

Cover Letter Guide

Univeristy of Minnesota



**Office of Career &
Professional Development**
Humphrey School of Public Affairs



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COVER LETTER EXAMPLE



THE BASICS

Why are cover letters important? 

- Introduces you to the hiring team
- Goes into more depth than your resume could about your interest, qualifications, fit, and value to a prospective employer
- Influences hiring team to look at the rest of your application and give you an interview
- Demonstrates your written communication skills

Common mistakes



- Lack of individualization
- Too generic and not tailored to the job description
- Generic opening that does not impress your reader right away
 - "Hi, My name is __"
- Not unique or compelling
- Focuses on many brief examples, instead of one or two strong examples
 - Focusing on quantity and not quality



5 STEP GUIDE

COVER LETTERS

Step 1

Read the job description & tailor your cover letter

Reflect on:

- How do your skills align with the job? What experiences do you have that make you a “great fit” for this position?
- What are the 2-3 things you want the employer to know about you?
- You want to be seen as a solid long-term investment as a colleague

Step 2

Include basic information → Header

- Name, email, phone number
- Optional: LinkedIn, City/State

Upper left/right hand corner

- Today’s date
- Name of letter recipient
- Title of recipient
- Organization name
- Optional: Organization address

Step 3

Introduction paragraph

- Start with “Dear First Name Last Name (Include Dr. if PhD, etc.)”
 - Be careful with Mrs., Ms., Mr. (assumes pronouns and marital status)
- Discuss why you are applying and what you are applying for
- Give an overview of what you will discuss in the rest of the letter and why you are a good fit
 - What do you admire about this organization and/or position?
 - What skills/interests/values/knowledge will you bring that align with the job description or the mission of the organization?
 - Think of this as a topic sentence of what will be discussed in the rest of the letter



5 STEP GUIDE

COVER LETTERS (CONTINUED)

Step 4

Body (2-3 paragraphs)

- Based on your answers in step 1, choose if the paragraph will focus on a skill, experience, interest, value, knowledge base etc.
 - I.e. Research skills, or knowledge of equity and inclusion, or experience working with diverse populations
- Begin with a topic sentence that summarizes the paragraph's focus
- Next, provide the most relevant context that best captures what the organization is seeking:
 - Define your context
 - Discuss your evidence, example, problem or goal
 - Explain your result or how your example relates to the position

Pro tip: Do not reiterate the entire resume or include too many examples

Step 5

Conclusion paragraph

- Summarize why you will be an asset to the organization
- Re-state your interest and desire for the position
 - Avoid saying passive phrases such as "If you have questions please email me." instead "I am looking forward to further discussing my qualifications"
- Include any other requested information from the employer (ex: when you can start)
- Thank them for their time and consideration
- Sincerely, your full name

INDUSTRY SPECIFIC COVER LETTER TIPS

Non-profit Organizations

- Want to see how your skills, values and experience fit with their mission and the population they serve

Governmental Organizations

- Want to see how you fit their required and preferred qualifications

Private Organizations

- Want to see skills and results based experiences
- Want to see numbers and information quantified (i.e. how much did you improve performance or how many clients did you serve?)
- Want to see what you are able to do for them

Your full name

Use the same header & formatting as your resume

Email address
Your full address (optional)
City, State zip

Date

Name of recipient

Title of recipient

Organization name

Full address (optional)

Dear _____,

Tip: It is best to address the letter to a real person. If you do not have a name, call to ask for a name you can use or say "Dear Hiring Manager".

Introductory paragraph should include:

- The position you are applying for and how you heard about the position.
- Why you want to work for this organization specifically and/or why this position specifically. · Names of people you've talked to from the organization (if applicable).
- Brief statement of key traits or qualifications (no more than 3) that make you ideal for the position.

Second/third paragraph(s) should include:

- Two or three skills, values, knowledge, experience, etc from this position's required qualifications that you possess and make you a great candidate.
- An explanation of how you have developed each attribute through past experiences. ·

Tip: Do not reiterate the entire resume or include too many skills!

Closing paragraph should include:

- Summarize why you will be an asset to their organization.
- Re-state your interest in the position and your desire for an interview.
- If you wish to actively follow-up with them (and you have their contact information), indicate that you will be calling to follow up and when that will be – give them at least a week. · Thank them for their time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Your preferred first & last name



MORE TIPS & TRICKS



- Keep it to one page
- Proofread - no typos or grammatical errors
- Combine sincerity with specificity
- Use active voice and strong verbs
- Tailor your cover letter **AND** resume to the job you are applying for
 - Employers can tell when you're sending a generic application instead of tailoring your materials to the job
 - Use keywords from the job site and description - most employers use AI to filter candidates.
- Be specific
 - A resume is a place to list experiences and accomplishments. A cover letter is an opportunity to expand on two to three things you want to highlight, preferably ones that were not on your resume.
 - This can include but is not limited to relevant academic projects, life experiences, volunteering, etc.
- When writing about an experience or accomplishment, use this structure as a guide:
 - a. What your role was and what the goal was
 - b. How you worked to achieve that goal
 - c. Skills you utilized and/or gained from that experience
 - d. The outcome of the experience - did you reach your goal and can you quantify the success?

HOW TO TAILOR YOUR COVER LETTER TO A JOB DESCRIPTION

Example job description:

Associate Program Position

Job responsibilities:

- Research, analyze, and collaborate to inform strategy
- Conduct systems analysis, engaging key partners, evaluate opportunities, and coordinate due diligence
- Coordinate and engage across the investment and portfolio management processes
- Collaborate with network partners
- Identify and engage with diverse voices on our issues

Qualifications:

- Passion for the company
- Research, analysis, problem solving, and written communication skills
- Ability to work collaboratively
- Attention to detail
- Comfort with change

Goldy Gopher

Email address
Your full address (optional)
City, State zip

Date

Name of recipient
Title of recipient
Organization name
Full address (optional)

Dear [employer's name],

I am excited to apply for the opportunity to be a Program Associate. I learned of this position through my professor and former Network Associate, Hubert Humphrey. He recommended I apply as he felt I would make an exemplary candidate. My commitment and value for building an equitable society, investing in philanthropy, and working around the globe closely aligns with your company's values. I am confident I would make a valuable addition to the team because of my skills, integrity, and passion for the company's mission.

Through my education and experience working with Councilmember Smith, my collaborative work was critical in influencing policy and enacting positive and tangible change within my community. In working with a diverse team of six individuals with the goal of researching potential policies, I was the chair of the committee and oversaw the delegation of roles. My personal impact on the committee extended towards both individual citizens and Minneapolis laws as I researched and vetted hundreds of proposals. My portfolio includes three specific policies that I helped shape with the Minneapolis City Council that worked towards ensuring equity for all citizens of Minneapolis, especially our historically marginalized communities. My attention to detail and collaborative approach enabled me to serve my community through my policy work.

After my work with Councilmember Smith, I was motivated by my passion for reimagining our economy and politics in order to better address the most pressing issues of our time. At the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, my Master's of Public Policy allowed me to take an interdisciplinary approach to tackling poverty and social injustices through a lens of accountability and inclusivity while emphasizing collaboration with my peers and community. My studies have focused on researching and analyzing public policies in order to refine them to better serve marginalized communities. Some accolades include praise from Dean Horatio for my research on the intersections of microfinance and gender discrimination in California, as well as a personal accommodation from President Hubert for my paper on the role of technology in business in rural Minnesota.

Through my relevant work experience and coursework, I feel that I will make a great Program Associate. It would be a pleasure to connect with you to further discuss my qualifications. Please contact me at 612-626-0001 or goldy.gopher@umn.edu. I look forward to connecting with you.

Sincerely,

Goldy Gopher

Goldy Gopher

goldy.gopher@umn.edu
Minneapolis, MN 55414

June 2, 2022

John Kay
Horatio Authority
Minneapolis, MN 55414

Dear John Kay,

I am excited to apply for the economic analyst position for the Horatio Authority. With a recent graduate degree in public policy from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, and as a former Minneapolis resident, I am very familiar with Minneapolis's economic issues. The initiatives of the Authority to revitalize trade and business activity in Minneapolis are of enormous importance to the city and the region. I would like to support this work.

I have focused my master's work on understanding both domestic and international dimensions of economic development and their direct impacts on state and local communities. I have focused specifically on the effects of technology and infrastructure changes on business opportunities and workforce development. As part of my research for my master's paper, I worked with the St. Paul Port Authority which faces challenges similar to Minneapolis's. I evaluated policy and developed a series of recommendations for increasing its effectiveness. Two of my recommendations were adopted by the City Council and will be implemented this fall.

Prior to my master's degree, I worked for two years in the private sector, coordinating quality control for a water purification manufacturer in Illinois. This experience helped me understand the private sector environment and the effects of government policies on companies' success or failure. I was involved with the workforce issues a small manufacturer faces, and I helped create effective employee training programs. I also became proficient in organizing workflow, meeting deadlines, and attending to small details as well as large and complex processes. This work motivated me to study the design and implementation of economic policies that affect such businesses.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss the work of the Horatio Authority and how I can bring added value to your initiatives. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Goldy Gopher