

Writing a Better Cover Letter

ASPIRE Job Search Series

September 28, 2023



Notes before we get started...

- *I'll be going fast! So stop me!*
- *You have full permission to interrupt and interject!*
- *Grab a piece of paper next to you to write some notes/thoughts.*
- *YES I'LL SEND THE SLIDES.*
- *First... Let me introduce myself.*



sio
@bestinsio

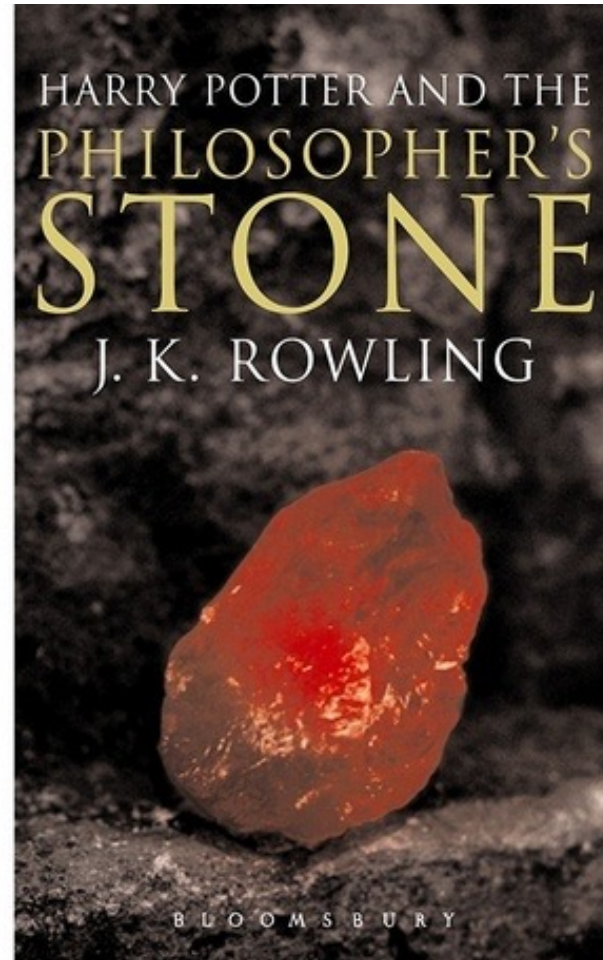
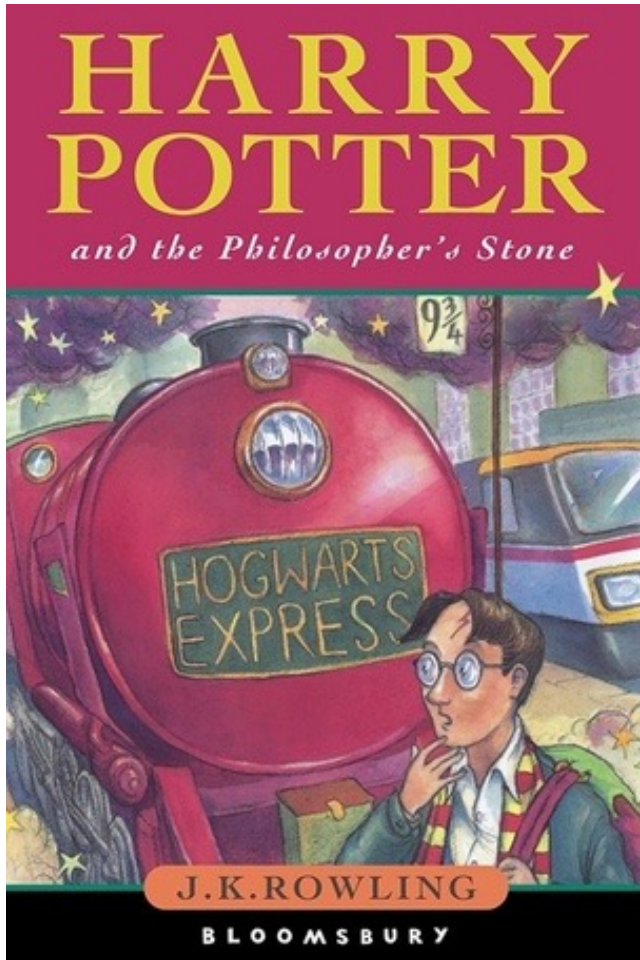
why can't a cover letter be "I want to
work here soo bad. Please please
please please please please please
please please please please please
please please please please please
please please"

Writing a Better Cover Letter



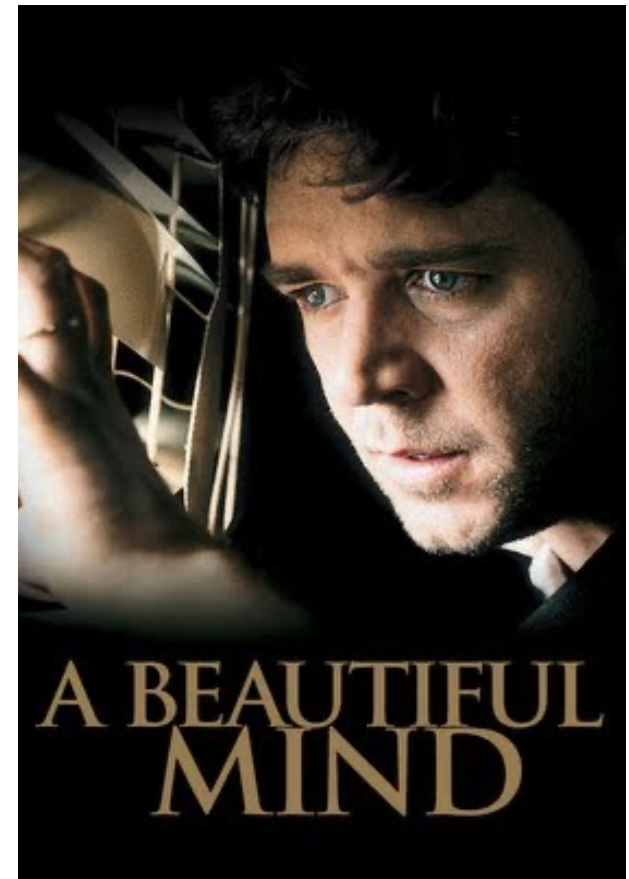
1. General Best Practices about Cover Letters
2. Outline the Flow of the Letter
3. Strengthen the Content of your Document
4. Analyze Examples

What is a cover letter anyway?



Why even write a cover letter?

- Introduction to you, the human
- The small talk before the ask
- Show the trailer to the movie



Different Uses of a Cover Letter



- Online application
- Emailing prospective faculty for postdoc positions
- Emailing a lead for a job
- “Interest Statement” or “Letter of Interest” for a position
- “Tell us why you want this job...”

When I think of a cover letter, I think...

unnecessary

BORING

difficult

summary

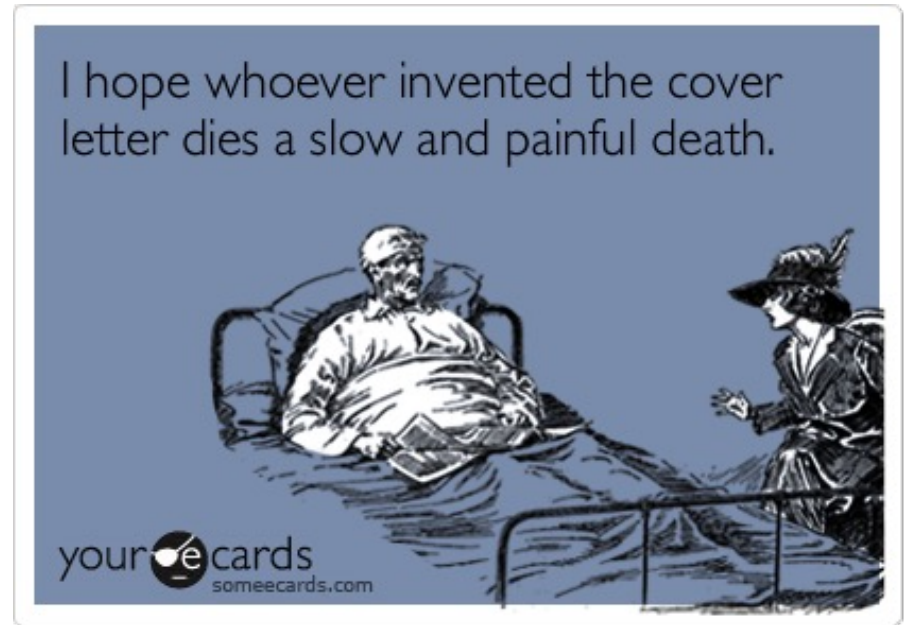
highlights

time-intensive

pointless

frustrating

Time for a Quiz



Does anyone read cover letters?

Most people do, some don't. Assume, "Yes."



To whom should it be addressed?

Ideally, the hiring manager, by name (*Dear Dr. Smith*). Alternatives: “Dear Hiring Manager” or substitute a subject line (*RE: Senior Scientist position*) for a salutation.



How long should it be?

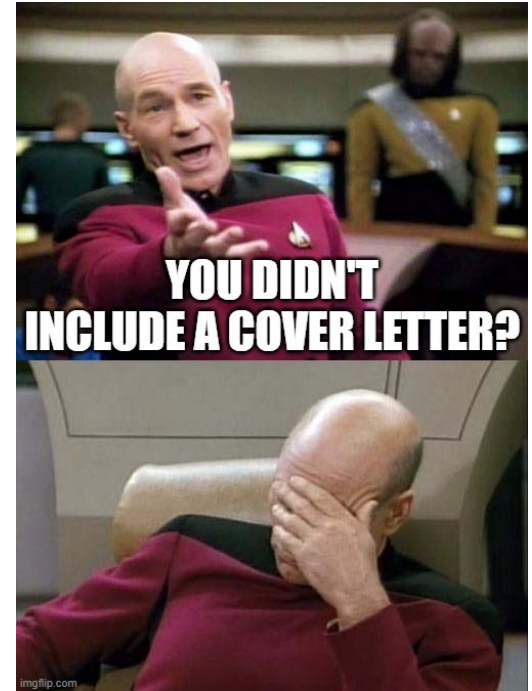
1 page max; not too wordy.

3-4 (maybe) paragraphs



*Should I use my institution's
letterhead?*

For faculty positions. Others, no.



Should I attach it to an email?

For faculty positions. Others, probably not. Use the body of the email as a cover letter.

Should I use this letter to tell the company my personal information (age, children, marital status, race, or ethnicity)?

No.

If I am not a US citizen but I'm authorized to work in the US, should I state that I am eligible to work in the US?

Yes!

Interviewer: how would you describe yourself?

Me: verbally, but I've also prepared a dance



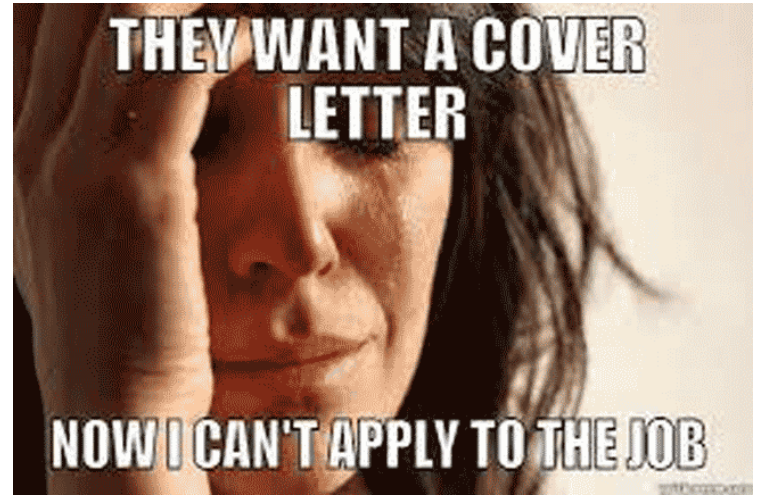


How do I close?

Sincerely, or Best regards,
[Your first and last name]

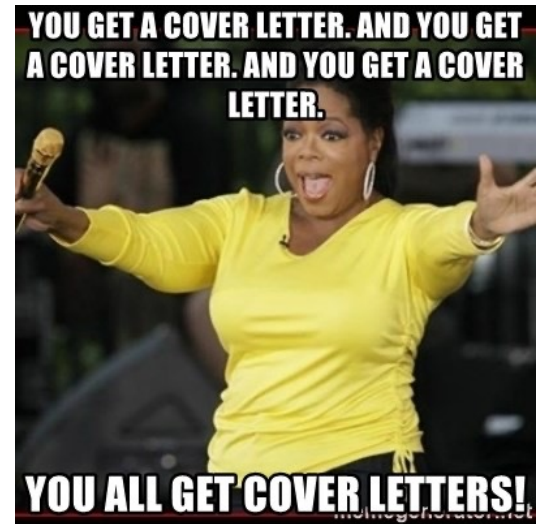
*Should I sign my name? Or drop
in the jpeg of my signature? That
seems formal...*

That would be really nice.



What's all the fuss about? Can't I just write only one and use it for all job applications?

Sorry, no.



What if I'm applying for more than 1 position at the same company or if more than 1 position is advertised?

Explore the submission options.
Consider something in the middle.



How do I stand out?

By writing well and professionally!

A “creative” cover letter usually won’t fly.



You need a clown for your
4-year-old's birthday party.
What do you want to know?

Cover Letter Structure

- 1 page
- Typically 3-5 paragraphs
 - Intro paragraph (3-4 sentences)
 - 1-3 paragraphs highlighting your skills (focus on your top three matches with job description)
 - Closing paragraph (2-3 sentences)
- Don't just regurgitate your resume!



Paragraph 1: Introduction



What position are you applying for?



Explain where you learned about the position (personal contacts, search engine, etc...)



Why are you interested in this organization and for this job in particular?

Match with your long term career objectives?

Match with the skills outlined in the job description?

What can you offer?

Paragraph 1: Introduction... which would you choose?

I am writing to apply for the position of staff scientist in Zebra Immunology at Merck.

Among my colleagues, I'm known as the one who can pick up the pieces, no matter what amount of disaster comes our way. That is why I think there's no one better to fill the Mars Petcare quality control leader role currently advertised on your site.

After spending four years managing over 200,000 datasets for our 10-person biostatistics team, I could construct an Excel spreadsheet in my sleep. What do I want to do next? Put that experience to work in an industry setting managing the next level in human genome sequencing.

It is with great enthusiasm that I share my experience in hopes that you will consider me for the Staff Scientist position in the Amgen Biodiscovery Division.

Paragraphs 2-4: Demonstrate Skills



Highlight your skills (pick 1-3 that match well with job description)



Cite personal qualities that make you a good fit



Explain how specific past experiences make you an ideal candidate/valuable to the company (quantify if possible)



Do your research and highlight important achievements, milestones, or values at the targeted organization*



Use summary statements

I have over 10 years of experience in....

I have expertise in project management and grant writing.....

***Important achievement/milestone at the targeted organization**

“I am impressed to see that your company was recently awarded several qualifying Therapeutic Discovery Program grants and believe that my skills would be an asset in your critical time of growth”

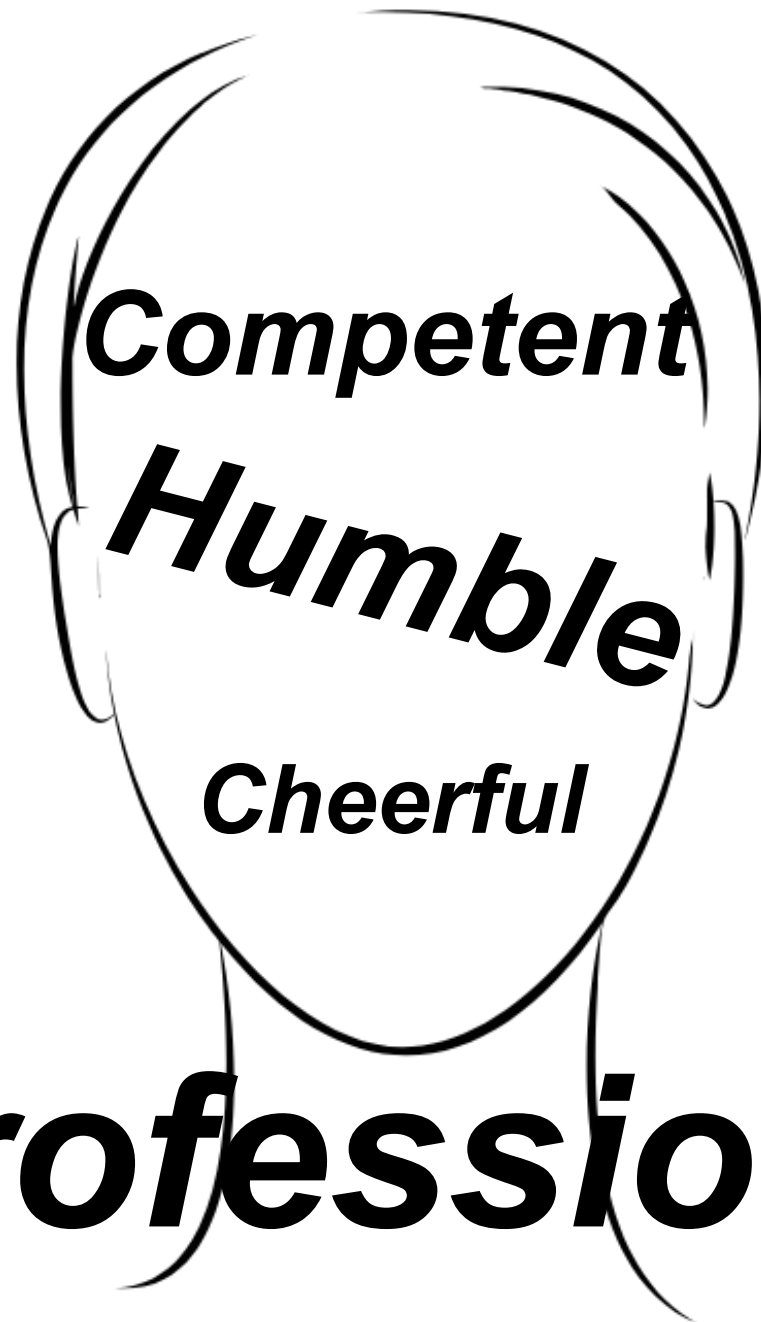
****Shows you have an interest in company and have done your homework****

A little secret....



They aren't cheering for you... yet.

TONE



Professional

Having trouble spotting keywords?

- **Word Cloud**
Generates “word clouds” from text
- Words that occur frequently in source text appear larger.



Job ads often contain all 3 types of skills

Genomics Scientist - Vanderbilt University Medical Center

Seeking business-minded clinical disease/genomics R&D experts to join an exciting Nashville biotech startup as we deploy our disruptive phenomics & genomics technology to transform drug discovery and development.

Interested candidates are motivated self-starters who will thrive in the fast paced environment of a startup. You will be responsible for understanding the results generated by our proprietary datasets, and relating them to disease and drug mechanisms through a careful understanding of science and literature. Central to this work will be extensive literature review and the ability to effectively communicate your findings to the team and clients.

Responsibilities:

- Validate scientific findings from our complex phenomic & genomic data sets
- Communicate scientific findings by synthesizing results into clear materials to deliver to clients
- Create proposal materials for proactive business development
- Manage ongoing projects to ensure deliverables are executed in a timely fashion
- Work collaboratively with Vanderbilt experts when specific scientific expertise is needed

Minimum Qualifications:

- MD, PhD, or PharmD preferred
- 1-2 years of project management experience
- Strong understanding of basic biology, especially as it relates to disease processes, pharmacology, drug-protein interactions, and signaling pathways
- Experienced at navigating literature searches, online databases, scientific articles and interacting with other scientific experts
- Strong pattern recognition in complex datasets
- Good feel for clinical indications of basic diseases
- Familiarity with statistics/biomedical informatics is a plus

Desired Characteristics:

- Startup mindset – willingness to grow, adapt quickly, and take on new roles as company grows
- Collaborator – very comfortable working within multi-disciplinary teams
- Business-minded – thoughtful of client needs, timely product delivery
- Curious – interested in digging deep into disease areas and underlying biology/science

Employers are looking for 3 types of skills

Knowledge skills		
Content skills required to do the job		
Usually nouns, e.g. <i>microscopy</i>		

Decode the ad

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• Knowledge skills

• Personality traits

• Transferable skills

Knowledge skills	Personality traits	Transferable skills
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Usually nouns, e.g. <i>microscopy</i>	Usually adjectives, e.g. <i>persistent</i>	Usually verbs, e.g. <i>analyze</i>

How many did you find?

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• Knowledge skills

• Personality traits

• Transferable skills



Use your brainstormed experiences to tailor your document to the job

	Genomics scientist job ad	Your experience
K	Strong understanding of basic biology, esp. of disease processes, pharmacology, drug-protein interactions, and signaling pathways	
K	Strong pattern recognition in complex datasets	
T	Communicate scientific findings	
T	Work collaboratively with VU experts	
P	Business-minded	
P	Motivated self-starter	

	JOB DESCRIPTION	YOUR EXPERIENCE
Knowledge		
Knowledge		
Transferable		
Transferable		
Personality		
Personality		



Adam Karpiak • 3rd+

Opinionated Recruiter. Candidate Therapist. Looking...

3d • 🌐

[+ Follow](#)

Honest Cover Letter:

"My ability to navigate ambiguity, as evidenced by my applying without knowing the actual salary range, is only outshined by my drive and determination, demonstrated by my willingness to manually input my information after uploading my resume."

Closing Paragraph

- Reiterate your interest and why you are qualified
- State your interest in hearing back from them to discuss the position further (i.e. getting an interview!)
- Thank them
- Let them know the best way to contact you

It's all in the details...

- Grammar errors or misspelled words reflect your ability to communicate and write well. NO EXCUSES!
- The reader should not have to guess your intent– it should be obvious...
 - why you are applying for the job
 - why they should hire you
- Make sure your contact information is on the document (email signature too!)
- Save and submit the final version as a **pdf** with a clear title that matches your other supporting docs.
 - i.e. Brady AE_cover letter_Pfizer.pdf

Are there efficiency strategies for writing these paragraphs?

Cover letters in general?

How ever can my brilliance be captured in a one-page resume?




ChatGPT.....

+ New chat

UCSF Applicant Cover  

 Clear conversations

 Upgrade to Plus

NEW

 Settings

 Get help

 Log out

KS

Write a cover letter for this position:

https://www.training.nih.gov/jobs/view/_10/10566/MSP_442023 and my resume is here:

<https://career.ucsf.edu/sites/g/files/tkssra2771/f/wysiwyg/ResearcherConsultingResume.pdf>

< 2 / 2 >



Dear Hiring Manager,



I am excited to apply for the Administrative Officer position at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). With my experience in administration, financial management, and project coordination, as well as my passion for scientific research, I am confident that I would be an excellent fit for this position.

As you can see from my attached resume, I have a diverse background in both scientific research and project management. Through my work at UCSF, I have developed a strong foundation in project coordination, data analysis, and strategic planning. I am skilled in financial management, budgeting, and forecasting, and I have experience developing policies and procedures to improve efficiency and productivity.

In my current role as a Researcher and Consultant at UCSF, I have also developed strong communication and interpersonal skills through my interactions with clients and stakeholders. I am a proactive problem-solver who is always looking for ways to improve processes and achieve goals.

I am excited about the opportunity to bring my skills and expertise to the NIH, an organization that is renowned for its commitment to scientific research and public health. I am confident that my abilities would be well-suited to the challenges and opportunities presented by the Administrative Officer position.

 Regenerate response

Send a message...



[ChatGPT Mar 23 Version](#). Free Research Preview. ChatGPT may produce inaccurate information about people, places, or facts.

Ashley E., Ph.D.
2012 Fake Street Nashville, TN. 37232 Phone: 615-123-4567
E-mail: ashleybrady@gmail.com

December 11, 2012

Mark Zuckerberg, Chief Executive
Facebook Corporation
217 Fake Street, Menlo Park, CA 94025

RE: Software Engineering Internship

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Suspendisse sem. Sed augue. Vivamus vel erat in tellus lacinia adipiscing. Nunc eget augue. Cras convallis, ligula non blandit venenatis, neque tellus aliquet augue, id posuere dolor massa a neque. Nulla massa. Donec vestibulum est eu sapien. Praesent at dui. Sed sollicitudin nulla non enim. Aenean vel neque. Duis id augue. Ut vestibulum tortor vel wisi. Aliquam erat volutpat. Quisque id nunc vel turpis malesuada porta. Mauris euismod eleifend elit. Nunc nisl eros, aliquet vitae, fermentum id, euismod quis, lectus. Aliquam lobortis metus sed quam. Proin iaculis fermentum purus. Suspendisse potenti. Maecenas eu massa nec tellus fermentum tempus. Phasellus ut felis vel nunc molestie vestibulum. Ut lobortis. Aenean tellus. Sed consequat ante vel est. Pellentesque odio. Quisque massa. Vestibulum quis tellus. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Quisque in pede eget lacus suscipit hendrerit. Morbi vel urna. Integer consectetur. Maecenas consectetur, magna eget bibendum cursus, tortor sem porta nibh, et auctor odio odio sit amet purus.

Suspendisse lectus arcu, tincidunt sed, rutrum vitae, consequat eget, sapien. Duis orci. Aliquam erat volutpat. Nam vel ipsum. Maecenas sit amet dui. Nullam placerat hendrerit lacus. Aenean imperdiet tincidunt turpis. Vivamus pharetra. Mauris neque. Donec at odio ut tortor consequat iaculis. Morbi faucibus. Proin varius feugiat sapien. Morbi blandit nulla vel odio. Aenean metus tortor, feugiat quis, facilisis vel, vestibulum a, tortor. Phasellus magna. Pellentesque sed est. Donec ullamcorper sapien ut felis. Donec eleifend venenatis eros. Sed ipsum. Suspendisse risus. Ut et metus vitae enim tincidunt scelerisque. Aenean imperdiet tincidunt turpis. Vivamus pharetra. Mauris neque. Donec at odio ut tortor consequat iaculis. Morbi faucibus. Proin varius feugiat sapien. Morbi blandit nulla vel odio. Aenean metus tortor, feugiat quis, facilisis vel, vestibulum a, tortor.

Training experiences and skillsets directly transferrable to the internship:

- Nullam iaculis sem vel turpis. Cras tincidunt. Donec justo lacus, pharetra sit amet, congue id, placerat semper, leo. Sed blandit augue vel magna.
- Ut at augue. Nulla facilisi. Donec diam massa, auctor vel, tincidunt at, dictum et, justo. Duis commodo. Cras dapibus erat sit amet justo.
- Suspendisse non nunc vel justo lacinia rutrum. Suspendisse urna. Fusce ac velit semper ipsum bibendum laoreet. Ut a nunc in libero vestibulum molestie.
- Maecenas eu massa nec tellus fermentum tempus. Phasellus ut felis vel nunc molestie vestibulum.

In summary, I believe my unique combination of experiences and skillsets are an excellent fit for the internship position and that I would succeed in making contributions to Facebook. Thank you for taking the time to consider my application.

Kind regards,



Ashley E. Brady, Ph.D.

To whom it may concern,

Suspendisse non nunc vel justo lacinia rutrum. Suspendisse urna. Fusce ac velit semper ipsum bibendum laoreet. Ut a nunc in libero vestibulum molestie. Phasellus mauris risus, vulputate at, tempus et, tincidunt eu, odio. Nulla facilisi. Nunc nec nunc. Ut wisi nibh, dignissim non, porta ac, malesuada vitae, tellus. Donec nec sem sed lacus faucibus consequat. Curabitur neque. Duis ac velit. Praesent vel orci. Etiam nunc. Nulla odio. Nulla facilisi. Sed vehicula. Nulla facilisi. Aenean vel turpis semper risus fermentum bibendum. Donec ligula neque, vestibulum id, varius ac, molestie non, elit. Proin pede. Vestibulum metus arcu, dapibus id, imperdiet non, ullamcorper et, dui.

Ut at augue. Nulla facilisi. Donec diam massa, auctor vel, tincidunt at, dictum et, justo. Duis commodo. Cras dapibus erat sit amet justo. Nam eu mauris. Pellentesque nulla arcu, mattis at, tempus vitae, pharetra id, urna. In massa nisl, dapibus vitae, nonummy eget, imperdiet et, lacus. Ut lobortis, lectus eget consectetur dapibus, leo sapien vehicula lacus, eu dignissim velit turpis non metus. Nullam vulputate sem at felis. Curabitur nec velit. Suspendisse pretium, erat et mattis facilisis, diam nibh ultrices urna, ut malesuada magna wisi eget dui. Donec euismod. Aenean euismod lacus quis eros. Etiam semper. Maecenas eu mi in sem rhoncus lacinia. Nulla facilisi. Proin varius diam id lectus. Ut justo. Quisque nonummy.

Nulla massa. Donec vestibulum est eu sapien. Praesent at dui. Sed sollicitudin nulla non enim. Aenean vel neque. Duis id augue. Ut vestibulum tortor vel wisi. Aliquam erat volutpat. Quisque id nunc vel turpis malesuada porta. Mauris euismod eleifend elit. Nunc nisl eros, aliquet vitae, fermentum id, euismod quis, lectus. Aliquam lobortis metus sed quam. Proin iaculis fermentum purus. Suspendisse potenti.

Best,

Ashley E. Brady

Example

- Postdoctoral opening inquiry
- Finishing up PhD in Immunology

Dear Dr. Sather,

I have applied for the postdoctoral position in your laboratory through the CIDR website. I wanted to also introduce myself directly to you. I am a graduate student in Dr. Sally Smith's lab at Vanderbilt University. I will be completing my Ph.D. in Microbiology and Immunology this Fall and I am flexible with respect to my start date.

My long-term career goal is to lead a research team in the area of infectious diseases and to apply the knowledge gained from studying host-pathogen interactions towards developing therapies. In Sally's lab I studied the pathogenic mechanisms underlying *Clostridium difficile* infection, which is a toxin-mediated disease that can cause severe damage to the colon. Specifically, I investigated how *C. difficile* toxins A and B perturb host cellular function and induce toxicity using cell and molecular biology tools. My work demonstrated the mechanism by which *C. difficile* toxin A gained entry into colonic epithelial cells and provided evidence for a novel mammalian endocytic process. This work was recently published in *PLoS Pathogens*. Additionally, I have determined the mechanism by which two anti-toxin A and anti-toxin B monoclonal antibodies, which are of clinical importance, neutralize toxin function and confer protection in host epithelial cells. These findings (*JBC*, *in revision*, and *PNAS*, *submitted*) have expanded our understanding of the toxin mechanism and have identified an important mechanistic step that can be potentially targeted for neutralization of multiple clostridial pore-forming toxins.

Through the course of my graduate work, I have developed a strong interest in vaccine development. The increasing antimicrobial resistance underscores the need for development of vaccines towards preventing many bacterial and viral infections or diseases. In that regard, your lab's HIV-1 and *Plasmodium falciparum* research is of great interest to me. I am particularly interested in your multi-pronged approach to vaccine development that includes investigating host-pathogen interactions and mechanisms that drive protective antibody responses. Additionally, my colleague and friend Dr. Stan Nicholas (former member of the Kalams lab) highly recommends your lab, which has further solidified my interest. Although I lack a strong background in immunology and animal work experience, I do not believe that to be a deterrent to my success in your lab. I joined Sally's lab, which is primarily a structural biology lab, with no cell or molecular biology experience. I was able to adapt to the new field quickly, develop and troubleshoot assays independently, successfully initiate and complete projects, and communicate my research at various scientific meetings. I am confident that my passion for infectious disease research, willingness to learn, and creative problem-solving skills will allow for a productive postdoctoral research experience in your lab.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet or talk with you to learn more about the research and postdoctoral opportunity in your lab. I have attached my CV and a list of references for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you for your time.

RC

Knowledge skills	Personality traits	Transferable skills
Content skills required to do the job	Personal qualities important for success in the job	Skills learned in one setting that can be applied in a different setting
Usually nouns, e.g. <i>microscopy</i>	Usually adjectives, e.g. <i>persistent</i>	Usually verbs, e.g. <i>analyze</i>

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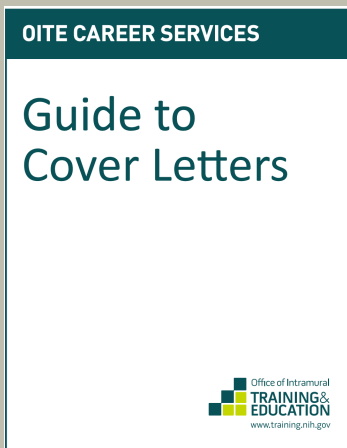
RC

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Questions?





https://www.training.nih.gov/assets/OITE_Guide_to_Cover_Letters.pdf

*Tuesdays
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