

Cover Letters

What is a cover letter?

A cover letter is a letter that accompanies your résumé that serves as an introduction of your skills and qualifications. The most important thing about a cover letter is that it matches your experience and skills to the position criteria. Therefore, it's necessary to write a specific cover letter for each position to which you apply. **DO NOT WRITE A GENERIC COVER LETTER.** Review the position, and determine the most important elements of the job, and try to match the skills and experience you possess to that specific job. You want to cite specific instances when you have used that experience on the job, rather than just providing a laundry list of your accomplishments. If you can prove your experience, rather than just state your experience, you will stand out to potential employers.

A cover letter should always be sent if you are applying to a full-time job, regardless of if the job announcement cites the need for a cover letter; for an internship, a cover letter may not always be necessary, so check the posting. If you are applying through *RockefellerCareers*, all cover letters need to be approved by the Rockefeller College Office of Career Development. Students may submit cover letters to external positions via *RockefellerCareers* as well.

In certain cases, you may not be applying to a specific position, but instead, inquiring if there are any available positions. If that is the situation, then you should focus on the organization's mission or services and how you could contribute to their goals.

Cover Letter Guidelines

- Limit your cover letter to 1 page, single spaced.
- Always personalize your cover letter for a specific job – **DO NOT WRITE A GENERIC COVER LETTER.**
- Proofread your cover letter before sending it out! Any mistake or grammatical error can result in rejection.
- Do not summarize your resume. Rather, pick out specific examples from your resume that reflect the skills the job description calls for.
- If you are emailing your cover letter, attach your cover letter and résumé to the email. Do not use the cover letter as the body of your email. Instead, write a brief message stating that your cover letter and résumé are attached.
- If you are mailing or printing your cover letter, use résumé paper.
- Address your cover letter to a specific person, whenever possible. Contact the organization and request the name of the appropriate contact person. If you absolutely cannot identify a person, use "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Internship Coordinator".
- Do not focus on what you would like to gain out of the internship, instead focus on what you have to offer to the organization and position.
- Use the active, not the passive tense.
- Do not staple your resume to your cover letter.
- Demonstrate your skills and qualifications through concrete examples. Use the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to discuss specific times when you have used that skill.
- Vary your sentence structure – avoid starting too many sentences with "I".
- Sign your letters in blue or black ink if sending via postal mail; use an electronic signature if sending via email or online.
- Keep copies of your letters for future reference.
- Include information about why you would want to work for that specific organization or in that specific position.
- Highlight the fit between your skills and the position requirements.
- Format your cover letter so that it matches your résumé – use the same font, headings, margins, etc.
- If an employer asks for your salary requirements, include a range (i.e. \$40,000-\$50,000) rather than an exact number. A range will allow you to obtain a reasonable amount and not price yourself too high or low. If you are unsure of an appropriate range, contact the Office of Career Development.
- **Proofread your document and have the Rockefeller College Office of Career Development approve a copy before sending it out to employers.**

Sample Cover Letter Format

Street Address
City, State ZIP
Phone Number
Email Address
Date

Employer's Name (include Mr./Ms.)
Title
Organization
Street Address
City, State ZIP

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name (try your best to find the name of a specific person):

The first sentence should address why you are writing to them – in other words, that you are applying to a specific position. Write a couple of sentences related to why you would like to work for that specific organization, particularly if you are applying to a non-profit organization. If you were referred by someone, mention that here. Indicate your degree and expected graduation date – explicitly mentioning that you are a student at Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy at the University at Albany. The last sentence of your cover letter should be your thesis statement. In other words, what you are going to address in the rest of your letter. Remember that you need to focus on what you have to offer to the organization, not what you hope to gain out of the organization or position.

The body paragraphs (one or two paragraphs) should focus on the qualifications that you possess that match the specific position requirements or the mission of the organization. How can your background and experiences contribute to the organization's goals and objectives? Read through the job description carefully to pinpoint the skill sets that the employer consistently mentions (i.e. analyzing data, lobbying, policy writing, researching, etc.). Select the skills you feel most confident of and match your skills and qualifications to those qualities. Do not laundry list the skills (I have good communication, analytical, writing, and researching skills), instead, pick one or two skills and describe them in depth.

When describing your specific skill sets, do not just reiterate what is on your résumé – give more in-depth detail. Target what they are seeking in a candidate and back it up with specific examples of times when you have used those skills. If you can prove your experience that is much more convincing than just stating that you have those skills. To give specific examples, use the STAR technique (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to describe the context of the example. The Situation and Task should give background information on the circumstances, the Action is what you did to complete the task, and the Result is the outcome of your effort.

The closing paragraph should again summarize your strengths in the position. You should also discuss some actions towards moving forward in the application process, such as your interest in interviewing with them, or you will be in DC over the summer, or that you would like to hear from them soon, or you will contact them in 2 weeks to follow up. You should thank the employer for their time and consideration.

Sincerely, (you can also use Best Regards, Sincere Regards, or some other closing)

Your full name signed (if you are sending your letter online, you can insert an electronic signature)
Your full name, typed

Résumé Attached (if you are sending via postal mail, include Résumé Enclosed)

99 Homestead Ave, Apt. 1
Albany NY, 12203
Mike.Student@gmail.com
(518) 993-0793

October 5, 20xx

Ms. Amanda B. Moitoso
National Recruiting Manager
KPMG, LLP
550 S. Tryon St, Suite 3200
Charlotte, NC 28202-4214

Dear Ms. Moitoso,

I am writing to apply for the Senior Associate position at KPMG in Albany, New York. I learned of this position at the information session that Mr. David Pondillo held at Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, University at Albany. I am currently pursuing my Master of Public Administration at Rockefeller, with a concentration in Information Management. Based on my skills in business process analysis and information technology, I believe I am an excellent candidate.

I have experience performing process analysis and producing professional writing, which would be an excellent match for advisory work at KPMG. This summer I was employed as an intern at the U.S. Census Bureau, where my branch collected financial data from local governments. I was asked to analyze and standardize processes for reviewing and editing survey responses. I conducted interviews with department analysts and produced a detailed data analysis plan to document current practices and train new hires. My supervisor informed me that he intends to use my report as a template for other analysis plans in all branches of the division. My ability to analyze and communicate complex information clearly and logically would make me a valuable addition to KPMG.

Additionally, I have experience analyzing and documenting technical systems. After graduating from Michigan State University, I was hired by their Academic Technology Services department, where I worked on training and documentation programs. The student help desk was struggling with high employee turnover, and I was tasked with developing an online training system to improve retention. I developed a curriculum consisting of written articles, screenshots, video screencasts, and assessment quizzes. Also while at MSU, I designed and wrote all documentation for a new Microsoft Exchange calendar system and provided support for managers when the server went live. My experience with information technology and computer systems is an excellent match with KPMG's work on information systems analysis.

Finally, my experience as an educator in South Korea has given me the ability to communicate clearly across language and cultural barriers. I spent a full year developing and teaching courses in cooperation with Korean educators, and I am skilled at working with people from diverse backgrounds. I am particularly attracted by KPMG's global status, and would be an excellent asset to the organization.

Thank you for your consideration. I can be reached at the contact information listed above, and I would be pleased to discuss the position further in an interview.

Sincerely,
Michael Student

Resume Attached

1400 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12222
NelsonRockefeller@albany.edu
518-442-5253

Date

Ms. Kathleen McCarty
Director
New York State Assembly Intern Committee
Legislative Office Building - Room 104A
Albany, New York 12248

Dear Ms. McCarty:

I am writing to express my interest in the New York State Assembly Graduate Intern program. Currently, I am pursuing my Master of Public Administration with a concentration in Local Government Management and will graduate in May 20xx. Growing up in New York, I have a strong interest in state politics, and have followed the Assembly's legislation for quite some time. I believe I would be a good candidate for the Graduate Intern program, as I have substantial research and policy experience.

Recently, I earned my bachelor's degree in public policy from Binghamton University. As part of my degree, I took several classes in policy writing, development, and analysis. In my "introduction to Policy Analysis" course, I completed a group project on higher education policy from 1960-2000. To accomplish the task, the group divided up the project, and each group member selected a decade. For my part of the project, I researched higher education policy from 1980-1990, including conducting research using Lexis-Nexis on Pell Grant initiatives. I found 10 articles on Pell Grants, and compiled a summary of the rulings and the implications on higher education loan assistance. As a team, we created a PowerPoint presentation comparing and contrasting the legislation in each of the decades; we presented it to a class of approximately 40 students. As a result, I feel confident that I could utilize my research skills in the Assembly Internship.

In addition to my research skills, I believe that I could contribute my experience in policy. During the spring semester, I completed a policy internship with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in Albany. In this role, I prepared legislative alerts, action alerts, updates, and communications with other local mental health service provider staff. Specifically, I researched and wrote documents about the recent health care bill passed by President Obama, and sent letters to local Congress and Senate representatives to voice NAMI's support of the bills.

Thank you very much for your consideration for the Graduate Intern position with the New York State Assembly. I can be reached at the contact information listed above, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss the position in more depth in an interview.

Sincerely,

Nelson Rockefeller

Résumé Attached

Sample Letter of Inquiry

15 Great Dane Way
Albany, NY 12222
518.442-3112
Polly@albany.edu
April 16, 20xx

Human Resources Director
New York Public Interest Research Group
107 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12210

Dear Human Resources Director:

Please consider this letter of inquiry an expression of my interest in exploring employment opportunities with the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG). Dr. Anne Hildreth suggested I contact you, citing your organization's excellent reputation as an advocate for the citizens of New York.

I am particularly interested in the combination of political initiatives and community education in which your organization specializes. As a political science major at Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy at the University at Albany, I have focused my studies on American Politics. In my *Current Controversies in American Politics* course, which I took last semester with Professor Friedman, we examined a myriad of issues plaguing the current political environment, such as healthcare, financial bailouts, reproductive ethics, and Second Amendment rights. Specifically, I prepared a debate on campaign financing, where I took the position that corporations should not be able to sponsor candidates. To prepare my arguments, I researched the recent legislation via online sources, such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Additionally, I contacted a local Congressman's office to get his position on the topic. The debate was successful, and I won the award for best debater, as voted by the class. I believe this experience meshes seamlessly with NYPIRG's stand on good government, especially in regards to campaign finance reform, research, and advocacy.

In addition, I believe that I would be an asset to NYPIRG, as I have extensive experience in organizing college students, which fits in with your mission as a student-directed consumer, environmental, and government reform organization. As Vice President of the College Democrats, I organized weekly meetings for a group of 40 students. During the meetings, we organized events, such as a voter registration table, to educate college students on their rights as a voter and encourage more college students to vote. Lastly, we recruited new members through tabling during the semi-annual activities fair.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I would be interested in learning more about your organization and determining how I could contribute to the mission of NYPIRG in a full-time position. If I meet the values and qualifications of the organization, please feel free to contact me to schedule an interview.

Sincerely,
Polly Lyman

Résumé Attached