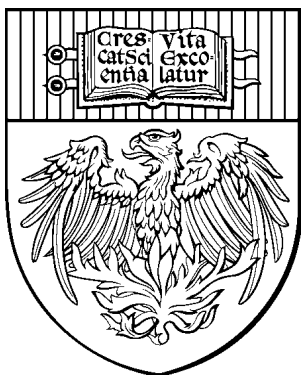


# COVER LETTERS



## THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO IRVING B. HARRIS SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY



### Chicago Harris Career Development Effective Cover Letters

*This Career Development Guide (CDG) provides basic information regarding drafting a cover letter. Students are invited to have their cover letter(s) reviewed by a counselor in the Career Development Office (CDO). However, be sure to plan ahead and give yourself time to make necessary changes well in advance of any deadlines. Visit HarrisLink (<https://harris-uchicago-csm.symplicity.com/>) today to make an appointment with your CDO counselor!*

#### I. Introduction

The cover letter is a supplemental document to the resume that provides a crucial opportunity to highlight a candidate's qualifications to an employer. The letter serves as a measure of your writing skills, ability to present a case for yourself, and familiarity with the company's needs. The primary goals of a cover letter include:

1. Introduction and pitch for why you are the right candidate for a position
2. Highlighted qualifications targeted to the position
3. Motivation/context for why the position is a good match for you

#### II. Preparing Effective Cover Letter Content

##### **Step One: Highlighting Key Accomplishments from Resume**

Keep it short. Cover letters should not exceed one page. A concise letter demonstrates your focus and ability to communicate succinctly. Do not simply restate the information in your resume. Instead, cite particular accomplishments and attributes that would be of special interest to the employer. Illustrate that you have the skills, knowledge, and experience an employer seeks.

If transitioning to a new field as a graduate student, the cover letter provides an additional opportunity to highlight your transferable skill sets. Assess your most proficient skills, interests, and industry-specific knowledge. If you have not already, complete and review the [Skill Identification](#) results with a CDO counselor. You may have gained valuable and relevant

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experiences in a variety of settings – academic, personal, professional, and extracurricular- and your goal is to convey this information effectively and persuasively to a prospective employer.

## **Step Two: Market Research**

Once you have assessed your interests and skills, it is critical to conduct [Industry Research](#). Employers are seeking individuals who fit their organization and culture well. Your letter should demonstrate a thorough understanding of the position and the needs of the employer.

## **Step Three: Analyzing the Job Description**

Now that you have a thorough understanding of your skills and target market, review the position posting thoughtfully. Employers usually enumerate qualifications in order of importance. Use the primary information listed under *Responsibilities & Qualifications* in the job description to guide the theme(s) of your cover letter.

## **III. Cover Letter Composition**

1. Format: Follow basic business-letter format in composing your letters.
2. Electronic Submittals: Submit the cover letter as a PDF attachment. This assures that formatting and/or text will not be lost through electronic submittal. In certain circumstances, you can use your email as the cover letter with your resume as an attachment.
3. Hard copies: If providing a hard copy of your cover letter, use high-quality matching bond paper for your resume, cover letter, and envelopes in white or ivory. *Please contact the CDO Administrative Coordinator for resume and cover letter paper.*

## **IV. Cover Letter Structure**

### **Date and Return Address**

In addition to traditional formatting, students have also become accustomed to creating personal letterheads to match their cover letter and resume. In either approach, include the following information in the heading:

(Name)  
(Street Address)  
(City, State)  
(Phone)  
(Email)

### **Recipient's Address and Greeting**

Avoid using the generic "To Whom it May Concern." While it is not always possible to secure this information, it demonstrates initiative and may help you get an interview. Attempt to identify the hiring manager or overseer of the hiring process through the organization's website.

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## Recipient's Address and Greeting (continued)

You may also contact company employees through LinkedIn for additional information- this can also serve as a great means for developing future networks!

*Example:*

Ms. Mary Smith  
Human Resources Director  
World Hunger  
Lloyd Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC, 20510

## First Paragraph: Introduce Yourself (Briefly)

This paragraph should be no more than 3-4 sentences. Articulate why you are writing, a quick review of your most relevant skills, and your interest in the employer.

Key questions to address:

1. Why are you writing?
2. Who are you, and what are you doing now?
3. Why are you specifically interested in this position and organization?

## First Paragraph Example:

*I am applying for the position of Policy Analyst, recently posted by your office to the Career Services database at the Chicago Harris School of Public Policy. I will graduate with my Masters in Public Policy from the University of Chicago in June 2012, and I am confident that my education and professional background well qualify me to make a substantial contribution to your organization.*

## Body of the Letter

How can you convince the employer that you would be an asset to his/her organization? In the second paragraph of your letter, elaborate on aspects of your education, work experience(s), and additional skills that are relevant to the organization and position. Use the vocabulary of the job description as much as possible to tailor your experiences to the employer's needs.

Key questions to address:

1. How did you develop the relevant skills/attributes for the required position?
2. How have you been successful in achieving your goals?
3. Why should they hire you?
4. What makes you unique or more valuable than other candidates?

Remember, you can draw from paid and unpaid activities- academic, extracurricular, volunteer, etc.- as long as you can communicate the transferability of your skills.

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## Second Paragraph Example:

*My experiences and values are a strong match for this position. I am specifically interested in your organization's focus on social injustice and poverty in Latino neighborhoods and in applying my analytical skills to help address these problems. In the course of completing my master's thesis, I developed strong quantitative skills, consistently met self-imposed deadlines, and produced work that received praise from my faculty advisors. I conducted a literature review of over 39 articles and books, and as a result I mastered large amounts of statistical information and identified issues in need of further research in minority poverty. These research, writing, and analytical skills will serve me well as a consulting analyst, as I can acquire expertise quickly and apply it to solve particular problems.*

## Discuss Your Fit with the Position and Organization

- Why does this job particularly intrigue you?
- Why does this specific employer interest you?
- What is it about the nature of the work that you find appealing?
- Why are you committed to the employer's mission?

As you ask yourself each of these questions, support your claims with evidence to incorporate in the letter.

## Third Paragraph Example:

*I developed my leadership skills as the president of the Students for Haitian Relief Club, an organization formed in response to the Haitian earthquake. Setting and exceeding a fundraising goal of \$10,000, I led a team in recruiting student donors at the University of Chicago. Capitalizing on a rivalry between two dorms, I created a competition-based fundraiser with prizes from local vendors. I thoroughly enjoyed devising a creative path to reach and exceed a challenging goal. I believe working as a consultant in your organization would allow me to apply my rigorous analytical training to generating resolutions to the issues of poverty, inequality, and social injustice.*

## Closing Paragraph: Final Words and Details

In closing, indicate your interest in discussing the position and request an interview. Thank the reader for his/her time and consideration. Include your contact information, and inform the employer of your next step.

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## Closing Paragraph Example:

*I welcome the opportunity to learn more about the policy analyst position and discuss my quantitative, analytical, and leadership skills in more depth. I look forward to hearing from you and can be reached via phone (312) 444-2323 or email [mychicago@uchicago.edu](mailto:mychicago@uchicago.edu). Thank you for your consideration. I will follow up with you in one week to ensure you received my application materials.*

**\*\*\*Remember: Your emphasis should always be on what you can do for the employer, not what you hope to gain from the experience.\*\*\***

## V. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### University of Chicago Resources

- Harris School Career Development Office: <http://harrisschool.uchicago.edu/resources/cdo/>
- CAPS Services and Resources: <https://caps.uchicago.edu/>
- Alumni/Mentor Network: <https://caps.uchicago.edu/undergrads/explore/>

### Online Resources

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics: Occupational Outlook Handbook
- Quintessential Careers
- Additional Websites: [www.GuideStar.org](http://www.GuideStar.org), [www.Salary.com](http://www.Salary.com), [www.Payscale.com](http://www.Payscale.com), [www.Vault.com](http://www.Vault.com), [www.monster.com](http://www.monster.com), and [www.Wetfeet.com](http://www.Wetfeet.com)

**See Cover Letter Template on Page 6** Note: You may list your second and third paragraphs in strict paragraph form (as in the examples above) or use bullets to further highlight your accomplishments and skills (delineated in the template below). View Additional Cover Letter Templates at <https://caps.uchicago.edu/resourcecenter/allhandouts.html>)

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Amanda Kelly  
5544 W. Elm Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60616  
312-521-1212/akelly@uchicago.edu

April 1, 2011

Ms. Mary Smith  
Human Resources Director  
World Hunger  
Lloyd Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC, 20510

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am applying for the position of Policy Analyst, recently posted by your office to the Career Services database at the Chicago Harris School of Public Policy. I will graduate with my Masters in Public Policy from the University of Chicago in June 2011, and I am confident that my education and professional background will qualify me to make a substantial contribution to your organization.

My experiences and values are a strong match for this position. I am specifically interested in your organization's focus on social injustice and poverty in Latino neighborhoods.

## Analytical Skills

- Through completion of master's thesis, consistently met self-imposed deadlines and produced work praised by faculty advisors.
- Conducted literature review of 39 articles and books, mastering extensive quantities of statistical information.
- Identified issues to further explore in the area of minority poverty in urban locations.

## Leadership Skills

- As President of the Students for Haitian Relief Club, set fundraising goal of \$10,000.
- Led project team in recruiting student donors.
- Capitalized on rivalry between dorms to create competition-based fundraiser, exceeding original goal and resulting in \$12,000 in donations.

These experiences will enhance my ability to acquire expertise in a short timeframe and devise creative paths to reach challenging goals. I believe working as a consultant in your organization will allow me to apply my rigorous analytical training to generating resolutions to the issues of poverty, inequality, and social injustice.

I welcome the opportunity to learn more about the policy analyst position and discuss my quantitative, analytical, and leadership skills in more depth. I look forward to hearing from you and can be reached via phone (312) 444-2323 or email [mychicago@uchicago.edu](mailto:mychicago@uchicago.edu). Thank you for your consideration. I will follow up with you in one week to ensure you received my application materials.

Sincerely,

Amanda Kelly