

Your Guide To Writing The Perfect Letter

10

CHAPTER 10

*Connecting through
storytelling*





Tanja Getter

Residency Education Lead Director for Community Health Systems, Inc.

Tanja Getter is an expert on career planning for medical residents. Since 2010, Tanja has presented 60-minute workshops to more than 300 residency programs across the US, educating more than 6,000 residents and fellows on best practices on how to write an effective CV and cover letter.

In addition, Tanja is a frequent speaker at national conference meetings, including the American Academy of Family Physicians, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and American College of Physicians to name a few. At these conferences, Tanja provides one-on-one CV consultations with physicians to provide an employer's perspective on what they are looking for in a CV.

CHAPTER AUTHORS

Will Coghill-Behrends, PhD

Will is faculty in the College of Education at the University of Iowa. He, along with Rebecca Anthony, is the author of the *CV Handbook* (PhDBooks), the *PhD Handbook for the Academic Job Search* (PhDBooks) and *Getting Hired* (2nd Edition Kendall Hunt). Prior to his faculty appointment he coordinated and led several programs at the University of Iowa on academic and professional job seeking for people with professional graduate degrees.



In This Chapter

Without a doubt, a cover letter is one of the best opportunities you have to make a meaningful impression and separate yourself from a competitive candidate pool, especially when sharing YOUR UNIQUE STORY.

In the following pages, you will learn how to customize a powerful cover letter taking the prospective employer on a guided journey of some of your most notable career and life achievements. Note: We will be referring to this as both a cover letter and cover email throughout the chapter.

OUTLINE

1. The Purpose
2. Customizing Your Cover Letter
3. The Components
4. Proofing
5. Addressing Time Gaps and Immigration Status
6. Writing Support

GOALS

- Write attention-grabbing cover letters for highly sought-after positions.
- Understand how a well-worded cover letter will enhance your chance of getting an interview.
- Leverage language drawn from the job posting itself.
- Clearly display your personal brand and the transferable skills you bring to the position.
- Paint a picture of how your candidacy will fulfill the needs of vacancy for which you apply.
- Set the stage for a potentially-rewarding career filled with success and contentment.

LET'S GET STARTED





READ:

The Purpose

In today's age, a cover letter is not necessarily an actual letter itself, but rather your introductory email. You can also think of it as your "elevator speech," named for the concept of communicating who you are, what you're looking for, and why you'd be a good fit for the organization...all wrapped up in the 30 seconds it takes to ride multiple floors in an elevator.

In most areas of life, you know who your competition is, and you can analyze the competition's strengths, capitalize on their weaknesses, and prepare accordingly to give yourself the best chance to win. However, when applying for a position, you don't know who you are competing against.

The more competitive the job is, the more candidates you'll be competing with for a single position within an organization. It's difficult to gauge whether you are the first or one-hundredth candidate to apply for the position. Often, when applying to positions from job boards, email campaigns, journal ads, and personal recommendations, you will not likely have all the details to determine if the position is a viable option for you. Until you have enough facts to make a sound decision (whether the job is one you'll consider), you always need to approach each job as your dream job to give yourself the very best chance to pursue, if desired. The key is to connect with the employer. Of course, connecting with an employer you haven't met or spoken to will be a challenge, but not impossible.



Although job boards have made it easy for you to apply to a position, physician recruiters generally receive your CV with an automatic informal message, such as, "Enclosed is CV for ABC Job". When candidates apply directly to a position, the physician recruiter's inbox is filled with informal inquiries, such as, "CV attached", "per your job posting on healthcareers", "Interested" and "call me".

Most physician recruiters manage multiple searches and receive dozens of CVs each week. Todd Skertich, Managing Partner of Arlington HealthCare, states, "some days, I receive an overwhelming number of candidate inquiries, and unfortunately, we do not always have the time to review each CV on a timely basis. I scan each email quickly to decide whether I review CV in the next day or two or move the candidate to my folder marked 'Potential Candidates for Future Review'. Often, the

candidates who include a compelling cover letter are candidates who make it to my review-today list".

The good news is by simply write a cover email with easily differentiate you from those who do not. But, how do you separate yourself from those who are including good cover letters? Through storytelling.

Why do we read books? Go to the movies? Watch TV dramas? Because human beings love stories. They move us, inspire us, transport us and above all...they entertain us. Why should a cover letter be a flat, unemotional document? Who decided they should exist only to regurgitate your resume? Each time you apply for a position, imagine that the employer received ten candidate inquiries that day for the same position and share your unique story with enthusiasm. Your cover letter has to stand out.

The more competitive the job is, the more candidates you'll be competing with for a single position within an organization.

FIELD NOTES

"CVs themselves can be rather standardized with nothing unique about them. I look for a candidate to "paint a picture" of their candidacy with their CV and cover email/letter. If the candidate can highlight awards/positions (chief resident, etc.) or certifications, that is helpful. Providing a list of professional interests and/or a case log" with numbers and types of procedures during training also adds value."

The cover is where the candidate can really articulate the true wants and needs of their search (type of position, income needs, community needs, lifestyle issues, reason for geographic preference, etc.). When this is done effectively, it has a strong impact on the interest of the potential employer.

**– Todd Hewett, Regional Director
Community Health Systems**



READ:

Customizing Your Cover Letter

Once you write your cover letter, you'll be able to repurpose the letter when applying for other positions. However, you want to ensure to customize the letter for each employer and position. Depending on the position, you may want to reorder the flow, emphasize certain parts of the letter, and remove irrelevant content.

Here are three simple ways to customize your cover letter:

1. Find out who to address your cover letter to.

Remember, your cover letter should be written to the specific position, addressed to the specific person, and written as if it's the only job to which you're applying.

Try not to address your letter 'To whom it may concern'. Find out the name of the person who will read your application. This might take a little effort, but it's worth it. Each year dozens of search committees chuckle when they read a cover letter addressed to apply to another competitive search in the field.

Also avoid what we call the "Dead-End Dears..." like Dear Sir, Madame, Friends, Future Colleagues; we've even seen Dear Gentlepeople? What are Gentlepeople anyway? Toss! And so we don't forget, salutations are followed by a colon (:) not a comma (.). If you absolutely don't have the name of the individual or if the advertisement directs you to write to a department or even a job number, use the simplified style of a business letter which omits both the salutation and complimentary closing.

Most job postings and advertisements will have the contact's name and email. If there is no contact information, call or email the employer and ask for the search committee chair in charge of physician

recruitment. They should be able to provide you with their name, title, and contact information.

By all means, do not address the letter to the search committee chair's first name. Use the correct title and only formal register.

Note: You will want to avoid applying through Human Resources unless specified, as HR staffs the rest of the hospital and/or practice. Physician recruitment is usually done on a completely different level. You will most likely be communicating with a physician recruiter; either on site and/or a part of a hospital and/or hospital system. The smaller the community, chances are you could even be communicating with a hospital CEO directly.

2. Find out more about the job

When finding out who to address your application to, you could also try to contact that person so you can ask a few questions. This can help you match your cover letter (and CV) to the job.

You could ask:

- > Can you share a little bit about the job details?
- > What type of characteristics are you looking for in a candidate?
- > Is there a position description I can review?

Write down the answers to these questions and if the answers are relatable, leverage them in your cover letter.

3. Research the company

Find out more about the company to further customize your cover letter for the position. Here are some tips:

- > If you are working with a recruitment firm, ask your recruiter to share the name of the employer and any insight they can provide you.
- > Once you have the name, look up their company online and research their website, google their company, and learn more about their organization.



FIELD NOTES

"It's helpful to know other factors involved in a candidate's search including: preferred practice setting, specific community and/or family needs, reason for interest in an area, and explanation of any gaps or malpractice. The CV often showcases training and employment history while a cover letter is a way to paint the picture of preferences and personal details specific to your candidacy and search that may separate one applicant from another."

– **Crissy Dale, Physician Recruitment Coordinator,
Community Health Systems**

 **READ:**

The Components:

Employers are interested in learning what's beyond your CV. They want to learn what's driving your search, your personal and professional goals, and from the employer's perspective, they want to know what sets you apart from everyone else...why you?

Each paragraph should compel the reader to continue to read the next. By the end of the letter, the prospective employer should want to learn more about you as a candidate.

A good cover letter should include the following components:

- > The Salutation
- > The Body
- > Introduction (The Grab)
- > Why You?
- > The Hook
- > The Close



The Salutation:

Include a greeting such as "Dear" or "Hello" and make sure you are addressing your letter to the specific person in charge of physician recruitment. More often than not, you will be using their last name.; (i.e. "Dear Dr. Smith, Dear Ms. Robbins: or Hello Mr. Smith:").

The Body:

The body of your cover letter consists of the (1) Introduction, (2) Grab and (3) Hook.

Part I – Introduction (The Grab):

Your opening paragraph is your introduction and should grab the employer's attention and make them want to read the rest of your cover letter. Don't waste any time — clearly define which position and facility you are specifically interested in and how it relates to your background.

If you have met the prospective employer in the past or have a mutual acquaintance, mention that right from the get-go. This is a good place to drop names of key influencers, such as attendings, administrators, and faculty. By doing so, you'll easily differentiate yourself from candidates who do not.



The Introduction – SAMPLE 1:

Dear Mr. Smith:

It was great meeting you last week at the career fair in Nashville and I'm excited to learn more about the [specialty]position available at [Name of Facility] located in [City, State].

The Introduction – SAMPLE 2:

Hello Ms. Robbins:

My name is Steven Green, MD. A former colleague of mine, Jane Doe, DO, who is currently practicing within your system, shared information with me about a hospitalist position at [Name of Organization].

The Introduction – SAMPLE 3:

Dear Dr. Johnson:

My name is Nancy Smith, MD. I am third year resident at Baylor Scott and White, looking to start practice in August of 2020. Recently I came across your job posting on the [name of website] and am very excited to learn more about the [specialty] position located in [City, State].

Part II – Why You?

This is where you're going to tell the physician recruiter what you have to offer. Use this paragraph to share why you have an interest in the opportunity and community. For example, most employers are interested in hiring physicians who have ties to the area and are likely to stay in the community for the foreseeable future.

If you do not have ties to the area, you'll need to paint a verbal picture of why you believe you'll be a valued member of the medical staff and community for years to come, such as:

- The community offers everything I am looking for
- Skillset to perform a variety of procedures
- Ability to build a practice
- Possess the qualities to become a great colleague, employee and advocate for the employer

Here you can build your case with one or more examples.

Why you? – SAMPLE 1 (location)

Over the past two years, my husband and I have driven through Abilene several times on our way to visit relatives in Odessa. We are looking at moving closer to family and are very familiar with the area.

Why You? – SAMPLE 2 (location)

I've visited your area on a recent camping trip to the Guadalupe Mountains and again when I went out to the Franklin Mountains. I am looking for a community where I can enjoy my passion for the outdoors during my free time to hike, bike, fish, and camp.

I would find practicing and living in [Name of Community] an easy transition.

Why you? – SAMPLE 3 (location)

My wife is from Scranton and we are looking at relocating to be closer to her family. I am looking to build a practice and life in the Scranton area where we can be close to my wife's family and easily attend my kid's sporting events at the local middle and high school.

Why you? – SAMPLE 4 (vision to build a practice)

I am currently chief resident (PGY5) at [Name of Residency Program], under the chairmanship of [First Last Name, MD]. Each year, our program usually has two fellows; however, this past year, I've been the only breast surgery fellow. This provided a unique opportunity to greatly increase my surgical experience and abilities. I believe my work ethic and additional experience in fellowship will help me build a sustainable, long-term practice sooner than most of the graduating fellows.

Why you? – SAMPLE 5 (niche practice)

I am searching for a position in family medicine with surgical OB in an underserved area. I would like to build a sustainable practice of caring for 20 or more patients per day and two to four deliveries per month.

Currently, I am completing an OB fellowship at [Name of Residency Program] and upon completion of my program, my case logs will include approximately:

- > XXX primary vaginal deliveries*
- > XX primary c-sections*
- > XX first assists*

Part III – The Hook:

The hook is your chance to impress the employers even further by showing them that you care enough to do some background research on the company, and how you can contribute to their mission. Here, you can tie in current events, information about the company's history, core values, and mission statement.

Use this paragraph to define specific examples of the work performed and results achieved. This paragraph should be connected to your CV.

The Hook – SAMPLE 1:

After reading [Name of Employer's] statement of purpose, "...the belief that access to quality health care is a basic human right, and that the quality of life in our communities can be improved through perseverance and working together to provide compassionate services to all those in need...", I am excited to say we share a common philosophy.

I am searching for a family medicine with surgical OB to care for the underserved community and provide exceptional health care. I'm interested in learning more about joining your dynamic team.

The Hook – SAMPLE 2:

As I read your CEO message on [Employer's] website, I found one part to really resonate with me: "[Name of Employer] has evolved over the years, but one thing has remained consistent—our commitment to ensuring patients receive personalized and high-quality care."

As long as I could remember, I wanted to become a physician and could not deny the fact that medicine is my calling. After a decade of training to become a physician, I believe I can provide patients with personalized, high quality care. I believe I will be an excellent colleague, employee, and leader in the community.

The Hook – SAMPLE 3:

Recently, I came across an article in U.S. News ranking the best hospitals of 2018-2019 and noticed [Name of Employer] ranked as one of the top Trauma I hospitals in the US.

I am confident my experience and training at a level one trauma center has prepared me to perform a comprehensive array of surgical procedures. I have been exposed to a wide variety of cases including, but not limited to: [x, y, z]. I have also encountered some of the most challenging types of trauma cases ranging from gunshot wounds to severe motor vehicle accidents.

The Close:

The goal of the cover letter is for the physician recruiter / employer to:

1. Review your CV
2. Schedule a phone interview

Your best chance to achieve both goals is adding a specific call to action. "The close" is also your opportunity to reiterate your interest in the position.

The Close – SAMPLE 1:

Thank you for your time in reviewing my attached CV. I look forward to speaking with you to discuss your opportunity and my qualifications in greater detail. Please feel free to contact me via text or call to my cellphone my cell at 123-123-1234 or by email at (email address).

The Close – SAMPLE 2:

Thank you in advance for taking the time to take a look at my attached CV. I look forward to speaking with you to discuss what opportunities you may have available at The South Metro Family Clinic. The best way to reach me would be via email, or on my cell after 6 pm CST.

Thank you for your time and review of my qualifications.

The Signature:

Make sure to provide the recipient with:

First and last name, MD/DO

Specialty

Cell number

Email address

Cover Letter Tips:

- Grab the reader's attention with a significant accomplishment and/or tell them exactly why you want to practice in their community.
- Communicate who you are as a clinician and physician. Talk about the importance of your research/fellowships/or other medical preparation.
- If you are applying to an academic position at a residency program, highlight your teaching experience and the impact your style has had on the students and their learning success.
- If you are leaning toward a clinical setting, highlight your strengths, your ability to integrate technology into the clinical environment, and your ability to work collaboratively with colleagues and patients.
- For research positions, give notations regarding your writing experiences. It's a signal to the reader that this candidate has solid writing abilities, and that is a good thing if you plan on writing and publishing! Talk about the importance of your research/fellowships/or other medical preparation.
- Weave in the basic tenets of your philosophy. It will certainly set you apart from other candidates who do not take the time to demonstrate how their beliefs influence their practice.
- Review your letter before sending. Can the reader hear your voice? If it sounds like a standard form letter, start over! Most letters are dreadfully dull because most writers don't give it any voice. Don't be one of those.



**READ:****Proofing**

A good way to confirm that each letter flows and that grammar and punctuation is correct, ask a colleague or friend to proofread it. Also make sure that your letter fits the position for which you are applying. You don't want to say you're interested in an academic practice when you're applying to a 100% clinical position!

Regardless of the length of the letter, proof the contents and check your letter for action, much like you did for your CV. Examine your sentences and see if you have used a variety of action verbs, like the ones below:

- Accomplished
- Advised
- Authored
- Chaired
- Collaborated
- Collected
- Coordinated
- Developed
- Established

- Facilitated
- Generated
- Instructed
- Investigated
- Managed
- Motivated
- Organized
- Participated

- Performed
- Produced
- Represented
- Researched
- Supervised
- Taught
- Trained
- Volunteered

Note: You will only be using particular verbs depending on what type of setting you are applying for. You don't need to use verbs which focus on research and teaching when you are applying for a clinic-based opportunity.

Regardless of the length of the letter, proof the contents and check your letter for action, much like you did for your CV.

If you are still at a loss as to what should be included in your cover letter, here are some questions to consider to help craft your email...

- > What type of practice do you prefer? (solo, group, etc.) What is your ideal practice situation?
- > When would you be available to start practice?
- > Will anyone else be relocating with you? If so, will they be looking for work?
- > Do you have any special family needs?
- > What are your hobbies? And are they available in the community you are applying to?
- > Do you have any special needs in the community?
- > Do you have authorization to work with any US employer or do you require a work visa?
- > Why are you interested in this location?
- > Do you have any gaps/program changes in your training? Please explain.
- > What is the best number to reach you?
- > What is the best time of day to reach you?



READ:

Address Gaps and Immigration Status

Gaps:

If you have any unexplained time gaps in your CV longer than three months, it is important to address them in your cover letter as gaps are red flags it is important to employers. You don't want them to assume the worst! Alternatively, you can send a separate letter explaining your gaps.

Your gap could be based on a countless number of reasons, some that would even work to your

advantage (mission work, family health emergency, maternity leave, study abroad, etc.) However, a few of you may have had a difficult period that needs a little bit more explanation (mental health issue, rehab, jail time, etc.) As uncomfortable it may be, the gap needs to be addressed because the recruiter's eye will always jump straight to it on your CV. Briefly mention it and you can go further into detail once you speak in person.

GAP – SAMPLE 1:

As you can see on my attached CV, I have a one-year gap between undergrad and medical school in which I took time off for family health reasons.

GAP – SAMPLE 2:

With regards to my life prior to residency, I did not follow a traditional pathway. I grew up in [City, State] and graduated magna cum laude with numerous awards upon graduation from [ABC University]. While there, I studied abroad, and my eyes were opened to a life outside of the country (although most New Yorkers would disagree that there is one). Therefore, I declined admission to medical school and other career paths and went on to play softball overseas and then moved to West Africa to teach math and science.

GAP – SAMPLE 3:

You will notice on my attached CV that there is a two-year gap between medical school and residency. During that time I struggled with some health issues. With the support of my family, friends and physicians, made a full recovery.

IMMIGRATION STATUS

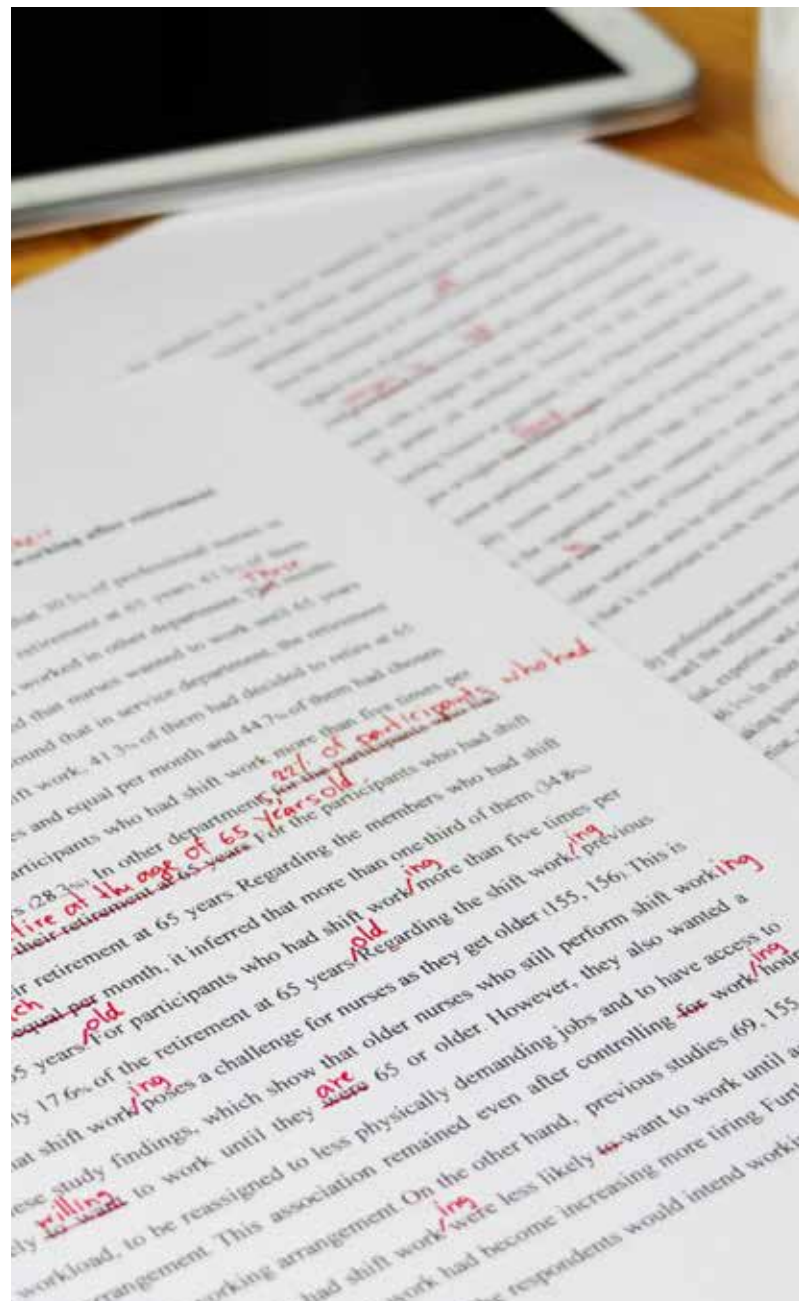
You will also want to briefly mention in your cover email any visa assistance you may require. There is no need to waste your time or the recruiters' on discussing an opportunity for a location that won't be able to support your visa. Be informed about the necessary visa requirements and work authorizations you'll need for any positions to which you apply. Impress the employer by being ready with the information they'll need to get you there.

IMMIGRATION STATUS – SAMPLE 1:

I am originally from Canada and will be looking for a H-1B visa sponsorship.

IMMIGRATION STATUS – SAMPLE 2:

Although I am originally from Germany and completed my medical school abroad, I am a US Green Card holder and do not need any visa assistance.





READ:

Sample Cover Letters

There are several cover letter templates you can access online. Reading through sample cover letters may spark ideas for your cover letter.



Recommended Tool

Sample Cover Letters.

Utilize sample cover letters to help you customize your cover letter.

<http://md.careers/S-03>

Summary:

- Make the body of your email your cover letter
- Research and send your cover letter to the person in charge of physician recruitment
- Address any unexplained time gaps in your CV
- Keep it short and sweet
- Attach your CV as a PDF file to your cover email
- Have someone proofread your CV and cover email
- Tell them who you are, what you want to do, and why you want to be there



Chapter Tool Box

The **CHAPTER TOOL BOX** consists of **RECOMMENDED TOOLS** featured throughout the chapter, along with additional resources and recommended links.

These tools will help you gain valuable insight about **How to Write a Cover Letter**.

SAMPLE COVER LETTERS

<http://md.careers/S-03>

CREATING AND USING AN ELEVATOR SPEECH

<http://md.careers/E-18>

HOW TO WRITE A CV

<http://md.careers/ST-15>





Chapter Bibliography

(1) <https://dannyhrubin.com/2014/01/23/your-cover-letters/>

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NEXT STEP: Track your progress with THE TRACKER – an action plan for you to apply *Your Guide To Writing The Perfect Cover Letter* lessons learned.

This step-by-step action plan consists of reading assignments, exercises, checklists, assessments and additional resources to help you transition from training into your work/life by making good sound decisions.

To access your Your Guide To Writing The Perfect Cover Letter TRACKER, go to <http://md.careers/T10>.



*Pride, Passion, Purpose:
Careers That Count!*

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Find Out More: Contact Us Today!

Joni Adamson
Manager of Recruitment
573.636.4222
jadamson@mo-pca.org
www.3rnet.org/missouri
or www.mhpps.org

Opportunities throughout our Rural & Urban Areas:

- ◆ Loan Repayment Options
- ◆ Competitive Salary & Comprehensive Benefits
- ◆ Team Based Models of Care / Care Coordination
- ◆ Little or no Call / Moving Allowance / Signing Bonus

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