GUIDE TO COVER LETTER WRITING

Evans School
Career Development

Daring Leaders. Courageous Careers.
The purpose of a cover letter is to directly convey why you are a strong candidate for the position of interest. It is your opportunity to demonstrate how your skills match the job's requirements. You will want to write about the specific ways in which your past positions and accomplishments have prepared you for success in this new position. Always limit your cover letter to one page, unless otherwise instructed.

Before a potential employer reads a word of your cover letter, he or she will form an initial impression of you simply by observing its appearance. The tone of the letter should be enthusiastic, polite, confident, and professional. Successful cover letters are never generic – they must be targeted to the set of required skills outlined in the job description. Here are some questions to help you formulate your cover letter paragraphs.

**PARAGRAPH 1**  
*What is the purpose / intention for writing this letter? Who are you?*  
Be creative. Start your cover letter with a relevant and compelling story or a grabbing statement. This almost always makes the reader want to continue learning about you. Then, state the position you are seeking and pitch your top selling points for this job. Try not to begin sentences with "I" or "my" and instead focus on the employer. Don't forget to state why you want to work with this particular organization!

**PARAGRAPH 2**  
*What academic experiences make you a strong candidate? How do your qualifications match up with the qualifications of the position and what skills or knowledge can you contribute?*  
Provide specific examples of academic (Evans School) experiences that are relevant to the job. Connect those experiences to an example of how they will help you succeed in this new role. Focus on related courses, class projects, accomplishments, etc. This section can be in paragraph or bullet point format.

**PARAGRAPH 3**  
*What professional experiences make you a strong candidate? How do your professional skills address the specific organizational needs of the job?*  
Provide specific examples of professional experiences (paid/unpaid/internships) that demonstrate your relevancy to the job. Connect those experiences to an example of how they will help you succeed in this new role. Focus on job and/or industry related skills such as, technical and IT skills, regional understanding, languages, communication skills, etc. This section can be in paragraph or bullet point format.

**PARAGRAPH 4**  
*Why are you interested in this company? What do you hope the next steps will be?*  
Show the employer that you've researched the company and know about their endeavors. State briefly how you plan to contribute to their specific goals. Finally, summarize your qualifications and interest. Don't be afraid to request an interview. Lastly, be sure to thank the employer for their time and consideration.
CITY OF SEATTLE

POSITION DESCRIPTION:

Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) Environmental Partnerships Team is seeking two graduate interns for the Customer Programs Division. The programs include recycling and composting outreach and education to Seattle businesses, multi-family customers, and the event recycling and composting program. This internship is intended to provide experience in ongoing outreach and education to the Seattle business community and multi-family residents. The selected interns will also gain additional program support experience through site inspections, customer service response support, as well as learn various administrative support functions.

Learning objectives include but are not limited to:

- Gain skills and experience working in a professional workplace environment providing customer service directly to Seattle residents and businesses
- Gain experience conducting audits of program elements
- Develop ability to monitor service issues, develop work plans, and track program performance
- Develop skills in customer service and communications strategies

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES:

Under direct supervision, the interns will learn through supervised practical training various aspects of community outreach in support of SPU's Recycling & Composting Programs. Duties may include, but not be limited to:

- Educate businesses, multi-family residents and school groups about recycling, composting, and waste prevention
- Assist with developing and updating outreach materials and website content
- Distribute waste reduction outreach materials and supplies to businesses, schools and multi-family buildings
- Participate provide logistical support for workshops, trainings and events

QUALIFICATIONS:

Education: Applicants must be currently enrolled in graduate-level coursework, pursuing a degree related to: Environmental Management, Policy or Education; Communications, Public Administration; Planning; Public Affairs, or other closely related field.

Required experience/qualifications:

- Excellent oral and written communication skills
- Highly skilled in Word and Excel
- Ability to complete and maintain program records and reports
- Ability to provide excellent customer service and communicate in a friendly manner when performing outreach and education site visits
- Ability to work independently, be self-motivated, and able to take initiative
- Demonstrated ability to be highly organized
- Good judgment in problem solving

Questions about the application? Contact Linda Rogers at linda.rogers@seattle.gov or 206/233-7221
September 20, 2015

Linda Rogers
Seattle Public Utilities
700 5th Avenue, Suite 5500
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Ms. Rogers,

Growing up in a developing world, where people are surrounded by heavy clouds of haze, and where curbside recycling is at a preliminary stage, always made me desperate for change. Then, I moved to Seattle and saw blue recycling bins, composting garbage cans, and millions of zero waste stations around every corner of the city. This move inspired me to pursue a career in sustainability and is the reason I am excited to apply for the Recycling & Composting Program Graduate Intern position at Seattle Public Utilities. In this role, I would look forward to contributing to the City of Seattle by using my public outreach and program management skills to raise awareness around recycling and composting, as well as use my customer service and strong writing abilities to create engaging materials and programs to reach new and diverse populations.

As a graduate student in the Evans School of Public Policy and Governance at University of Washington, I am pursuing a Master’s in Public Administration degree with a concentration in Environmental Policy. Through my coursework, I’ve learned to collaborate and communicate with people in teams on multiple projects focused on organizational performance, program evaluation and policy analysis. Working in groups and producing graduate-level proposals and memos will allow me to work cohesively on the Customer Program Division team, and effectively communicate complex waste management processes to residents using accessible platforms. Also, through my Quantitative Analysis course I used my organizational skills to collect and analyze various sets of data to critically assess issues and inform decisions. These courses have further prepared me to think critically and work collaboratively to meet the pressing program deadlines for the upcoming Recycling & Composting Annual Campaign.

Currently, I am the Executive Assistant for an environmental conservation non-profit organization, Save Habitat And Diversity Of Wetlands (SHADOW). I recently led the coordination for the biggest annual fundraising event of the year, where I developed a thorough work plan in order to track logistical tasks, manage volunteer outreach, and prioritize advertising deadlines. This plan ensured that the SHADOW staff was prepared for the day of the event. I also designed the main event flyer and invitation, posted event details to local websites and social media, and delivered flyers in-person to businesses of interest. On the day of the event, over 250 people attended and we successfully raised $5,000 to go toward a new outdoor wilderness education program. I would be excited to adapt my programming skills to meet SPU’s goals of create engaging, successful community events.

A dedicated heart to environmental sustainability, an ability to thrive on teams, and the communication skills to inspire action. I believe these attributes, along with my relevant educational pursuits make me a strong candidate for the Recycling & Composting Program Graduate Intern position. I would be grateful for the opportunity to discuss how my skills and values align with the position and SPU in an interview. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Anita Job
Health Systems Group Research Assistant

About Us:
VillageReach is looking for a part-time research assistant, currently enrolled in a graduate-level program, interested in joining the VillageReach team for the summer — and potentially beyond — to apply their experience in global health to furthering the mission of a small, innovative Seattle-based global health organization: to save lives and improve health by increasing access to quality healthcare for the most underserved communities.

Position Description:
Health Systems Group (HSG) research assistants are paid staff based in the Seattle, WA headquarters and typically work part-time or full-time in the summer and part-time during graduate school working sessions. Research assistants work closely with VillageReach program staff on a variety of activities to support the work of the Health Systems Group.

Primary Responsibilities:
The work of the research assistant will be determined based on time availability, experience, and interest. Potential Malawi-based projects include:

- Manages a comprehensive health systems strengthening demonstration project in one community. The research assistant will support monitoring and evaluation efforts and lead and/or support research on potential new project initiatives on community health.
- Support the monitoring and evaluation efforts and lead and/or support research on potential new project initiatives on community health.
- Build and maintain relationships with community partners using cultural competency to increase project stakeholders
- The research assistant will help develop the content for the mobile messages for the Mobile Nutrition Project
- Help advocate and communicate ideas for an e-learning program, design an implementation plan and support field staff
- The research assistant will be asked to collaborate with field staff to initiate documentation of current VillageReach projects through case studies, blog posts, website and social media content, etc.
- Other duties as assigned.

Qualifications:
- Graduate-level student studying public administration, public health or another relevant field
- Skillful writing and verbal communication abilities, able to synthesize and deliver information to diverse audiences in a clear and concise way
- Outstanding ability to synthesize, organize, and present research; strong experience accessing secondary sources
- Passion for global health and development issues
- Self-motivated: independent worker
- Demonstrated understanding of challenges with working in rural, underserved and low-income context; experience working in a low-income country a plus
- Demonstrated interest in MNCH, nutrition and/or mhealth a plus
- Fluency in English; French reading and writing skills a plus
March 24, 2015

John Smith, International Research Manager
VillageReach
1015 Third Ave.
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Mr. Smith:

I’ll never forget what it was like to live in Kenya and see the devastation of economic instability. Seeing people live without shelter, food or water, was an eye-opening experience that has led to my pursuit of a career in international development. My passion for serving those in developing countries and my first-hand experience of living in East Africa has motivated me to apply for the Research Assistant position with VillageReach. Through my graduate education and professional experiences, I have gained extensive knowledge in conducting program evaluation, establishing community-based partnerships, and building organizational capacity. I see the Research Assistant position as the ideal opportunity for me to advance my personal and professional mission to create social mobility for populations in low-resource settings.

- Monitoring and Evaluation
  As a current graduate student in the Evans School, I have built essential skills in program evaluation and economic and policy analysis. I’ve excelled at developing, monitoring, and evaluating programs, running statistical analyses on survey data and applying microeconomic frameworks to development issues. Previously, as a Global Health Fellow in the Evaluation and Research department at Single Stop USA (SSUSA) in New York, I pulled and analyzed data from proprietary case management software to increase organizational understanding of program impact. These same skills will allow me to succeed at VillageReach where I look forward to implementing monitoring and evaluation tools to assess the effectiveness and impact of the Mobile Nutrition Project in Malawi.

- Communication and Advocacy
  Along with Evans School coursework in policy analysis and group decision making, I’ve also canvassed and campaigned during the Congressional District elections in 2014 – allowing me insight into the implementation of a democratic governance system. In New York, I developed a case management tool for SSUSA’s organizational partners, where I made frequent visits to maintain relationships and ensure that the tool was meeting their unique needs. Also, as the First Year Liaison for the Evans School Student Organization, I worked to improve the student experience by implementing a diversity initiative. This involved me liaising with students, faculty and staff to build strategies for improving our collective experience as students of public service. My ability to build and maintain relationships with ease will allow me to be a productive and personable member of the field staff for VillagerReach.

VillageReach’s research on small working households and the role of technology in developing countries aligns well with my working experience and my graduate studies. Furthermore, having been raised in Nairobi, Kenya, I have the cultural competence and vested interest to use my professional skills to improve the livelihood of East African cultures. I would be grateful for the opportunity to discuss my qualifications with you in an interview. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Seymore Dollars
COVER LETTER CHECKLIST

Use the checklist below to quickly critique your cover letter

☐ Do not exceed one page, and stick to 3-5 paragraphs. The length should be driven by how much you have to say that is relevant to the position - no more, no less.

☐ Typographical and spelling errors can cost you a job. Mistakes on cover letters can undermine your credibility and show you don't pay attention to details. Use the spell check every time you modify your cover letter, proofread it at least three times, and, if possible, ask someone else to look at it with a fresh eye prior to submission.

☐ Both your resume and cover letter should include your letterhead at the top with your contact information. Use the same fonts on both documents for consistency and professionalism.

☐ Whenever possible, cover letters should be addressed to an actual person rather than to HR or Personnel. Pay close attention to spelling and job titles when addressing the contact person. If you cannot find a name anywhere online or through your contacts, use “Dear Hiring Manager”.

☐ Your cover letter should NOT be an overview of your entire work history- chose the most relevant examples of your academic and professional experiences that relate most to the qualifications of the position and connect that to what you will do in this new role. (Use the job description as your guide- what key words are repeated?)

☐ Think outside the box. Cover letters that begin with an engaging and creative statement get read and often lead to an interview. Use words that showcase your interest such as, passion, thrilled, excited, compelled, inspired.

☐ Try not to just list your skills. You have to prove to the employer that you have utilized these skills in your past experiences. Give a specific example of how you used that particular skill. Then give an example of how that experience will help you in the job at hand.

☐ Ask yourself, why do I want to work for this organization? Forgetting to mention why you specifically want to be a part of an organization can lead your letter to be tossed. Do your research and mention something specific (a program, initiative, event) that inspires you.

☐ If sending your cover letter via email, do NOT send the letter as the text of the e-mail message. Keep the text of your email message professional and brief, 4-5 sentences max.

☐ Remember to attach your cover letter and resume as one single PDF when sending via email.