

Speech, Language, Hearing Sciences Cover Letter Guide

A cover letter is a persuasive statement to an employer where you state in clear and specific ways how your skills, interests and experiences MATCH the requirements listed in the internship or job description.

The 5 Steps of Cover Letter Writing

1. Determine if you meet the basic or minimum qualifications to apply (usually education requirements and years of experience).
2. Look for key words/phrases throughout all parts of the job description and required qualifications that match your skills, interests, and experiences (not just under “Required or Preferred Qualifications”).
3. Retype all key words or phrases (transferable skills) from the job description directly onto a fresh clean Word document and highlight them in another color. The highlighting tells you which key words came from the job description, so you won’t change them. Do not use synonyms – use these exact key words.
4. Take each key word/phrase and provide an example of when you used/acquired this skill, which will be unique to you. Ask yourself the following:

What does the employer want?

- ☐ List the skills, qualities, or values in the job description (or deduce what skills will be needed for such a position);
Example: *Direct communication skills*

What evidence can you provide to highlight your skills? (Unpaid experiences, work, classes, academic projects, internships, jobs, etc.)

- ☐ Provide a specific example of how you acquired and have used each of these skills in a detailed concrete way:

Incomplete statement: Demonstrated strong communication skills.

Excellent statement: Demonstrated direct communication skills when assigning 5 cancer walk volunteers specific set up and break down instructions.

5. Place these examples into paragraphs in a sensible order for the reader. Begin with the strongest, most relevant examples or skills first. The least relevant (or weakest) will be at the bottom of the cover letter.

Formatting & Advice

Choose between either design:

Traditional Business Design

Traditional cover letters start at the top, left-hand side of the page with:

- ☐ Your address, the date, person’s full name, their address, Dear _____
- ☐ Your name only appears at the bottom of the page (not the top)

Contemporary Style

Copy and paste the exact same information (name and contact) from your resume onto the top of your cover letter.

Format/Layout:

- ☐ Font is the same style as your resume and should be around the same size
- ☐ Length - one page
- ☐ Keep bolding, all-caps, colors, lines, and italics to a minimum
- ☐ Margins can be between .05 and 1.25 inch
- ☐ Keep free of typo’s, spelling mistakes and grammatical errors
- ☐ Left hand justify entire page, no need to indent spaces for paragraphs
- ☐ Use only one white space (aka return) in between all paragraphs
- ☐ Need a minimum of three sentences to form a complete paragraph

First Paragraph Must Include:

- ☐ What position you are applying to (include a job ID # if there is one)
- ☐ Where did you see it advertised?
- ☐ Why do you want this job? (be as specific and unique as possible, and demonstrate enthusiasm)

Middle Paragraphs (usually between 2-4 sentences):

- Must include words/phrases directly pulled from the job description
- Opening paragraph has the most relevant skills and important qualities, last paragraph has the least relevant
- Use short narrative examples to showcase how your skills and experience match their qualifications
- Several short paragraphs are easier to read and comprehend rather than one long one

Closing Paragraph:

- Include final skill sets, or additional qualities or characteristics that make you stand out as a candidate
- Must include a “Thank you for your time and consideration” phrase

Tone:

- Professional, positive, direct, enthusiastic

Don't forget:

- Create a **NEW** cover letter for each application, as the skills and qualifications will vary - don't waste time with generic phrases or cover letters
- Never mention things you don't have, such as “While I don't speak Arabic, I know some Spanish”. Instead, write about how you have utilized conversational Spanish in the past and enjoy learning new languages.

AI Tools for Career Development

You may be interested in using Artificial Intelligence tools, such as ChatGPT, to brainstorm ideas and enhance your career planning process. We encourage you to review the following guidelines and sample prompts, before proceeding with the use of AI.

1. AI can quickly gather useful industry data and career information.
2. If used for application materials, generative AI responses should be utilized only for ideas and examples.
3. Detailed and precise prompts will generate better responses.
4. Protect your privacy. Chat GPT and other AI tools are not confidential.
5. SPHHS Office of Career Planning resources are compatible with AI use.

AI Sample Prompts*

Included below are some sample prompts to consider utilizing to help you get started.

Career Exploration

- You are an experienced career coach. Ask me questions to understand my career interests, academic and work experiences, skill set, and what motivates me in the workplace. After you gather enough information, give me practical advice about what actions I should take in determining my career path.
- What are some entry-level positions for a [Public Health, Kinesiology, SLHS, Nutrition major]?
- What is a typical career path for a [role/job title]?
- Based on my professional experiences, what are some career fields I may want to explore? {list experiences or insert resume}

Industry Trends, Company Research & Market Analysis

- What are the key trends, challenges, and opportunities for growth in the [Public Health and Health Sciences fields]?
- What are the emerging technologies in the [Public Health and Health Sciences fields or within “X” organization]?
- What are the top key performance indicators in the [Public Health and Health Sciences fields]?

Resumes

- Add metrics and improve the following resume bullet point: {insert bullet}
- You are an experienced career coach. Review the following resume and give me specific changes to make based on the following job description: {insert resume} {insert job description}

*(Adopted from ISOM)

Example Job Description: Autism Specialist

Job Summary: As an autism specialist you will travel to homes and other community settings to **implement individualized goals and plans** for the development of each child. You will be required to execute a plan designed by a program supervisor to **improve the child's behavior through skill acquisition**. You will also be responsible for **documenting student progress**.

Requirements:

- ☐ **Remain current on new research** and developments in autism and special education
- ☐ Two years related coursework in Child and Adolescent development, Communication Disorders, Applied Behavior Analysis, Psychology or Education
- ☐ **Experience working one-on-one with children**
- ☐ Possesses **strong time management skills** and is prepared to be a **team player**
- ☐ Must be **reliable, patient, and non-judgmental**
- ☐ Must have access to reliable transportation and a clean driving record

Preferred Qualifications:

- ☐ Experience working with children with autism/**special needs**
- ☐ Possess American Sign Language or bilingual ability preferred

Review the sample cover letter provided on the following page to help you get started.

Example Cover Letter (Traditional Business Style, or use Contemporary Design- see previous page)

My Address

My Address

Today's Date

Person you are addressing

Company Name

Company Address

Company Address

Dear Professor Smith,

It is with enthusiasm that I apply for the **Autism Specialist position** that I viewed on **ABC School's website** yesterday. I am **very interested in pursuing my career in autism spectrum disorders (ASD), specifically working with children**. Through this position, I would be able to apply my skills and abilities to contribute effectively to your cause and mission, **which align with my core values and career goals**.

(The first paragraph includes: What, Where, & Why)

I am very capable of **working one-on-one with children** having spent significant time volunteering in a fourth-grade classroom. There I provided educational support and behavioral management to the teacher by **documenting student progress** and following through on student's **individualized goals and plans**. Additionally, I served as an escort to students during school and after school programming activities. I am well versed in using **patience**, kindness and humor to develop rapport and draw out even the shyest student in engaging ways depending on their learning style preferences.

My **experience with children with special needs** also includes growing up with a sibling with Asperger's. This makes me able to relate very well to parents and other family members in a **non-judgmental** manner. From a young age I **researched** her diagnosis and became quite close with her therapy team, observing techniques that would **improve her behavior through skill acquisition**.

(Each sentence refers to key words and phrases from the job description. Each sentence provides an example of where or how you acquired or utilized these skills in the past or present.)

In conclusion, I am an extremely **reliable** person having never missed a day of volunteering at the school. I possess **strong time management skills**, as evident through my high GPA and 16 hours/week volunteer commitment. Lastly, my intrinsic motivation to learn and do well by others makes me a strong, committed **team player**.

I look forward to the opportunity to share my qualifications further. My contact information is yourname@umass.edu or (413) 413-4134. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Your signature

Your full name printed here

Please note: Bolding within this cover letter is ONLY for example purposes, so you can see how to use the skills within the job description; this is not the recommended norm.

Job Search Methods

Career Planning Office Meet with Career Ambassador Peer Advisors to review your resume or cover letters and answer general career questions, or schedule an appointment with a professional advisor through Handshake (umass. Joinhandshake.com). You are not alone – we’re here to help!	Networking Often jobs are not advertised but filled through connections. People get jobs by talking to friends, family, neighbors, acquaintances, co-workers, professors, guest lecturers, etc. Be sure to share your career interests with others.	Direct Employer Contact Directly contacting employers is one of the most successful means of job hunting, if you can get yourself to the hiring manager. Research and develop a list of potential employers in your desired career field, even if no current positions exists.
Informational Interviewing Informational interviewing is one of the most effective job search methods out there. By asking someone questions about their career field and current position, you can learn about working in the field, their particular company and expand your network – potentially leading to future work.	Job Boards Check out the SPHHS job board www.umass.edu/sphhs/career-opportunities but don’t rely on job searching in just this way. Most of your time should be spent networking and doing informational interviews. As stated above, many jobs aren’t posted, but are filled through prior connections.	Internships and Volunteering Many employers like to hire directly from their intern or volunteer pool because they have already seen the quality of work that can be produced. Consider both unpaid and paid positions, for credit or not, in order to gain experience.
State Employment Service Offices These offices provide resources on professional training and development programs, health care licenses, training programs and civil services exams in addition to job searching help. www.mass.gov/topics/finding-a-job	Federal Government USA Jobs (https://www.usajobs.gov/) provides resources for students and recent graduates, including information about how to apply for federal jobs, resume help, disability programs, service programs, veterans, national guard reserves, Peace Corps and AmeriCorps VISTA.	Professional Associations Each industry or field has their own niche professional organization and many times more than one. (American Public Health Association www.apaha.org) The websites often include a job search feature, career planning, mentoring, and educational programs. Associations may require that you be a member to use their services.
Staffing Agencies Staffing or Temp agencies are often used as a vetting agency by large hospitals. You can register with a healthcare staffing agency, for example, and they can help you find temporary work that could lead to a full time position. This is a great opportunity to test out a career field without committing to it long-term – and get paid for it!	Alumni/Campus Events Take advantage of the many opportunities to connect with Alumni: meeting them at on-campus networking events, connecting on LinkedIn, attending off-campus events, and engaging with them at career fairs etc. Join the UMass Amherst Alumni Advisor Network: https://www.connectumassalumni.com/	LinkedIn/Handshake https://www.linkedin.com There are 181,000+ UMass Amherst Alumni on LinkedIn. This is an excellent source for networking, job searching and making connections. https://umass.joinhandshake.com Handshake is the school’s internship and jobs database. You can also network with employers and students, register internship credits and schedule appointments with career advisors.

