
Cover Letter & Thank-You Letter Writing



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY • CAREER CENTER

Butler Pavilion, 5th Floor, 4400 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20016-8011

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What Is a Cover Letter?

A cover letter is your introduction to a prospective employer. It should demonstrate that you can think clearly and write persuasively. An effective cover letter makes you stand out as a candidate and should always accompany your resume. Your cover letter should create a link between the skills outlined on your resume and the specific employment needs of the organization, not simply restate what is on your resume. It should enhance your resume by detailing how your skills and background directly match the requirements of the position and also demonstrate that you know specific information about the company or organization.

Why Send a Thank-You Letter?

A thank-you letter is an essential follow-up step to an interview. It is your chance to present yourself again and to answer or address specific concerns raised during the interview about whether or not you have the qualifications the organization is seeking. For example, if an interviewer had doubts about your supervisory experience, you can emphasize that you have, indeed, demonstrated leadership and supervision abilities in much of your volunteer work. You may also use your letter to mention a specific area of related expertise that you did not have an opportunity to discuss in the interview. The thank-you letter is a courtesy that is expected and noticed by interviewers. You may fax or e-mail your letter if you know that the hiring time line is drawing to a close. It is important to send your letter as soon after the interview as possible.

The Cover Letter—Rules to Live By

- **Address the letter to a specific person.** If you do not have a name, call the organization and ask for the name and title of the person who should receive your letter.
- **Limit the letter to one page.** Keep it simple and to the point. Note: Spelling and grammar must be perfect. Have someone who is knowledgeable review your letter and provide feedback.

- **Research the organization carefully.** Demonstrate in your cover letter that you appreciate and understand the organization's principal activities. Think about the skills necessary to do the job for which you are applying. Demonstrate that you possess these skills by highlighting an experience or achievement that you think would interest the reader.

- **Be as specific as possible.** Tell the reader what you want and why you think you should be given what you want (cite your qualifications) and suggest the next course of action (e.g., you will follow up with a phone call). Do not recount your educational history in general, but focus on what is relevant to the employer.

- **In general, you should not indicate a disability or salary requirement** or make references to religious affiliation on your resume or in a cover letter. Because federal law requires that employers consider only job-related criteria throughout the application and interview phase, you should highlight your skills and abilities. In all aspects of cover letter writing, Career Center advisors are available to assist you.

- **Other types of letters** include responding to a specific job or classified ad, applying for a position through someone you know, applying for a position after you have had a conversation with someone from the organization, accepting or rejecting a position, and follow-up letters after conducting an informational interview. See the Career Center Web site at www.american.edu/careercenter for more information and examples of these types of letters or see an advisor at the Career Center. We urge you to contact us.

Career Center Resource Library

If you would like more information on cover and thank-you letter writing, look in the cover letter section of the Career Center Resource Library. You will find helpful books that provide sample letters as well as great advice on how to write cover and thank-you letters.

The Format of a Cover Letter

Make an effort to understand the employer's needs. How can you show that you are a good fit for the organization? Focus on clarity. Letters precede, confirm, and serve as evidence of your interactions.

Your street address
City, state, zip code
Your phone number
E-mail

Date

Mr./Ms. Individual's name

Title

Company name

Street address

City, state, zip code

Dear (Ms. or Mr.) Last Name:

Paragraph 1: State why you are writing, how you learned of the organization or position, basic information about yourself, and your status in school. If you are writing at the suggestion of someone who knows the addressee, this is a good place to say so. Draw attention to your knowledge of the company or organization and to your resume.

Paragraph 2: Spell out exactly (through examples) how your experiences, skills, and education fit the position and can benefit the company. Use the position description to give you guidance to focus this paragraph.

Paragraph 3 (optional): Should be used only to describe further what you can bring to the position. It is an extension of the theme of paragraph two.

Paragraph 4: Indicate that you are enclosing your resume. Reiterate your interest in the position. State your next course of action (e.g., contacting the employer within 7–10 days to check on the status of your application). Thank the reader for their attention and consideration. Say that you are looking forward to hearing from the potential employer and provide a phone number and e-mail address where you can be reached.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

Your name (typed)

enclosure(s)

Sample Cover Letter: Undergraduate Student Seeking Internship

317 Anderson Hall
4400 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20016-8101
202-555-5555
robin@american.edu

March 9, 2004

Ms. Christy Mumford
Editorial Director
Freedom Forum
1101 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22209

Dear Ms. Mumford:

I recently noticed a posting on AU CareerWeb for a Freedom Forum summer internship that entails writing short articles and assisting with research and the editorial process. As a student in American University's School of Communication and its Department of Literature, I am focusing on writing and the media and would like the opportunity to explore these interests further as an intern with your organization.

Through coursework in both communication and literature, I have developed skills in written, oral, and multimedia expression—all critical to working in journalism. As the chief editor of a student literary magazine and as a teaching assistant evaluating students' written work, I have strengthened my editorial skills. The course, Writing for Mass Communication, gave me a firm grounding in the basic techniques of news writing. In addition, my varied work experiences, ranging from program coordination to waiting tables, have helped me become proficient in dealing with the public and working under pressure.

Enclosed are my resume and writing samples for your review. I am available to start work the week of May 15. I will contact you the week of March 18 to follow up on my application. In the meantime, if you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at 202-555-5555 or by e-mail at <robin@american.edu>.

Sincerely,

(signature)

Robin A. Sheffler

enclosure(s)

Sample Cover Letter: Graduate Student Applying for Summer Intern Position

12123 Windsor Lane
Sunnyvale, RI 32398
(505)555-6767
ryansmith@yahoo.com

March 3, 2004

Ms. Peggy Newhouse
Senior Associate
American Federation of Teachers
Educational Issues Department
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Ms. Newhouse:

As a hardworking student with a passion for education and a comprehensive range of experiences, I feel that I would be an outstanding candidate as a full-time summer 2004 intern in the Educational Issues Department. An examination of my attached resume will attest to these attributes: a successful university career as well as a variety of notable positions held in the field of education.

Like the American Federation of Teachers, I too am a strong supporter of high standards, not only in the arena of the public education classroom but also for myself. Since beginning my graduate education at American University in 2003, I have spent countless hours in order to excel in my academic pursuits, while simultaneously working two jobs in order to remain in school, and dedicating myself to aiding in the education of others. It is this dedication, commitment to hard work, and enthusiasm that I would like to bring to the AFT.

As stated, two of the larger tasks required of this position are providing support in production of AFT publications and working on a variety of research projects. A rigorous course load both at American University and New York University has provided me with both the writing and the research skills necessary to successfully fulfill these duties. For three years I served as editor-in-chief of my monthly college newspaper, composing a minimum of two pieces per issue. Not only did I greatly enhance my writing abilities, but I was able to finely tune my attention to detail and investigative skills. Additionally I have spent nearly five years working in the public sphere, including retail and customer service positions. From these experiences, I have been able to extensively develop my communication skills, which will be of great benefit to the AFT.

Enclosed are both my resume and a writing sample for your review. Thank you for considering my application. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns at (505)555-6767, or email me at ryansmith@yahoo.com.

Sincerely,

(signature)

Ryan Smith

Sample Cover Letter: Undergraduate Student Applying for Full-Time Job

4400 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20016-8104
(555) 555-5555
abcdef@american.edu

March 7, 2004

Ms. Mary McCloud
Office Manager
Global Fund for Women
1375 Sutter Street, Suite 400
San Francisco, CA USA 94109

Dear Ms. McCloud:

I would like to express my interest in the Development Fellow for Individual Giving position posted on your Web site. As a senior in American University's School of International Service, I have developed a focus on gender and development. I have a keen interest in the Global Fund for Women and completely support its mission to advance women's human rights.

My internship at the Central American Resource Center in Washington, DC, gave me experience working in the development office of a nonprofit. The fast-paced work environment strengthened my organizational skills and my ability to manage several tasks simultaneously. I completed an extensive investigation of potential public and private funders to the organization through phone calls and internet research. After determining whether or not our organization met the funder's criteria, I wrote letters of inquiry to obtain their support. These tasks helped me to develop strong, professional, written communication skills while working to meet deadlines.

I gained additional experience in international issues during my recent internship at Amnesty International's Women's Human Rights Program. I completed extensive written tasks such as creating fact sheets, compiling articles for a monthly on-line bulletin and composing sample letters for the on-line action network. I also fielded calls and responded to emails from a diverse group of Amnesty members who requested information about the Women's Human Rights Program.

I have enclosed my resume. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at 555-555-5555 or by email at sabrown@american.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

(signature)

Susie Brown

Sample Cover Letter: Undergraduate Student Applying for Full-Time Job

111 Raisin Drive
Wesley, WI 09812
292-888-7654
swilliams@hotmail.com

November 15, 2004

Mr. John Bevins
CBS Television Network
Human Resources
51 West 52nd Street
New York, NY 10019

Dear Mr. Bevins:

As a former U.S. Whitewater Kayak Team member, I have competed at a world-class level in my respective sport, something I could not have done without discipline and hard work. As a senior at American University's School of Communication, I plan to use the same determination that made me an accomplished athlete in my future broadcasting career. I have focused my education on working in news, non-fiction and documentary television production and I am seeking entry-level employment with CBS.

Through my minor in International Politics and attending school in Washington, DC, I have both knowledge and interest in public affairs, politics and international relations. Through coursework in both visual communications and foreign policy analysis, I have developed skills in written, oral and multimedia expression as well as analytical skills - all critical to working in the news and non-fiction television industry.

As a production assistant for Story House Productions in Washington, DC, I worked closely with journalist Peter Bergem (CNN Terrorist expert and author of Holy War, Inc.) as well as the executive producer and producer researching global terrorism for the Discovery Times Channel feature, Al Qaeda 2.0. Because of the small, intimate nature of the company, the producers relied on me to fill multiple roles without being asked and with minimal supervision, giving me a diverse exposure in television production and experience working in a high-pressure environment.

I would describe myself as a very technically competent person and a quick learner who is comfortable working with the many tools of television production. This is why many of the producers at Story House Productions relied on me for tape handling and duplicating as well as computer-related issues. I work very well under pressure and usually become engrossed in whatever subject I am pursuing. My passion lies in non-fiction visual storytelling and the process and research that go into it. I would like to apply this passion in a career with CBS.

I have enclosed my resume and I am available to begin work in early December. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at 292-888-7654 or by email at swilliams@hotmail.com.

Sincerely,

(signature)

Sarah L. Williams

Sample Cover Letter: Graduate Student Applying for Full-Time Job

Mary Owens
1234 Georgetown Rd.
Rockville, Maryland 20812
301-555-8655 mowen@hotmail.com

June 18, 2004

Ms. Gladys Williams
Administrator
Smith & Associates Inc.
10000 Brooklyn Avenue
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear Ms. Williams:

I am writing to apply for the position of Research Assistant at Smith & Associates as advertised in the *Washington Post*. I am a graduate of Kenyon College with a major in psychology, and I have recently completed my masters in Justice, Law and Society at American University. I am seeking a full time position in the area of psychological or sociological research, and am particularly interested in the area of child welfare. I would describe myself as dedicated, hardworking, and highly competent.

My first research experience was in my senior year of high school. For my Senior Project, I set out to design, conduct, and analyze a research study at the Empower Program, a nonprofit organization that worked to end violence against women. Since high school, I have had the opportunity to study statistics and research methods in depth, as well as to design additional research projects. I also have a passion for child welfare. While at Kenyon College, I initiated and organized Child Abuse Education Week. The week included a bookstore display, a fundraiser, and two local speakers. My greatest accomplishment for the week was to bring Dave Pelzer, author of *A Child Called 'It'*, *The Lost Boy*, and *A Man Named Dave* to speak at Kenyon. I booked the lecture, raised the funding, and with the help of the committee that I formed and led, thoroughly advertised the highly successful event.

I know that your organization has conducted research for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, where I interned the summer of 2003. I had a wonderful experience at OJJDP, where I had the privilege to help organize The National Summit on Children Exposed to Violence. The various skills I sharpened during my internship would be strong assets within your organization.

Through my experiences, I have developed strong research, writing, organization, and analytical skills. With these skills, as well as my passion for both research and child welfare, I would welcome the opportunity to join your organization. I believe that you will find me to be an extremely dedicated and competent employee. My resume is enclosed.

Sincerely,

(signature)

Mary Owens

Sample Thank-You Letter to Follow Job Interview

8253 California Circle, #101
Rockville, MD 20852
301-555-5555
E-mail: sally@american.edu

September 5, 2004

Mr. Roy Jones
Marketing Analysis Services Manager
The Bureau of National Affairs
1231 25th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037

Dear Mr. Jones:

Thank you for meeting with me last Friday. I found our discussion to be very informative and am excited about the possibility of joining your staff as a marketing associate.

As I mentioned in the interview, I can offer many skills and insights that are essential to the marketing efforts of the Bureau of National Affairs. In particular, I have played an integral role in marketing several newsletters and other publications, including coordinating direct mailings and compiling specialized marketing lists.

You described this position as mid-level management. As a marketing associate with Casey Publishing, I have been responsible for numerous group projects that require overseeing the cooperation of several divisions within the company. In addition, I have a solid record of meeting deadlines and have developed a keen appreciation of bottom-line issues.

I am confident I can make a valuable contribution to BNA. I am impressed by the long-term possibilities with your organization and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

(signature)

Sally Anderson
