Public Health 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: Research Assistant

Job Summary: Mongan Institute for Health Policy is a leading force for beneficial change in health policy, and its mission is **to improve health and health care** across America and in other nations worldwide.

Job Duties and Responsibilities:
- **Organizes**, **creates agenda**, and **records the minutes** for study staff **meetings**
- Runs and cleans data, and conducts qualitative coding
- Maintains required project documentation, institutional review approval
- **Conducts relevant literature searches and reviews for publications** and grant applications

Qualifications:
- BA or **BS required, interest in public and community health, psychology**
- **Prior research experience** (particularly in **public health interventions**) desirable
- **Excellent organizational, communication (oral and written)**, and **problem-solving skills**
- Computer skills/**experience working with database, spreadsheets**, and word processing programs; **SPSS**
- Strong personal **initiative**, **attention to detail**, **ability to work independently** required
- **Willingness to make a 2 -year commitment** strongly preferred

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

My Address
My Address

Today's Date

Person you are addressing
Company Name
Company Address
Company Address

Dear Professor Smith,

It is with great enthusiasm that I apply for the **full-time Research Assistant position** at the **Mongan Institute for Health Policy** as advertised **on your website**. I am a recent graduate from the University of Massachusetts Amherst with a Bachelor of Science in Public Health Sciences. **What attracts me to this position** is my strong interest in combining my major focus of study with the minor I received in psychology. Additionally, I possess a strong **interest in public and community health with the overall goal of improving health and healthcare for all.**

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

A pivotal research experience, which honed my **problem solving skills,** was a Public Policy Analysis Course through Amherst College. In this course, we were assigned into groups and instructed to take our own **initiatives** in formulating public health interventions for the city of Springfield, MA. Our first step was to develop a project plan within an **organized** time-frame. I **demonstrated strong personal initiative** to **create the group agendas**, **record minutes** during our weekly **meetings**, and **communicate** effectively **both orally and in writing** to our groupmates the necessary information. I then **conducted relevant literature searches and reviews** as well as wrote literature summaries. Additionally, I **worked independently** to collect city crime data, conduct personal interviews with 10 participants and provide **progress reports** to our instructor. For our final product, I reviewed our PowerPoint presentation utilizing **strong attention to detail**, to ensure that all information was presented accurately. Overall, I was able to display my **ability to work independently**, and follow through on all tasks to completion.

My computer skills using Excel are proficient. I have **experience working with databases, spreadsheets**, pivot tables and macros. I have also been introduced to **SPSS** through my biostatistics course. **Maintaining required project documentation** is a concept that I am accustomed to utilizing when keeping lab notes and recording my progress for the principal investigator of the Huthenson Lab where I have interned for six months.

==*(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.)*==

The mission of the Mongan Institute for Health Policy along with the job duties, are in direct alignment with my career aspirations and skill set; and I would be **willing to commit to two years**. This is evident by my undergraduate area of study, as well as from my past research and work experience. I look forward to the opportunity of discussing the position in more detail. Thank you for your time and consideration. I may be reached at 413-000-0000 or yourname@email.com.

Sincerely,

Your signature

Your full name printed here

Job Search Methods

Career Planning Office	Networking	Direct Employer Contact
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!	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.	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	**Job Boards**	**Internships and Volunteering**
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.	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 are not posted, but are filled through prior connections.	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	**Federal Government**	**Professional Associations**
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	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.	Each industry or field has its 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	**Alumni/Campus Events**	**LinkedIn/Handshake**
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!	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/	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.