Public Interest Cover Letter Checklist

THE GOAL OF THE COVER LETTER

Persuasive “brief” to employer, to state why you want a particular job, and why you are the best candidate. Convince the employer that you are passionate about and committed to their issue area and that you are the best/most qualified person for the job, due to experience, skills and knowledge. These are different than private sector or clerkship letters. Do not talk about how the job will help you.

COVER LETTER DO's and DON'TS

**DO** - Revamp each cover letter for each job you are applying to (although letters may be similar for jobs in same sector).

**DON'T** - Don’t assume the employer has read your resume.

**DO** - Use topic sentences.

**DON'T** - Don’t just list credentials – carefully craft an explanation of your merits.

**DO** - Carefully read the job announcement (if one exists) and be responsive to it.

TIP!

If your interest in a job or issue stems from personal involvement (e.g., you want to work at the DA’s sex crimes unit because you are a rape survivor; or want to do foster care advocacy because you were a foster child), CONSULT WITH AN SJICOUNSELOR before including this. Some employers may view this as an asset whereas others will question your objectivity and view your application with wariness.

If you are applying for international jobs, please consult our International Toolkit.

FORMAT OF THE COVER LETTER

1. See attached samples BUT DO NOT COPY.
2. Use business letter format.
3. No typos!
4. Do not address the letter to "To Whom It May Concern" - instead, use a specific person's name. (Call the organization or check their website if you do not have this information, unless the job announcement says otherwise).
5. One page in length.

COVER LETTER CONTENT

1st paragraph: This states who you are (e.g. “I am a second-year student at _”); and what you are looking for (such as a summer internship); and your funding status (e.g. “As a recipient of guaranteed summer funding at Columbia, I am able to _”). If you have any connection to the organization (e.g. if you heard someone speak on a panel, or if you have spoken to their former intern), mention it here.

Second paragraph: Highlight your past experience, commitment and passion. THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THE LETTER, SO MAKE IT GOOD!

Third paragraph: Explain any relevant skills you have. (A 1L may have less to put here than a 2L or 3L). If there is a job announcement, make sure to specifically address some of the desired skills and qualifications.

Fourth paragraph: Reiterate your interest. Tell them what materials you have enclosed. Sound appreciative and eager. If you are coming to town, offer to come in and meet with them.