

# Dissected Physical Therapy Cover Letter

The intent of this resource is to serve as a basic structural writing guide for students to learn how to write a concise cover letter. Please note that before beginning any letter of intent or cover letter, it is essential to research an opportunity, otherwise you may not be able to make the most impactful and relevant arguments in your letter.

Ways to research a position include:

- using LinkedIn, Glassdoor, the organization's website, etc., to learn more about a company and/or its employees
- inviting someone in your network who is affiliated with the opportunity to coffee so you can learn more about their experience working there
- using UCSF Alumni resources, like UCSF Connect, to find someone who is, or has been affiliated with the opportunity, so you can invite them to coffee and learn more about their impressions and experience with regard to the organization

A straightforward cover letter includes about four to five paragraphs. Each paragraph in the sample letter is deconstructed below to illustrate how an applicant may write a cover letter for a physical therapy position. Note that the rubric approach below is very formulaic in order to provide an easy-to-follow generic writing structure. Those who have excellent writing skills may choose to organize and write their letter in a different fashion according to their skill level and experiences. Regardless, each letter should be written in a way that is unique to the individual and their experiences.

## Cover Letter Checklist

### First Paragraph

- Did you address the hiring manager or program director by name?
- Did you include your academic training?
- Did you include how you learned of the position?
- Did you include which specific aspects of the position appeal to you most, based on specific and concrete professional goals?
- Did you mention 2-4 specific "superpowers" that you would contribute to that specific employer (e.g. **clinical experience**, **teaching experience**, and **leadership**)?

### Body Paragraphs

- Did you include a transitional topic sentence for each paragraph that aligns with each of the superpowers you mentioned in the last sentence of your first paragraph (e.g. one paragraph about clinical skills, one paragraph about teaching, etc.)?
- In each paragraph, did you include 1-2 **examples** where you discuss your superpowers in action? (Remember not to repeat everything on your CV! *You should use a meaty example that provides more depth than your CV.*)
- Did you include a few sentences on what you **liked**, what you **learned**, and what you can **contribute** as a result? (**LLC**)

### Final Paragraph

- Did you restate your thesis, i.e., summarize your three main **superpowers**?
- Did you mention something that excited you about the program, but in employer-focused language that emphasized how you could contribute?
- Did you express enthusiasm and signal interest in next steps?

## Color-Coded Cover Letter Key

Now, let's take a look at a sample color-coded cover letter using the key below. As you read through, use the checklist above to note what the writer does well, as well as what they could add to make their cover letter even stronger. Generally, cover letters should also include the address of the recipient and the date, but we have chosen to omit these within this sample.

**Color Key:** Superpower #1 / Superpower #2 / Superpower #3 / Examples / LLC

# Sample Color-Coded Cover Letter

Dear Dr. Newman:

I read about the Staff Physical Therapist position (#123456) in the outpatient physical therapy clinic at Kaiser Oakland with great interest. I will graduate with a DPT from the UCSF/SFSU Physical Therapy Program in June, and expect to be licensed by September. I was thrilled to see the vacancy on LinkedIn, as I had an exceptionally positive clinical affiliation at your facility last summer and enjoyed the supportive, team-based environment. I would appreciate the opportunity to continue using my **clinical**, **teamwork**, and **leadership** skills to serve your patients.

During my affiliations, I developed my skills as a clinician and communicator and found that I enjoyed working with complex clinical cases. At Kaiser Oakland, I was able to maintain an entry level caseload of 12 patients with minimal supervision from my clinical instructor. I performed daily walk-in evaluations where I created functional mobility goals that aligned with patients' work duties and focused on decreasing barriers to healthcare literacy by providing patient education prior to each visit. For example, I enjoyed using my clinical communication skills to discover the multiple causes of a patient's back pain and then providing medical education and working with the patient to address those causes holistically. One of my favorite patients I worked with was a hobbyist gardener with chronic low back pain with L1-L3 stenosis. Due to the chronic nature of her condition, the patient had established fear-avoidance patterns such as avoiding exercise. In order to make her goals and exercises more functional and relevant to her daily life, I evaluated her lifting and carrying techniques for potted plants. Through this experience, I learned the importance of looking beyond the anatomical causes of low back pain and instead focusing on a patient's interests and personal goals. By focusing on the patient's daily movement, I was able to make the plan of care patient-focused and help her progress toward her functional goals. It was rewarding to collaborate with the patient in order to address her concerns and help her become more confident in her everyday activities.

I also value the teamwork aspect of clinical care, and specifically, working in an interprofessional work environment that addresses the patient's care in a multifaceted way. For example, during my clinical rotation at Sunrise Skilled Nursing Facility, I often coordinated with the PT team and occupational therapists in order to address the complex needs of our patients. For instance, when working with an elderly male patient who struggled with mobility and chronic pain, I worked with the PT team to help the patient with gross motor patterns, such as ambulation and sit-to-stand, while the occupational therapists focused on fine motor patterns, such as toileting, tooth brushing, and washing the patient's face. I communicated regularly with both the PT and OT teams in order to co-treat this and other patients, collaboratively creating plans of care that centered patients and their goals. As a member of this interdisciplinary medical team, I learned how to adapt my communication style and utilize conflict resolution techniques in order to improve patient care and avoid redundancy. I also developed strong teamwork and communication skills by collaborating with diverse personalities to meet the needs of the clinical care staff and our patients.

From my time as a volunteer in UCSF's Community Leadership elective, I gained an understanding of how to make an impact in my community by developing strong leadership skills, and in particular, initiative. For instance, I led reflection-based small group discussions after patient encounters in order to improve patient care. A large part of our patient population had immigrated from the Philippines, and in order to gain a better understanding of the patients' point of view and improve access, I developed my own cultural competence by learning more about the barriers to healthcare in this population and the history behind traditional modalities. As a result, I took the initiative to lead discussions on healthcare with a focus on the Filipino community. These conversations led me to organize a health outreach fair in the Soma neighborhood. Furthermore, I proactively identified clinic needs and devised solutions. For instance, I saw that patients were often unaware of the services we offered and needed additional resources, so I developed a marketing outreach project to raise awareness of our services and created a short list of established community resources. This experience was meaningful to me because it taught me how to navigate difficult conversations about social justice and equity, as well as how to organize and delegate tasks in community projects. Going forward, I hope to utilize these leadership skills in order to provide an excellent quality of care to patients.

I would welcome the chance to bring my **clinical**, **teamwork**, and **leadership** abilities to a team committed to providing comprehensive care and education to patients. Each day of my Kaiser clinical affiliation, I saw the positive impact that the Kaiser model had on employees. Your in-house infrastructure and interdisciplinary team-based approach meant that I always felt supported as a practitioner, and could in turn successfully support my patients. Thank you so much for your consideration, and I look forward to discussing my qualifications with you further.

Warmly,  
Angelina Jolie