

Career Development: Cover Letter Guidance



FORMATTING AND WRITING TIPS FOR REPRESENTING CITY YEAR ON YOUR COVER LETTER

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance general formatting practices of a cover letter and on how to write a really strong cover letter that integrates City Year skills and experiences. This resource is designed to provide relevant and tangible knowledge in building an intentional approach for every section of a cover letter.

Do I Need a Cover Letter When Applying for a Job?

The short answer: Yes! ResumeLab Surveyed 200 HR Staff and Recruiters in March 2021 and found:

- **83% of HR staff and recruiters** claimed that they would interview a candidate with a great cover letter, even if their resume isn't up to par.
- **77% of recruiters** will give preference to candidates who did send a cover letter

General Formatting Practices

- 4 main sections– header, opening paragraph, middle paragraphs, and complimentary closing
- Length– no more than one page
- Font style– clear, legible, non-stylized fonts
- Font size– default for font, size 10-12
- Language– active; demonstrate your competency!

Sample Job Description We Will Use to Inform How We will Write a Strong Cover Letter Using City Year skills and experiences

For illustrative purposes to show how to tailor your City Year experiences and skills to a particular job description, we will use the following information about a fictional company and role they are hiring for.

Organization: The Awesome Company

Mission: To inspire students and spark career ideas through fun, safe, educational events.

Role Open: Event Planning Coordinator (reports to Senior Events Manager).
Key responsibilities:

- Plan and lead large scale, career day events for 200-300 students
- Build strong relationships with school administration and external speakers
- Create site layouts and detailed day-of schedules

Contact for Applications: Claire Jones, HR Director

The Header Section

Jordan Smith
123 1st Street
Apt. 1
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74008
(123) 456-7890
jordan.smith@gmail.com

Start with Your Name and Contact Information. You can decide not to include physical mailing address and just stick to email, mobile and social media/LinkedIn.

March 3, 2022

Date of Your Letter. If you are working from a previous template, be sure you update the date (and any other areas that may include old information)

Claire Jones, HR Director
The Awesome Company
789 1st Avenue, Suite 200
New York, NY 10001

Name/contact information of the recruiter, hiring manager, or person identified in the job posting to direct your application to. If you don't know the name of the person, you should seek to address to the Team this role would work with (i.e. Customer Service Hiring Team)

Dear Claire Jones,

Salutation/Greeting to the Hiring Manager

Instead of this

Jordan Smith
123 1st Street
Apt. 1
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74008
(123) 456-7890
jordan.smith@gmail.com

You could do something like this

Jordan Smith
jordan.smith@gmail.com 
(123) 456-7890 
linkedin.com/in/jordansmith 

The Opening Paragraph – Tell a Story

Tell a story that invites the reader immediately into the most interesting epiphany you've had in your life (or over the last year) relative to your career path and sets up why you are really interested and perfect for the role you are applying for. As [this article cites](#), "We're always afraid that, hidden down below, somewhere after that awful first paragraph, there's a fascinating person with great ideas. And we might not ever find out. It's a basic lesson of journalistic writing: Put the good stuff right up there at the top. Grab us and hold us and keep us reading. Good opening sentences capture the reader's imagination:

- **The first time** I planned a parent engagement event I was standing in my school's auditorium envisioning the vibe in the room in four weeks.
- **I remember** the exact moment when the fifth grader I'm working with learned fractions.

Our City Year example of an Opening Paragraph: The first time I planned a student appreciation event I was standing in my school's gymnasium envisioning the vibe in the room in four weeks. The smiles, the cheers, the laughter, the conversations between friends, the feeling of pride in one's accomplishments. By the time I grabbed the mic to welcome 250 students, I had dotted every "i" and crossed every "t" in my project plan, color-coded every rotation space on my clipboard, and engaged 12 school administrators and teachers to play a volunteer role on my team. I was fully ready for the day and thrilled to experience it with my team and students.

The Second Paragraph – What You Bring (i.e. skills related to the role)

After starting with an interesting story, the key to the second paragraph is to link that story to communicate that you have acquired the transferable skills that directly connect to the most important competencies of the role. Seek to use some of the same language in the job description as you highlight your skills. Shows you understand the role and have transferable skills for success. Questions to ask yourself are:

- What skills or qualifications make me the best fit for the position?
- How do these skills relate to success in this role and/or the needs of the employer as referenced in the job description?
- What 2-3 examples from your experiences or achievements back up this/these claims of qualification?

Our City Year example of a Second Paragraph: I am excited to apply for the Event Planning Coordinator at The Awesome Company and the opportunity to bring my skills acquired through my service year with City Year Tulsa to advance your mission to inspire students. As an AmeriCorps member, I led and co-planned 8 school wide events that engaged more than 500 middle schoolers to enhance positive school climate and uplift student voices through Student Celebrations, Attendance Initiatives and Talent Shows. Through my proactive, relationship building and collaborative team-based approach, I engaged my principal and school faculty, as well as recruiting a new student event committee to incorporate their ideas into all programs. My proudest moment was when a parent shared “I’ve seen my daughter build confidence through performing in the Talent Show – thank you for encouraging her to take a positive risk!”

The Third Paragraph – What Value You Bring to the Organization (i.e. how you can help solve their key challenge related to the role)

The third paragraph is an opportunity to show you really learned about the company (via social media, website, etc) and can communicate how you can advance their mission, particular strategy or challenge the company references. Key questions to ask yourself:

- What alignment or connection do you have with the company purpose?
- How will you help solve the company’s challenges relative to the role based on the job description or website?

Our City Year example of a Third Paragraph: I understand The Awesome Company to be a place and a community that seeks to spark career ideas in students and also has a continuous improvement focus to deliver better engagement through incorporating feedback directly from students. In my multi-faced school-based role as an AmeriCorps member, I not only analyzed and tracked student data in collaboration with my team to inform decision-making about improvements to small group tutoring and enrichment clubs but also provided spaces for the new student engagement committee to offer their perspectives and recommendations on how we can better connect and celebrate their fellow students. I hope to bring this same commitment to uplifting student voice I learned through City Year to better serve the students within The Awesome Company community.

Complimentary Close and Signature


You’ve already written three really strong paragraphs. Just do a short and appreciative close.

Our City Year example of a Complimentary Close: Please see my resume for additional information on my experiences. You can contact me at jordan.smith@gmail.com or by phone at (123) 456-7890. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am looking forward to discussing the Event Coordinator position at The Awesome Company.


Sincerely,
Jordan Smith

The Finished Product

Jordan Smith

 (123) 456-7890

 jordan.smith@gmail.com

 [linkedin.com/in/jordansmith](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jordansmith)

July 22, 2021

Claire Jones, HR Director
The Awesome Company
789 1st Avenue, Suite 200
New York, NY 10001

Dear Claire Jones,

The first time I planned a student appreciation event I was standing in my school's gymnasium envisioning the vibe in the room in four weeks. The smiles, the cheers, the laughter, the conversations between friends, the feeling of pride in one's accomplishments. By the time I grabbed the mic to welcome 250 students, I had dotted every "i" and crossed every "t" in my project plan, color-coded every rotation space on my clipboard, and engaged 12 school administrators and teachers to play a volunteer role on my team. I was fully ready for the day and thrilled to experience it with my team and students.

I am excited to apply for the Event Planning Coordinator at The Awesome Company and the opportunity to bring my skills acquired through my service year with City Year Tulsa to advance your mission to inspire students. As an AmeriCorps member, I led and co-planned 8 school wide events that engaged more than 500 middle schoolers to enhance positive school climate and uplift student voices through Student Celebrations, Attendance Initiatives and Talent Shows. Through my proactive, relationship building and collaborative team-based approach, I engaged my principal and school faculty, as well as recruiting a new student event committee to incorporate their ideas into all programs. My proudest moment was when a parent shared "I've seen my daughter build confidence through performing in the Talent Show – thank you for encouraging her to take a positive risk!"

I understand The Awesome Company to be a place and a community that seeks to spark career ideas in students and also has a continuous improvement focus to deliver better engagement through incorporating feedback directly from students. In my multi-faced school-based role as an AmeriCorps member, I not only analyzed and tracked student data in collaboration with my team to inform decision-making about improvements to small group tutoring and enrichment clubs but also provided spaces for the new student engagement committee to offer their perspectives and recommendations on how we can better connect and celebrate their fellow students. I hope to bring this same commitment to uplifting student voice I learned through City Year to better serve the students within The Awesome Company community.

Please see my resume for additional information on my experiences. You can contact me at jordan.smith@gmail.com or by phone at (123) 456-7890. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am looking forward to discussing the Event Coordinator position at The Awesome Company.

Sincerely,
Jordan Smith