

IPA Workshop: The Art of the Cover Letter and Interview Prep

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Career Center
3/29/21



Objectives

- Identify 3 characteristics of a successful cover letter
- Describe 3 types of interview questions
- Outline the preparation method for interviewing for a career opportunity

Cover Letter Writing

In Your Cover Letter

- Define yourself (quickly) in your policy interests and the effect you want to have
- Describe how your experiences have highlighted your passion
- Chance to connect experiences that may be less obvious to goal/position
- Share values and “whys” - connect to employer (through research)
- Mid-point in story telling - don’t just repeat resume, be specific, but brief
- Highlight key skills (through experiences, based on what position needs)

Research Assistant, Economic Policy Studies

US-DC-Washington

3 weeks ago

Job ID 2020-1375 **# of Openings** 1 **Category** Economic Policy

Overview

AEI is seeking a full-time research assistant to work with senior economists. AEI economists study a wide variety of economic policy issues related to the US economy, tax policy, international finance, political economy, financial services, and health care.

Responsibilities include research support in the form of data management, retrieval, and analysis; editing and contributing to scholarly papers, articles, op-eds, and books; creating and formatting charts, graphics, and tables; and writing literature reviews and background reports using national and international publications.

Applicants should have a demonstrated interest in economics and public policy and experience with economic methodologies, acquiring data from official sources, analyzing large data sets, and knowledge of statistical programs — preferably STATA. Applicants should also be willing to learn new statistical programs. A strong math or statistics background is required, and coursework in linear algebra, multivariable calculus, and econometrics is strongly preferred.

AEI offers a stimulating and harmonious work environment and excellent benefits. Interested candidates should submit their resume, cover letter, unofficial academic transcripts, and 500-word writing sample with their online application.

About AEI

The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) is a public policy think tank dedicated to defending human dignity, expanding human potential, and building a freer and safer world. The work of its scholars and staff advances ideas rooted in a belief in democracy, free enterprise, American strength and global leadership, solidarity with those at the periphery of our society, and a pluralistic, entrepreneurial culture.

AEI is committed to making the intellectual, moral, and practical case for expanding freedom, increasing individual opportunity, and strengthening the free enterprise system in America and around the world. Its work explores ideas that further these goals, and AEI scholars take part in this pursuit with academic freedom. AEI operates independently of any political party and has no institutional positions. Its scholars' conclusions are fueled by rigorous, data-driven research and broad-ranging evidence.

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- Analyzed
- Assessed
- Forecasted
- Researched
- Computed

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- Authored
- Collected
- Evaluated
- Examined
- Organized
- Systematized

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Category Economic Policy

Overview

Shared values:

- Using data to support free market
- Studying individual opportunity
- Intellectual methods to expand liberty in the US and beyond

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Cover Letter Format

- Purpose- explain the fit between applicant, position, and organization particularly if it's not expressly clear in resume
- Paragraph 1- why you are interested in this position and employer, and to grab the reader's attention.
- Paragraph 2- describe your qualifications for the position using specific examples from academic, work, volunteer, leadership, athletics, and student organization experiences.
- Paragraph 3- Connect your accomplishments, skills and knowledge directly to the position and employer
- Paragraph 4- final statement of your interest and qualifications, gratitude, contact info

Cover Letter Tips

- Avoid using continuous “I” sentences
- Use templates for formatting and relevant key skills but they need to be tailored to each position
 - Make 3-4 templates for different types of positions (health policy, lobbying, advocacy, policy analysis, etc.)
- Try to address to a hiring manager, or at least the position who will likely supervise (avoiding To Whom It May Concern)
- Frame everything in a valued added perspective- what you bring to contribute
- Translate experience and look for learning opportunities, don't be afraid to express excitement about growth

Cover Letter Tips

- Use quantification in the same way that you would in a resume
- Check company social media/website/press release to see how formal your tone should be- match their voice
- Start strong, finish strong
 - Narratives are eye-catching and grab attention much more than “I’m excited to apply”
 - Think about what prompted you to apply, what peaked your interest, what matched your values, etc. – what grabbed your attention will grab theirs
 - End with what value you’ll add and bring to the position

Some starting examples – depending on your risk tolerance

- If truly loving data is wrong, I don't want to be right. It seems like the rest of the team at Chartbeat feels the same way—and that's just one of the reasons why I think I'd be the perfect next hire for your sales team.
- Among my colleagues, I'm known as the one who can pick up the pieces, no matter what amount of you-know-what hits the fan. Which is why I think there's no one better to fill Birchbox's customer service leader position.
- If we were playing "Two Truths and a Lie," I'd say the following: I've exceeded my sales quotas by at least 20% every quarter this year, I once won an international pie-eating contest, and I am not currently looking for a new job. The last, of course, is the lie, especially where Yext is concerned.

Successful cover letters are...

- Customized
- Skill based
- An expansion past the resume
- Values and “why” oriented
- Expressions of personality (appropriately)
- Well-researched
- Not afraid of bragging about what makes you great
- Reviewed by multiple sets of eyes
- Read aloud before being submitted

Interview Prep and Tips

First thoughts

- **Research** and **preparation** are the keys to successful interviewing
- Knowing how you'll answer **common questions**, and **practicing** being comfortable with them, will get you halfway through most interviews
- Interviews are **two sided**- both parties are interviewing
- Interviews show your **competence** with subject matter required for the position and your **fit** with the company – be yourself



Prepping for the Interview

- This is the time to use storytelling to showcase your strengths
- Use your experiences to provide specific examples of skills
 - Remember the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) method and use the specifics from your master resume
- Think about your top three strengths for the position and have a story ready to demonstrate each strength
- When thinking of questions to ask, consider what would have been helpful during challenges of past experiences
- Different types of fit (position, skill, organization, team)



Live Video

Look into the camera (pretend it's the eyes of the interviewer) when answering

- Clear, blank background if possible, with good posture
- Don't panic with tech issues- everyone has them and your perseverance will be an asset
- Look for non-verbal cues
- Notes are still ok!
- Have water ready

Recorded Video

Practice your answer before pressing record if it's an option

- Without feedback, give more detail than normal
- Smile through the silence
- Feel free to still take breaks
- Note if you are re-examining the question (Sorry, one moment- I just need to make sure I'm answering the question as fully as possible)
- Notes are still ok!

Video Backgrounds

Avoid distracting background wall art

- Use your computer's photo booth app (or Zoom settings) to test your lighting- make sure it gives you a clear, bright image
- Try to keep the camera at eye level (avoid laps- use books if needed!)
- Avoid wearing the same color as your background
- Avoid virtual backgrounds if possible (if there is a clear space you can use) or use just a blank, solid color if needed

Live Phone

Prepare a quiet space for 15 minutes before and after

- Smile while talking
- Take notes even more than you normally would - summarize each question
- Use a checklist of stories, skills, and examples if you would find it helpful
- You WILL talk over each other- don't sweat it!

Written Response

- Still pretty uncommon, but happening
- Take time to do two drafts and read it out loud before submitting
- Have a beginning, middle, and end even if not telling a story
- Write in the tone you would use with a professor

Common Interview Questions

- General Questions
 - Tell me about yourself – 30 second elevator pitch
 - Strengths/**Weaknesses** - be vulnerable and learning oriented
- Behavioral Questions
 - Tell me about a time...
 - What's an example of... - STAR
- Organizational Interest Questions
 - Why here? What do you know/like about us?
 - What specific area would you....
- Reasons for Hire Questions
 - What accomplishments....
 - How are you prepared for...



The STAR Method

Situation: Describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.

Task: What goal were you working toward?

Action: Describe the actions you took to address the situation and keep the focus on YOU. What specific steps did you take and what was your contribution? Use “I,” not “we” when describing actions.

Result: Describe the outcome of your actions and don’t be shy about taking credit for your behavior. How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? Provide multiple positive results.



Concise, Complete, Confident (through practice)

Concise- answer the root of a question quickly and spend remaining time proving that answer

Complete- Remember that interviewers want detail, even if it feels like forever- give it 30 more seconds

Draw from all different types of experiences- even outside of formal internships/jobs

Remember to explain organizations, events, and jargon

Confident- Practice makes perfect in this area of career development

Practice Interviewing!

Big Interview (udel.biginterview.com)

Common Interview Questions

Articles with Tips

Recording and Practice

Appointments, Drop-Ins, Mock Interviews

Drop-In with our Peer Advisors virtually (1-4 M-F)

Make an appointment with a Counselor (mention mock interviewing in meeting request)

Q & A – What else do you want to know?

