

# Cover Letter Tutorial

## **Purpose of the Cover Letter**

To share your strengths, demonstrate your fit with the organization, and illustrate how you will benefit their overall mission and purpose.

## **Key Points for a Strong Cover Letter**

- Elaborate on your listed experiences, instead of reiterating your resume.
- Demonstrate how your background, academics, skills, and training make you an ideal fit for the position.
- Tailor each cover letter specifically to the position you are applying to.
- Content is based on your applicable experience, so this can consist of a variety of professional, academic, or civic experiences in showing how much of a fit you are for the position.
- PROOFREAD, PROOFREAD, AND PROOFREAD!!!

## **Structure of a Cover Letter**

- Be concise: the cover letter should be no more than one page split into approximately 4 or 5 paragraphs.

## **General Format**

Hiring Official (Name of person in charge of the search process)

Company Title

1234 Company Rd.

City, State and zip code.

## **Dear Hiring Official,**

- Title (Dr., Mr., Ms., Mrs., etc.) and name are important. Try to find who is in charge of the search. If you can't you may list Search Committee, Hiring Manager, Human Resources etc. in your salutation.
- Avoid using salutations like To Whom It May Concern – demonstrate you did your research and avoid sounding impersonal.

## **Introduction (1 paragraph): Include who you are and briefly why you are interested in the position.**

- I am a skilled experiential education professional who is seeking to utilize my energy, enthusiasm and expertise to develop outstanding civic engagement opportunities in the DC area. Thank you so much for taking the time and energy to review my materials for consideration of the program coordinator position.

## **Body (2-3 paragraphs): Focus on a specific aspect (Skills, Qualification, Responsibility) of the position you are applying for, and describe how your experience applies to those responsibilities.**

**This is your opportunity to build a connection with the reader through the use of your experience.**

- My previous positions have demanded both patience and flexibility in effectively solving the variety of challenges faced in the field of student affairs. The opportunity to work with AmeriCorps NCCC and VISTA provided me with great insight in how to create, develop and coordinate service opportunities for a wide range of students.

**Closing (1 Paragraph): Be sure to thank them for their time and end on a strong note.**

- Based on my experience passion for crafting intentional learning experiences that cultivate civic identity in college and university students, I know I would make a strong fit for this role. I look forward to discussing this position, learning more about The Washington Center’s organizational needs, and how I can apply my skills to this role. Please feel free to contact me directly at 000-000-0000 should you have any questions.

# Professional Communication

## Email Etiquette

Email has become the most popular form of written communication for all types of companies and organizations in the 21st century. Email is used to correspond internally within a company or organization, in addition to communicating with external stakeholders. At your internship, you will be required to conduct email correspondence in a professional manner.

Use the following tips to help you write a professional email:

1. Subject Line
  - Use a short, abbreviated subject line that briefly summarizes the content of your email.
  - Avoid using “No Subject” as these emails can sometimes land in spam folders.
2. Start with a Salutation. Address your contact with an appropriate level of formality such as:
  - Dear Paul,
  - Hi Mr. Smith,
  - Hello Ms. Jones,
3. Body of Email
  - You can start the email with, “How are you?”, “I hope you’re doing well” if you see fit.
  - Avoid writing your email like a text message; use full-sentences.
  - Be concise and clear.
  - Mention in the body of the email if you included an attachment.
  - Include any follow up or action steps needed from your contact.
  - Be sure to say, “Thanks for your help” or “I appreciate your time.”
4. End with a Signature. Sign off your email with one of the following:
  - Sincerely, John
  - Best, Jana
  - Thanks, Bob

### Additional Considerations

- Respond to emails with a similar timespan that you would use to return a phone call, usually within one business day.
- Read through your email before sending to make sure you are sending it to the right contact, attaching the right document, and using correct spelling and grammar.
- Use “Reply All” only when requested by the sender.
- Avoid using any emoticons! There should be no ☹ or ☺ in professional emails.
- Avoid CAPS and exotic fonts. Stick with something traditional such as Calibri, Times New Roman or Arial.
- Be sure to include a subject line for emails that you send.
- Be careful what you write in an email. Once you send the email, it cannot be deleted.

## **Examples of Good Email Etiquette**

Subject: Meeting today

Hi Eric,

I hope you're doing well. I wanted to know if you'd be available to meet today about drafting the Marketing proposal for the Executive team. I have some ideas that I'd like to share with you.

I have availability this afternoon, so please let me know what time works for you. I hope to hear from you soon.

Best,  
Samantha

Subject Line: Proposal Draft

Dear Mr. Smith,

As requested, I have attached the Marketing proposal draft for you to share with the Executive Team. I look forward to hearing your feedback and discussing revisions to the proposal. If you have any questions, please contact me or Samantha.

Thanks,  
Eric

## **Example of Bad Email Etiquette**

Subject Line: (no subject)

Jen,

Can you believe what was discussed in today's Board meeting?! Cynthia is being completely controlling and IT IS UNFAIR how she is treating the rest of the Board. What do you think we should do?

-Jamie



# The Basics of Phone Interviews

## Interviewing with TWC Internship Site Partners

- You are a representative of your Institution, TWC, and yourself.
- Communication is key.
  - Your Internship Coordinator should always be informed when you have an interview or offer.
  - The Internship Site should always receive prompt responses from you.
- Accept all interviews.
- Always consult with your Internship Coordinator before rejecting an offer.

## Research + Preparation

- Be prepared to talk about yourself.
- Learn about the company by researching the organization's mission and recent accomplishments; this information can be found on the company's website.

## Communication

- Phone, email, and home phone—check regularly.
- 24 hour response times are key.
- Be professional in your writing—spellcheck, no texting language.

## Phone Interview Set-Up

- Stand or sit up straight during the interview.
- Speak clearly and loudly.
- Notes are great—no scripts.
- Smile—interviewers can hear smiles.

## Ending the Interview

- Say “Thank You.”
- What is your timeline for filling this internship position?
- Restate your interest.

## Post Phone Interview

- Call or email your Internship Advisor to debrief on the interview.
- Write a thank you – be sure to include highlights from your interview.
- Reflect - consider the rapport with the potential internship supervisor.
- Be open and consider all you can gain from the opportunity. What skills will be tested? What kind of professional exposure will you experience?



# Common Interview Questions

## **Tell Me About Yourself**

- This is one of the most common interview questions.
- Avoid covering personal information (age, where you're from, hobbies, etc.)
- Think of this question as a pitch – one that describes how you are a strong fit for the position.
- Concisely give your BIO: 1) Background, 2) Interests, and 3) Organizational fit.

*Example:* “I am currently a Senior at the University of Maryland where I study Communications and Public Relations. I am particularly interested in Crisis Management and Organizational Branding. I pride myself on my time management and relationship building skills. My education and previous internship with XYZ Media have provided me with the necessary skills to support this role.”

## **What is an area of weakness?**

- This question is meant to evaluate your self-awareness and your ability to recognize when improvement is needed.
- Briefly describe the “weakness”, and then focus most of the answer on how you are working to overcome it.
- While describing your weakness, also mention how your strengths contribute to your success.
- If possible, give an example of how you are progressing in your professional development.

*Example:* “I am someone who thrives behind the scenes because of my strong attention to detail. When it comes to presenting, I tend to shy away from the spotlight. However, I have taken steps to improve this by attending public speaking courses. I have already noted improvement. In fact, I recently gave a successful presentation to my community’s town hall meeting.”

Where do you see yourself 5 years from now?

- Interviewers are looking to see if you have put thought into long term goals.
- Keep your answer general in terms of specific companies, titles, etc.
- Relate your future goals with the position for which you're interviewing.

*Example:* “I am very excited by this internship opportunity with ABC Company because my goal is to develop myself as a professional in the political field. I am looking for a position where I can take on new challenges and contribute to a team. Eventually, I'd like to assume more project management responsibilities and lobbying experience. But most importantly, I want to work for an organization where I connect with the mission.”

## **Tell me about a time when....**

- Situational questions determine your ability to take action and achieve goals.
- Prepare for situational questions by brainstorming some instances that could relate to the skills needed for the role. Most situational questions will focus on leadership, teamwork, and problem solving.

- Stay organized by following the STAR approach – Situation, Task, Action, Result. Describe the situation/task you were presented with, then speak about the action you took, and finally give the result of your actions.
- Professional examples are best, but you can also describe academic examples.

*Example:* “I currently work for my university’s bookstore. I once needed to assist a customer who was angry because we were out of stock of a certain textbook. I made sure to remain calm and listen to her concerns so that I fully understood the situation. I then explained our timeline for the next delivery, and I told her about our waitlist system. I also directed her to other resources the store offered to meet her needs. These included virtual textbooks and renting. My explanation helped the customer realize she was not completely out of luck and that she would have support. From there, we were able to successfully complete her transactions and she left with everything she needed for her upcoming semester.”

### **Why are you the best candidate?**

- Showcase your self-confidence and preparation.
- Explain what you have to offer the organization.
- Reiterate your skills and past experience relevant to the position

*Example:* “I have the experience and drive to excel in this law enforcement role. You mentioned that the ideal candidate must be organized and calm under pressure. I have demonstrated success in those areas through my two years of volunteering with my local police department and emergency management team. I believe that my experience would contribute to your team, and I would welcome the opportunity to work with your agency.”

### **Other Common Interview Questions Include:**

1. What do you plan to contribute to our company?
2. What do you know about the company so far?
3. What interests you about this role?
4. How would a coworker or classmate describe your working style?
5. What is your greatest strength?
6. How do you stay organized?
7. How do you handle stress?
8. Why do you want this internship?
9. What is your proudest achievement?
10. What kind of work environment do you prefer?
11. Tell me about a task you accomplished and your approach, start to finish.
12. What do you hope to do after this internship?
13. What is important to you in a supervisor?
14. What made you want to pursue a career in XYZ?
15. How do you resolve conflict?
16. What is your typical role on a team?

# Thank You Emails

## After the Interview

- Send a thank you email within 24 hours of an internship interview to make an impression.
- Handwritten vs. Email
  - While handwritten notes are appreciated, it is completely appropriate to share your gratitude via email.
  - This is specific to the nature of interviewing remotely and also due to the sometimes fast-paced nature
    - with which internship site partners can select their interns.
- Write a separate personalized thank you email to each interviewer with specific references to the interview. The thank you emails do not need to be completely different. You can write a few similar paragraphs for each note, but you should always add some personal anecdotes from your interview (ex: shared interests).
- Content
  - Reiterate qualifications.
  - Highlight memorable moments in the interview.
  - Reaffirm interest in position.
  - Show gratitude for interview and reiterate any timeline for selection that was shared.

## Example of a Thank You Email:

### Example 1:

Dear Ms. Jones:

Thank you again for the opportunity to interview for the internship position at ABC Company. I thoroughly enjoyed our conversation about the networking opportunities and project possibilities associated with this role.

My education has prepared me well for the duties of this internship. As we discussed, I have focused my academics on business administration and finance. I have a special focus on wealth management and corporate finance, which aligns with your organization. With my background and experience, I believe that I could be a strong asset to your team.

I look forward to hearing from you - should you have any questions you can reach me directly at (123) 123-1234. Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Tim Smith



**Example 2:**

Dear Mr. Hamilton:

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me about the policy internship position with Cloud LLC. I appreciate your candor when discussing the future direction of your department.

As shared in the interview, I have held a previous internship focusing on foreign policy relating to the Middle East. I was able to develop my communication, research, and teamwork skills. I aim to bring these skills to your company and contribute to the organizational mission.

Once again, thank you for speaking with me. I look forward to hearing from you regarding next steps. If you have any questions feel free to contact me at (123) 123-1234.

Sincerely,  
Patricia Jackson

# Responding to Internship Offers

Sample guide to accepting or declining an internship

- Congratulations on your internship offer! Contact your Internship Advisor as she can provide you with decision making guidance.
- You may be offered a position immediately after an interview. You can either accept or ask for time. It is recommended that you take some time to think about your offer and speak to your Internship Advisor.
- Once you have accepted an offer you are committed to the internship, and you will need to decline all further interviews and offers.

## Asking for Time

- It is acceptable to ask for some time before making your decision. This will allow you to weigh your options and make the best informed decision.
- Be reasonable with your request. A decision should be made within three business days of receiving the offer.
- When making the request, you should convey your interest in the offer.
- Example:

Dear Ms. Lincoln,

I am very excited to receive the offer to intern with Maxx Group, LLC. I enjoyed speaking with you and learning about your organization. Would I be able to get back to you with my decision? I would greatly appreciate some time to evaluate the offer.

Could I give you an answer by Monday?

Thank you,  
[Your Name]

## Accepting an Offer

- Begin with a statement of acceptance
- Showcase your enthusiasm to begin your internship
- Reiterate your start date (refer to the TWC website if you need confirmation about dates)
- Example:

Dear Mr. Washington,

It is with great enthusiasm that I accept the Public Policy internship position with ABC Company. I look forward to being part of your highly efficient team and am confident that I will be able to make a positive contribution to the ABC Company goals.

I very much look forward to beginning the position on September 1. In the meantime, if you need to reach me, please feel free to call (555) 555-5555 or email me.

Thank you,  
[Your name]

### **Declining an Offer**

- Never decline an offer before speaking with your Internship Advisor
- Convey your gratitude for the company's time and interest
- Let them know you will be declining their offer
- Be diplomatic when providing reasoning
- Example:

Dear Mr. Smith,

Thank you for your internship offer with XYZ, Co. Unfortunately, I am unable to accept the offer. After evaluating all opportunities available to me, I have decided to pursue another option.

I would like to sincerely thank you for all of your time and consideration. I truly enjoyed speaking with you and learning about your organization. Best wishes for continued success.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]

# Security Clearance

## Understanding Potential Delays and Denials

### **Security Clearance Completion & Potential Delays**

The clearance process can be lengthy - there is no official time frame for completion. By accepting an internship with an internship site that requires a security clearance, you are assuming the risk that your security clearance may not be completed in time for you to begin work on the first day of your internship.

Please note that in the event of a delayed start date, TWC is not obligated to extend the internship program beyond the dates of your originally scheduled term or semester. In addition, TWC is not obligated to provide housing for an extended time period beyond the originally scheduled dates for your term or semester.

### **Failed Security Clearance & Security Clearance Delays**

In the event that your security clearance is denied, TWC cannot provide any representation, or appeal on your behalf.

If your clearance is not approved prior to the internship start date, or if you are denied security clearance, you will have the following options:

1. Resume your internship matching process – TWC will identify an alternate placement. However, because this decision will likely not be made until very close to, or after, your intended start date, TWC cannot guarantee that there will be placements available at that time that directly match your interests.
2. Wait for your clearance to be approved – In most cases, delays last no longer than a few days but can also last up to 2 weeks. TWC will coordinate alternate activities while you await your clearance. You may only wait for your clearance to be approved if your university approves it - please consider these questions:
  - Does your university require specific activities/assignments that they would prefer you participate in while waiting to begin your internship?
  - Will the delayed start date affect your ability to earn full credit for the internship?  
In some cases, students are able to make up the lost hours by extending the length of their standard workday by a small amount.

Security clearance delays and denials do not happen often – when they do, TWC is prepared to replace students in another internship. TWC acts in the best interest of the student's academic experience and will replace any student when delays extend beyond acceptable timelines and when a student's security clearance is denied.

# Out of Network Information Sheet

---



While The Washington Center staff work hard to find you potential internship sites within our network, students are also able to apply externally to internship sites outside of our network (sites we do not have a partnership with). You can apply to Out of Network sites within the DC area by researching potential organizations and applying to their internship programs online.

In order to determine if a potential internship site is within the TWC network, simply reach out to your Pre-Arrival Advisor!

There are certain **requirements** for any site you may apply to, in order to partner with The Washington Center Program (TWC):

- The internship must be Monday-Thursday, to allow for Friday programming
- The internship should not run later than 6:00 pm, so that you can get to your evening class
- The site must be able to offer you 32 hours of work, in order to receive academic credit
- The site must be aware of and adhere to the internship start and end dates
- The site must be willing to partner with TWC by providing a direct supervisor, coordinating a site visit, as well as completing a midterm and final evaluation.

Please ensure that any Out-of-Network site is aware of the requirements above **before** you accept an offer. Once you have shared the above information with your Out of Network site supervisor we will take it from there!

**In order to contact your supervisor we will need the following information:**

- Internship Site Name
- Site Supervisor Name
- Site Supervisor Title
- Phone Number
- Email Address
- Physical Address

It is important to get the above information to your Pre-Arrival Advisor as soon as you accept an offer, so they can begin the process of confirming your Out of Network internship. Getting in touch with your supervisor will take us approximately a week, however your internship will not be officially confirmed until we are in contact with your supervisor and can verify their willingness to partner with our program.

If you receive any interviews/offers or have any questions about Out of Network sites, contact your Pre-Arrival Advisor!

