

Negative Sample Cover Letter for History Internship (With Annotations)

Emily Dobish
Manager of Volunteer Services
History Colorado Center
1200 Broadway
Denver, Colorado 80203

April 5, 2016

Hi Emily,

I was delighted to learn about the Photography Collection Internship that you advertised on your website! I am graduating in May with a degree in History from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and I am hoping to find a position that will grow my experience and help me learn more about history. I visited Colorado on my spring break last year and really loved it, so I know am the candidate you have been searching for!

My academic work has given me a solid intellectual foundation on which the History Colorado Center can build with what I will learn in this position. In my History of the American West to 1850 course, I learned a ton about how the U.S. expanded into territories that included what is now Colorado. In another course, I wrote a paper on the history of the Hoover Dam and its effects on the Colorado River ecosystem. I look forward to learning more about the state through photographs in your collection.

During the summers I work at the Brat Stand, a small on-campus restaurant, where I provide excellent customer service to the vibrant and diverse campus community. I excel at putting customers at ease by engaging them in pleasing small talk while they decide what to order; many customers have praised my superior service manner by telling me I am chatty. In addition, I have developed important leadership skills in this position; I am especially good at pointing out mistakes that other students make, which is important because I am committed to keeping the stand running smoothly. I have a solid knowledge of food-service procedures because my brother managed a McDonald's, so I am not afraid to speak up when I see a better way to do things. I know that I can bring the same attentiveness to detail and willingness to speak up to collections management at the History Colorado Center too.

Standard business letter format includes your own address and contact information as well.

This salutation is too informal and addressing the recipient by their first name is not appropriate. "Dear Ms. Dobish" is a stronger choice here.

Again, the tone here is too casual, and the last line may sound arrogant. The applicant should use the first paragraph to identify his skills that are directly relevant to the position, not to talk about how he liked his spring break.

The applicant makes an attempt to connect his coursework, but he skims over projects he completed and how they might demonstrate familiarity with Colorado history. "Hoover Damn" suggests he did not proofread the letter; employers could conclude he will be equally sloppy on the job.

This paragraph is highly problematic. First, the tone shifts to overly formal and florid. Second, the applicant inadvertently suggests he might be difficult to work with: "chatty" is likely not the praise he thinks it is, and eagerly pointing out others' mistakes is not good leadership. Employers want to know that new hires can take criticism well and work smoothly as part of a team; this paragraph does not demonstrate that the applicant has learned anything about teamwork, collaboration, or self-improvement from his position. If anything, it shows he will not be respectful of his co-workers' experience and ideas.

Negative Sample Cover Letter for History Internship (With Annotations)

The conglomeration of my schoolwork and my job experience along with the wide variety of extracurricular activities in which I participate every semester make me the best candidate for a position at your museum. I am sure you'll agree after reading my résumé! I will call next week to set up a meeting with you or your associates to discuss the ways I can help improve the ways the Colorado History Center researches and rehouses its photographs.

Thanks,

Crank E. Mann

This conclusion demonstrates poor self-awareness and could come across as arrogant. First, the applicant declares that he is the best candidate without having directly shown the relevance of his skills and assumes the reader will agree.

Second, he states that he will call to set up an interview. Demanding or expecting an interview is presumptuous; the internship director will call *him* if she wants to set up an interview.

Third, the applicant refers to the organization by the wrong name, again giving the impression of poor attention to detail (and possibly suggesting he is not serious about the position).

Fourth, the applicant's claim that he can help the Center "improve" their methods. Do not insult your potential employer by suggesting they do not know what they are doing.

Finally, there are notable shifts in tone here, from the unnecessarily formal (and poorly written) first sentence to the too-casual "thanks" in the closing.