1 Notice that Jane reminds Mr. Doe of their previous correspondence and relationship. This can be critical to landing an interview!

2 Jane shows a commitment to the company by going above and beyond the requirements of the job. This implies a potential long-term commitment to the organization.

3 The candidate subtly discusses her growth at the organization. Describing that your responsibilities grew at a certain job implies a promotion and/or appreciation of your work from higher-ups.

4 Jane does a very nice job summarizing her previous experience in just two lines!

Appendix 8

Sample Job Description (Annotated)

① The Vera Institute of Justice is an independent nonprofit organization that combines expertise in research, demonstration projects, and technical assistance to help leaders in government and civil society improve the systems people rely on for safety and justice. Vera’s Cost-Benefit Analysis Unit (CBAU) performs cost-benefit analyses and other cost-related studies, provides assistance to jurisdictions conducting their own studies, and carries out research to advance the knowledge and application of cost-benefit analysis in the justice system. For more information on Vera’s Cost-Benefit Analysis Unit, please visit www.vera.org/cba.

Responsibilities ②

Working closely with the Senior Policy Analyst as well as CBAU and Vera staff, the Policy Analyst will:

- Conduct cost-benefit analyses using appropriate analytic methods;
- Develop and write program materials, including publications, briefing and research memoranda;
- Participate in grant writing and program development; and
- Assist on other projects as assigned. ③

Qualifications ④

Vera seeks a candidate with the following:

- B.A. or B.S. and two or three years work experience in a policy-related position, or a graduate degree in economics, finance, public policy, or a closely related discipline;
- Strong quantitative skills and experience in cost-benefit analysis, budgeting, economics, or finance strongly preferred;
- Analytical thinking and rapid problem-solving skills;
- Demonstrated ability to gather, synthesize, and analyze information for a variety of audiences; ⑤
- Interest in social justice, commitment to fairness, and demonstrated knowledge of juvenile/criminal justice issues;
- Ability to manage work on multiple projects effectively and efficiently;
- Willingness to travel outside of New York City occasionally;
- Strong interpersonal and communications skills; and
- Ideal candidates will be equally adept at working independently and with a team.

Salary

Commensurate with experience, and excellent benefits. ⑥

How To Apply

Please submit cover letter and resume.

No phone calls, please. Only applicants selected for interviews will be contacted. Online submission is preferred. ⑦

However, if necessary, materials may be mailed or faxed to:
ATTN: Human Resources / CBAU Policy Analyst Recruitment
Vera Institute of Justice
233 Broadway, 12th Flr., New York NY

Please use only one method (online, mail or fax) of submission.

① This is a very brief description of the organization. Do not rely on this to learn about it. Spend ample time on the website, and Google the organization so you can speak intelligently in your cover letter (and interview!)

② Do all or most of these responsibilities sound exciting to you? Can you handle them? Will they provide enough of a challenge for you? If you have experience in these areas, it’s worthwhile to describe them in your cover letter.

③ Pay close attention to such statements. They imply that a degree of flexibility will be required. Address your eagerness to take on new projects in your cover letter.

④ Do you have all or most of these qualifications? Be sure to address all of them in your cover letter! For qualifications that you don’t have, mention, for example, your capacity to learn quickly and that you thrive on new challenges.

⑤ “Demonstrated ability” suggests that you can show them that you have experience in this area. Give concrete, tangible examples of such skills in your cover letter.

⑥ See the Career Brief on Salaries for more information. The job description may ask for your salary history. The Career Brief on Salaries can help you develop this.

⑦ Pay attention to instructions. Note the preference for online submissions. Be respectful and meet the organization’s requests.