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HARVARD



GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF EDUCATION

# Art of Cover Letters



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Thursday, November 3, 4-5pm



# Cover Letters: Purpose

Opportunity to introduce yourself:

- Tell them *why* you are interested and *how* your experience meets their needs
- Elaborate on any special qualifications
- Highlight your successes
- Guide the reader (what to focus on & what to consider)

It's also a screen:

- Do you seem to understand the mission and values of the employer?
- Did you tailor the cover letter to the needs of the specific job?
- Can you articulate yourself well?



# Cover Letter Format: Content

## **1<sup>st</sup> paragraph: Orient the reader**

- Indicate position you're applying for & how you heard about it
- Tell why you are interested
- Introduce any key contacts
- Summarize in one sentence your qualifications

## **2<sup>nd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph: Show how your experience relates to what they need**

- Use examples to show fit between skills, knowledge, and qualifications and position offered
- Focus on what you can do for them (instead of why you *want* the position)
- Expand on bullets from resume (focus on success and scope of work)
- Highlight important experiences, key assets that will enhance your contribution

## **Last paragraph: Clarify what happens next**

- Tell them when you will contact them
- Thank them!



# Cover Letter Format: Sample

Dear Mr./ Ms. xx,

## INTRO:

I'm excited to apply for the Boston Program Coordinator position. I found the position on HGSE's Hub database and have since spoken with [your colleague] who further inspired me to apply. My skills empowering and engaging citizens through local action as well as my teaching and leadership experience are well aligned to the requirements for this position.

**HOW ALIGNED:** *experience with urban youth; leadership, teaching, advocacy skills;*

As a native of [an urban community], I am well aware of the many challenges that face urban communities. I was fortunate [to work with a club that] led me to register many people to vote, educate citizens on bond referendum that provided my school district with \$150 million dollars, and advocate to stop the reintroduction of corporal punishment into my school district, amongst many other successes.

My early experiences heavily influenced my future endeavors and have continued to inspire my passion for youth and community. They drew me to HGSE to study literacy, bilingualism, and how children in stressful situations can better learn and where I built a model curriculum that has been adopted by the local school district. I look forward to using these skills to further your projects [x, y, and z] I believe that my unique experiences ... all make me an excellent candidate for the position.

## NEXT STEPS:

Thank you so much for your time, and please feel free to contact me with any questions by phone at (617) 555-1212 or email at email@email.com. I will also follow up on [this date] to see if you have any questions.



# Tips Review Checklist

- ✓ Deconstruct and analyze the job description
- ✓ Understand the mission of the organization and how it contributes to the industry
- ✓ Clearly state the position you are applying for
- ✓ Articulate how you can help the organization achieve its goals
- ✓ Use examples to show fit between your education, experience, and skills and the position offered
- ✓ Give examples of qualities required for the job
- ✓ Proof-read your letter for typos and misspellings

Also check:

- ✓ Do you feel good about your letter? Do you feel that it represents you well?



# Cover Letter Handouts: Structure

Your Address

Date

Contact Person

Title Department

Employer's Name

Address

Dear (Contact Person):

## First Paragraph – Introduction (2 - 5 sentences)

State the purpose of your letter to attract attention and create interest. This paragraph should include:

- *Why* you are writing, *how* you heard about the position/employer, and *why* you are interested in the position/employer.
- Who your contact person is, if you have one.
- A statement that summarizes your qualifications.

## Second Paragraph – Body (May be 1 - 3 paragraphs—depending on your background)

Focus on your skills, knowledge and qualifications as they relate to the specific position.

- *Focus on what you can do for them* rather than why you want the position.
- Highlight your skills, knowledge and qualifications.
- Go beyond the resume bullets and highlight your success and the scope of your work.
- Point out important experiences and key assets (that *expand* on what's on your resume; avoid repeating your resume)—to demonstrate to the employer personal qualities that cannot be indicated on a resume.

## Last Paragraph – Closing (4 sentences maximum)

State your commitment to action.

- Clearly state what you will do next. For example, "I will call on Friday to confirm the arrival of my materials and to see if you have any questions for me."
  - *Do not state that you will wait for them to contact you.*
  - *Only say you will call if you intend to do so. Make sure to put it on your calendar.*
- Thank the employer for their time and consideration of your application.

Sincerely,

(Your Signature)

HGSE Student Name



# Cover Letter Handouts: Critique



## Cover-Letter Worksheet

### INSTRUCTIONS

- Choose: 1) one of the postings provided, 2) content from a posting you've considered, OR 3) just make up details.
- Then pick an **OPTION** below to start. Feel free to move on to other options, if you have time and want to.

**Purpose of the Cover Letter Body:** to elaborate on the match between your skills, knowledge, and qualifications and the job requirements and the link between your enthusiasm/passion and the job and organization, so this will help you highlight the most important information and how you can sell it.

Employer	Where do I match?
<p><b>OPTION 1:</b> What are the employer's top 2 or 3 needs?</p> <p>Skills:</p> <p>Knowledge:</p> <p>Experiences:</p>	<p>Which of my experiences illustrates these?</p> <p>Skills:</p> <p>Knowledge:</p> <p>Experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From work [even if diff. industry, <i>transferable skills</i>]?</li> <li>From school, volunteer work, activities, and/or accomplishments/awards/certifications?</li> </ul>
	<p>Provide examples of how you illustrated the above using STAR approach:</p> <p>Situation I faced or Task I was charged with:</p> <p>Actions I took:</p> <p>Results I achieved:</p>
<p><b>OPTION 2:</b> What kind of person does job description describe? What are this person's key competencies/abilities?</p>	<p>What traits and characteristics do I exhibit that match?</p> <p>SPECIFICALLY-how have I illustrated this in previous roles and what was the positive result?</p>

<p><b>OPTION 3:</b> What is the employer's or school's mission statement, purpose or goals?</p>	<p>Do my passions, commitment, teaching philosophy or enthusiasm map to this?</p> <p>How have they guided my actions in previous work/volunteer/school etc. to achieve <b>definitive</b> positive outcomes?</p> <p>Or</p> <p>How will they guide my work for this organization and create meaningful impact on organization's work/student body, etc.?</p>
<p><b>OPTION 4:</b> What do I know about this organization and why do I like them?</p>	<p>How do I fit in with the organization culture and goals?</p> <p>Why are my skills, knowledge, qualifications and experiences relevant for their work?</p>

### GETTING FEEDBACK (OPTIONAL):

Complete a cover letter for an opportunity you want to pursue and get individualized feedback!

To get feedback:

- Schedule an Office Hours appointment with any of the CSO team members on HIRED at [gse.harvard.edu/symplicity.com/students](https://gse.harvard.edu/symplicity.com/students)
- Let us know you want feedback on your cover letter by writing that in the *Comments* box when you schedule your appointment
- Email us a link to the internship posting or bring a copy with you.

**Any questions?**

Visit Hub to set up a coaching appt !

