

WRITING A COVER LETTER

A successful cover letter “hooks” an employer in the first paragraph. The first few sentences should show that you’ve done your research about the job or internship and the organization and should make an employer want to learn more about you. A cover letter is also the first writing sample that an employer sees from you. Make every word count and make sure the final version is polished and error-free.

Before You Start

1. **Research the position.** What are its key responsibilities? What skills, knowledge and qualities are listed in the posting?
2. **Research the organization.** What is its culture? Its history? Its strategic goals? How do they describe themselves and what sets them apart? You can find this information online and through informational interviews.
3. **Identify your most relevant skills and competencies.** Then create “stories” from your experience that illustrate your competencies in the required areas.
4. Download and complete the Resume/Cover Letter/Interview Prep Sheet from the career center website.

Quick Tips

- **Be specific.** Tailor each letter to the employer and position for which you are applying. This shows the employer that you are truly interested in the job and that you took the time to research the organization.
- **Whenever possible, address the letter to a person.** Spell names correctly.
- **Be concise. Keep your letter to one page.** Be clear and avoid using flowery or boastful language.
- **Complement your resume.** Rather than repeating information from your resume, tell specific stories and use examples. The tone and content should focus on what you can do for the employer, not what they can do for you.
- **Never be negative.** Don’t apologize for not yet possessing a skill they would like to see.
- **Proofread, proofread, proofread.** Typos signal a lack of attention to detail.
- **Get feedback.** Come to the Center for Career Exploration to meet with a Peer Career Advisor to discuss your cover letter (see Handshake for details).

How to Format a Cover Letter

Font

Use a 12-point standard font (e.g., Times New Roman, Garamond, Verdana, Helvetica, Arial).

Spacing

Set the document margins to 1 inch on all sides. Center your letter on the page and set paragraph alignment for all text to “justified.”

How to Structure a Cover Letter

First Paragraph

Tell the reader why you are writing (“I am writing to apply...”) and then go on to very specifically describe why you are interested in that specific job and that specific organization. The reader should feel that this letter was written specifically for them and is not a template you use for all jobs. Details that appeal to you about the organization and/or job are critically important to mention. (Did you notice how often we use the word “specific”?)

Second and/or Third Paragraph

Choose two or three experiences from your resume that are the best examples of your ability to do the exact job for which you are applying. Describe the situation, including

Heading

Use the standard business letter format, starting with the same heading as your resume (your name and contact information) followed by other elements separated by paragraph breaks: date, recipient address, salutation, body, closing salutation and signature.

both the action you took and the result, and how it relates to the position for which you are applying. Be very specific but brief and concise.

The second paragraph should highlight in detail your most relevant and/or impressive experience. The third paragraph should highlight the next most relevant experience.

Last Paragraph

Reiterate your interest in the organization and position. Indicate that you are available to discuss your qualifications in a personal interview. Close by stating that you look forward to hearing from the employer, and reiterating your contact information.

Sample Cover Letters

The following cover letters, while not focused on any specific industries, all have the following things in common:

- The writer indicates in the first paragraph why they are specifically interested in the position and/or the organization.
- They highlight experiences and/or skills that are specifically relevant to the reader.
- They emphasize achievements over adjectives. They provide specific details and stories that the reader would find relevant without rehashing everything they listed on their resumes.



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April 9, 2013

Mr. Danny Musher, Programming Services Officer
Office of Energy Resources
One Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02908

Dear Mr. Musher,

I am writing to apply for the position of Technical Writer for the Rhode Island State Energy Plan, which was recommended to me by my concentration advisor Professor Dawn King of the Center for Environmental Studies at Brown University. As a student pursuing a career in energy policy, I think this position is a great opportunity to channel my interest and knowledge of energy and environmental policy towards the creation of a coordinated State Energy Plan for Rhode Island. This would not only be a great learning experience, but would allow me to work to create real change in a politically progressive state. Further, I have experience in computer programs like Microsoft Word and Excel, research, condensing information and drafting policy briefs.

I developed an interest in integrated policy-making as a research intern at IBM during the summer of 2012. As part of the India@75 initiative undertaken by the Confederation of Indian Industry, my team's project was to create preliminary transport and energy plans for the city of Bangalore. My independent tasks included researching international best practices in transport and energy, synthesizing and summarizing the data I collected into cohesive presentations and creating Compatibility Maturity Models (CMM) with recommended policy interventions depending on the state's level of investment. My time at IBM showed me the importance of conducting policy intervention at the systemic level. For example, my city transportation CMM considered every element of the sector from Intelligent Transportation Systems and road safety to pedestrian facilities and legal drivers.

At Brown University, I have created an independent concentration called the *Political Economy of the Environment*, which addresses my interest in energy and systemic solutions through a focus in energy policy. My most important methodological course, *Energy Policy and Politics*, has made me familiar with U.S. energy infrastructure from production to transmission to distribution, as well as various types of energy policy interventions from subsidies to market-based frameworks like RGGI. I have synthesized information from academic to government sources and drafted technical policy briefs on Offshore Wind Energy on the U.S. east coast as well as Nuclear Energy in the U.S. My final project involves working as part of a cohesive team to evaluate and draft an integrated and comprehensive RISEP that will include recommendations for new energy resources and regional policy integration to address environmental health, economic development and the provision of clean, reliable energy for the citizens of Rhode Island.

I can assure you that I will be a great candidate for this position, and am eager to take on new challenges while working as a part of this team. I look forward to an interview to elaborate further on my skills and qualifications, and can best be reached by email at steven_harbough@brown.edu.

Sincerely,

Steven Harbough

Josiah Carberry
Josiah_Carberry@brown.edu
167 Angell Street,
Providence, RI 02912 (401) 863-3326

September 1, 201X

Ms. Jane Doe, Assistant Director
Community Center
555 Community Center Way
New York, NY 10002

Dear Ms. Doe:

I am writing to apply for the Group Leader position at Community Center, which I learned about through idealist.org. I am looking for work that will channel my energy for community building and social change. Community Center embodies much of what I am hoping to accomplish, and working as a Group Leader would allow me to use my community building and language skills to serve your organization's mission.

As an Ethnic Studies concentrator at Brown University, I studied the often unspoken histories of immigrants in America, and learned how to bridge the gap between marginalized communities and academia. I have been involved with Brown's Third World Center throughout my undergraduate studies, first as a peer counselor to minority students and then as a program coordinator for Multiracial Heritage Week and Puerto Rican Cultural Week. These experiences developed my ability to create safe spaces that help students from under-represented groups to feel welcome and accepted. I have spent years cultivating skills in community organizing, and intertwined with that goal, inspiring change and self-reflection through the arts.

My familiarity with Manhattan, through working at the Museum of Chinese in the Americas in Chinatown (MOCA) would be helpful to Community Center. At MOCA, the research I undertook enabled me to understand families within their cultural, social and historical contexts. I also worked with summer camp and daycare groups on-site at MOCA. I feel connected to the people who live in this area and attribute this in part to my fluency in both Spanish and Chinese.

I would be happy to come to New York to discuss the position of Group Leader or other possibilities within Community Center. I can best be reached at my cell phone, (401) 863-3326. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Josiah Carberry

Mary Gorown

69 Brown Street #7098, Providence, RI 02912 • MaryGo@brown.edu • (555) 904 – 7385

February 21, 2012

Marc Fleishhacker
Managing Director, North America
True Action Network
495 Broadway, 4th Floor
New York, NY 10012

Dear Mr. Fleishhacker:

I am writing to apply for the Marketing Associate Program at True Action Network, which I learned of on the Brown University Job and Internship Board. I was immediately drawn to True Action for its use of consumer behavior data insights and digital creative power to generate strategic results. I am impressed by True Action's dedication to its clients as proven by its shared risk / shared reward compensation model.

My interest in the position comes from a combination of my academic intellectual curiosity and extra-curricular experiences in marketing and creative problem solving. As an applied cognitive science concentrator at Brown, I have studied the psychology of marketing and have practice using data to answer big questions. My research has included using information processing theories to understand the role of humor in advertising, understanding the science behind good design and layout, and studying the linguistics of brand names, including what aspects of a brand name elicit consumer purchasing preferences. Both my academic knowledge and my skill set of applying research will be relevant across the Strategy, Marketing Services, and Project Management rotations of the Associate program.

Outside of the classroom, I have experience in corporate marketing as the Brand and Naming Intern at Hasbro. I was responsible for creating toy names across 29 global brands. Through naming products, I learned the importance of extracting and highlighting the essence of a product and a brand and how each part of a product must fit into a larger marketing strategy. For example, toys that are meant to be collectible need names that communicate that they are a part of a set. Additionally, from being President of Brown RISD Hillel, I have experience working with a diverse set of people to bring ideas to life. With a five person executive board, I led forty-two student leaders and initiated a leadership development program to increase collaborative planning. My understanding of brand essences and the importance of working in partnerships will be directly applicable to the work I do and learn to do at True Action.

True Action believes that its success is measured in the growth of its client's business. I would love to further discuss the opportunity to use my skills and experiences to contribute to clients' growth and True Action's success through the Marketing Associates program. I can best be reached at (555) 904 – 7385 or MaryGo@brown.edu.

Thank you for your time and your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Mary Gorown