Cover Letter Workshop for Graduate Students

Rosanne Lurie, Senior Associate Director
University of Pennsylvania Career Services
rlurie@upenn.edu
Agenda

• What is a cover letter?

• General tips for cover letters

• Typical structure and examples

• Q & A

• Review your own cover letters with our checklist
What is a cover letter

• A personal introduction associated with a job application
  – Imagine meeting a potential employer in person and explaining why you are a good candidate
  – Remember, first impressions count
  – Cover letter introduces your resume or CV

• You need to “cover”:
  – **Who** you are and **why** you are getting in contact
  – **What** your relevant qualifications are
  – **How** you have been effective at doing things in the past
  – **Why** your experiences are advantageous for employer
  – **Why** you want to work for *them*
  – …all in one page***

***usually
A good cover letter is not...

• Just a repeat of what you say in your resume/CV
  – Take the opportunity to expand on your most relevant experiences
• A form letter
  – They are easily identifiable and about as appealing to employers as junk mail is to you
• An inconvenience
  – A cover letter that complements your other materials allows you to provide a better picture of yourself
• Going to get you a job
  – But it will help to differentiate your from similarly qualified candidates
  – OR…, will help to explain why your non-traditional background makes you a good candidate
General guidelines

• Write in simple, clear, professional style and make your letters/correspondence error-free
  – Get it reviewed

• Always try to address your correspondence to a specific individual - spell his or her name/title correctly
  – Calling an employer to find this is sometimes OK
  – Otherwise use generic, non-gender specific (“To the Hiring Manager”)

• Are you sending lots of letters to unknown entities?
  – You may need to tweak your job search process
Do you always need a cover letter?

• The job announcement asks for one:
  – Yes – always give the employer what they ask for

• There is an option to upload a cover letter:
  – Yes, because your resume can be stronger when paired with a letter – letters can expand on examples in resume

• There is no mention of cover letters (or no option to include one):
  – You don’t always need a cover letter, but they can be very handy as an introduction to your interest
  – If you are sending resumes attached to email, the email can stand-in for a short cover letter.
Which comes first?

Cover Letter?  Or  Resume/CV?
Steps to creating effective materials

1) Find a job to apply to
   - Advertised positions are helpful to learn about tasks/duties

2) Research the organization and/or the general requirements of that position
   - Look at similar positions at related organizations
   - Look on the company’s website; look at their mission
   - Read news about the company & trends in the industry
   - Become familiar with the “language” they use
   - **Use your network**: speak to people in the know
Healthcare Consultant - Princeton

Founded in 1993, ALCIMED is an Innovation and New Business consulting firm, specializing in innovative sectors: life sciences (food, biotech, healthcare), energy, aeronautics, ICT, chemicals, cosmetics, materials, transportation, space and defense. Our mission is to help our clients in the private and public sectors to explore and develop uncharted territories. This mission covers four types of uncharted territories: New Technologies, Market Innovation, High growth geographies and Strategic Foresight. We have seven offices in Europe, one office in the United States and one office in Asia.

Job Description:
Today, our Princeton’s office recruits consultants to assist our Healthcare clients in their issues. The mission of this role is both technical and commercial.

Technical Mission:
• - You will be in charge of the end-to-end completion of projects, from information-gathering to the drafting of recommendations.
• - Working directly with our customers, mostly Innovation, R&D or Marketing Directors at major groups in Life sciences (Biotech, Pharmaceutical, Healthcare and Food Science companies), your mission is to create and maintain privileged professional relationships.
• - You will be trained in our methodologies and benefit from ALCIMED’s experience.

Commercial Mission:
• - You participate to the company’s strategic development by realizing research and mapping of the Healthcare market in the US.
• - You provide support to the Business Development Managers and help them in the organization of their business trip.
• - You may collaborate to the prospection of new customers.

Please send your CV and cover letter (Job reference: CS-US-) to: applications@alcimed.com
Steps to creating effective materials

• Step 3: Review the job advertisement, and highlight key terms

• Step 4: Create a tailored resume/CV; describe your experience in employer’s language

• Step 5:
  – Create draft cover letter that expands on skills listed in resume, and illustrates them in action in narrative form
  – Make sure cover letter and resume/CV work together in FORMAT and CONTENT

• Step 6: Review/have someone else review your draft
  – Set up appointment at Career Services (call 215 898 7530)
Anatomy of a Cover Letter

guidelines on the basic structure
Bare Bone Facts

• Each cover letter should be targeted to a specific job

• You will need to:
  – Do some research on the organization/company
  – Find ways to tailor your letters each time (you won’t have to completely re-write them)

• You’ll probably have more luck with three tailored cover letters than with 30 stock letters sent to 30 different employers
  – Think of the person reading the letter – their job may not be to decipher your job application materials
Their details, if available

Date

Dear … (or Hiring Manager/Search Committee/etc.),

- Why you are getting in contact
- Who you are
- Broad summary of your qualifications

- How you have been effective at using skills relevant to employer in the past – use specific illustrations
- Why these experiences are beneficial for the new employer – why do they make you a good candidate

- Explain why you want the job in the context of working with that specific employer
- Ask if you can send additional information and specify any next steps

Yours sincerely,
Your goals are

1. To show that there is a good match between your strengths and position’s requirements & responsibilities
   – First and middle paragraphs, with summary at the end

2. To use keywords from the job description
   – Describe your experiences in language used by employer

3. To emphasize how excited you are about the job
   – Most employers want to know you're interested or enthusiastic – make sure this is not forced
   – It helps to mention something relevant about the organization – by name
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Their details, if available</th>
<th>Your name &amp; contact details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Yours sincerely,
Cover letters & resumes

• Anything mentioned in the cover letter should be listed in your resume/cv

• Cover letters provide you with the ability to tell a story about your skills in action
  – Use narrative approach to provide specific illustrations
  – Illustrate those skills most relevant to employer
  – Pick illustrations with evidence of successful outcomes

• Cover letters must convince the reader that they want to read more, so that they will investigate resume
Just remember...

• When you send your cover letter and resume by e-mail
  – Convert them to pdfs and send them as attachments with a **brief** cover e-mail that indicates what is being sent
  – Give the attachments appropriate names such as JaneDoe_letter_PennCareerServices
  – Do not call file “resume” or “cover letter”
  – You usually don’t combine resume and cover letter into a single file unless requested
Dear Contact Name:

I am applying for the position of Associate Director (Job#758476). Please find attached my cover letter and resume as separate PDF files. Please let me know if you need any additional information, or if you have any trouble opening these files.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Jane Student
Resources

• Make an appointment at Career Services 215 898 7530 if you need additional help with your cover letter

• View our guided resources for putting together an effective cover letter and resume
  – www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/gradstud/samples/
  – Use check-sheets as a preliminary self-assessment tool

• Stop by the Career Services reference library and view the many books we have on this topic
  – Books include additional sample resumes and cover letters that you may find helpful
More resources

• If you are concerned about your written English, make an appointment with a tutor @ The Penn Writing Center:
  – http://writing.upenn.edu/critical/help_wc.html

• Explore the many online guides to job search correspondence:
  – e.g., http://www.rileyguide.com
  – ScienceCareers.org
  – The Chronicle of Higher Education
  – Inside Higher Education
  – And many, many more
Questions?
Answers!
A pen..., and real paper..., how old school
Peer-review session

• Swap cover letters with a peer
• Read letter and then complete ‘cover letter checklist’ as completely as you can
• On the back of the letter, write the following:
  – Best part of the letter
  – Part you think needs most attention
  – List the three main skills you feel the letter tries to illustrate
I am applying for the Program Administrator position advertised on the Association of Historical Affairs website. I have a proven background in innovative program development and effective communication with diverse audiences that ranges from my teaching experience at Liverpool University, making historical information easily accessible to visitors at the Penn Museum as a docent, to tutoring History majors at the University of Pennsylvania. I enjoy teaching as an outlet for my creativity, and seek to provide real-life and meaningful connections between the subject and the students, leading to a greater understanding of the need for historic preservation – a goal identified for this program administrator position.
One of my strengths is in collaborative work, both in applied and research endeavors. As a program coordinator at CHOP, for example, I created a working group of six CHOP oncologists and cardiologists to discuss research funding issues common to both these fields. As a result of our monthly meetings, we are about to embark upon a survey of funding organizations, which I am coordinating and implementing. This approach is certainly something that would be applicable to your organization, and that would help to strengthen your relationship with the funding bodies that have a stake in hospital research.
Middle paragraph example

- I have a documented track record of being able to translate complex science into written or oral materials that can be understood by a wide range of audiences, with varying degrees of expertise in science. My science writing awards were received for articles written about my doctoral research in animal behavior, and research performed by my peers at Oxford. At Disney, I interacted with park visitors on a regular basis to talk about the research being performed with the animal collection, and tailored my explanations to be understood by adults and children alike.
The success of the workshops, lectures, trips, and tours I currently coordinate as director of programming for 65 undergraduates at a residence at the University of Maryland depends on my skills in project planning, task delegation, and team and time management. As elected Director of Finance for the Student Government, for a student population of over 30,000 people, I gained substantial experience in managing teams of both student representatives and full-time employees in order to ensure the effective deployment of a multi-million dollar budget, and to oversee the operations and financial performance of the various retail and food businesses owned by the Student Government.
Middle paragraph example

• My experience in writing three single-author articles and one joint paper for publication, and in editing two full-length manuscripts, including work on multiple and varied subjects by different scholars, has taught me to effectively present complex concepts and data in writing. As an active presenter and lecturer, having presented at six national and international conferences and in numerous smaller seminars and classes, I have a great deal of experience in presenting complex data and making persuasive oral arguments to a variety of audiences.
Middle paragraph example

- I have also been working with the Penn Biotech Group, serving as a life sciences expert on two projects and leading one project. As a group leader, I coordinated the completion of an online survey of 750 clinicians to find out how they decide what to prescribe and how they prefer to hear about new treatment options. I also interviewed representatives from insurance companies about how drugs get placed in different reimbursement tiers. Our client was very pleased with our work and after the delivery of our final recommendations, told us that our conclusions were the same as a boutique life sciences consultancy that he had paid $70,000 dollars for the same work.
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Final paragraph example

• I am attracted to XXX because it is a fast growing, innovative, and global firm. Its emphasis on strategic research and initiatives, its holistic approach to its clients and client relationships, and its strong focus on personal development and training are particularly attractive. As someone who is highly motivated, constantly seeking new challenges and new development opportunities, and skilled in analyzing and synthesizing large amounts of data to find new solutions to existing problems, I believe I would be a valuable addition to your team.