



Office of Career Services

Cover Letter & Job Search Correspondence

Along with resumes and interviews, many employers view cover letter and job search correspondence as another indication of future job performance. Your written correspondence not only demonstrates your communication abilities, but it also reflects your attitudes and professionalism. Therefore, whether it is a cover letter, application letter or thank you letter, prepare all correspondence carefully and thoughtfully.

COVER LETTERS

The purpose of a cover letter—also known as a letter of application or inquiry—is to encourage an employer to review your qualifications and consider you for an interview. A cover letter should always accompany a resume.

As often as possible, address cover letters to individuals rather than "To Whom It May Concern." A printed advertisement, current corporate literature, the *Standard and Poors Directory*, various trade directories, and other indexes are resources which may list specific contacts. If a contact person such as a human resources manager or personnel manager cannot be found through these means, simply call the organization and ask "Who does the professional hiring for (the organization's name or a specific department)?" Make sure you get the proper spelling of the contact's name. Also note preferences for Ms., Dr., Mrs., Mr., their job title, and address.

Rather than a total repeat of your resume, your cover letter should emphasize unique qualifications and personal characteristics which are relevant for the particular organization, industry, or job opportunity. Think about -

- What are your particular strengths (assertiveness, creativeness, enthusiasm, etc.)?
- What accomplishments (academic achievement, campus leadership, athletic teamwork, etc.) are worthy of emphasis?
- Do you possess specific skills or talents (organizational skills, foreign language fluency, artistic abilities) which are relevant to the job?
- Can you communicate unspoken essentials of previous jobs (flexibility, conflict management, decision-making)?

Consider the employer's perspective and select 2 or 3 of the most relevant and impressive facts from your analysis. Organize these facts according to the most appropriate strategy for your cover letter.

Letters in Response to an Advertisement When you write in direct response to an advertisement, the ideal cover letter addresses job requirements and desirable personal characteristics mentioned in the ad. For example, if the advertisement says the company is looking for an assertive and energetic person, describe experiences which demonstrate these characteristics. Mention in your first paragraph where or how you found out about the opening.

"Shotgun" Approach Letters Letters written without specific knowledge of an opening, commonly known as approach letters, can generally be done in two different ways. One way is to construct a very generic letter, pick an industry or career area, and "shotgun" a number of resumes, in mass quantities. By putting a large number of correspondences in circulation, your numerical odds of a response may increase but some employers are turned off by indiscriminate mass mailing letters.

Targeted Approach Letter A more preferable type of approach letter is a "targeted inquiry" letter. The targeted letter's contents are tailored to the specific organization. Start with a statement that connects you to the reader. ("From my research on Johnson & Johnson...") Mention any personal referrals. ("Ms. ___ suggested that I contact you...") Make your purpose clear - whether you are writing to gain advice on career plans, obtain occupational information, or to discuss future work possibilities.

A cover letter should explicitly address what YOU can do for the organization, not what the organization can do for you. One of the most effective ways to do this is to research everything possible. Do your homework - get information about the industry and company by reading trade publications and business magazines, annual reports, and other corporate information. Contact trade associations for additional information. Incorporate company research findings about new accounts, the work environment, products, services, growth areas, and history with your specific qualifications and experience. ("My experience last summer at XYZ in public relations would be very beneficial as you expand new services into ___.") "Contribute" and "mutually beneficial" are convincing words that would demonstrate what you could do for the organization.

A good cover letter closing tells the reader what to expect in the future. Employers receive correspondence from hundreds of applicants daily. Be assertive in your letter and tell the reader that you will call within a specific time (typically 7 - 14 days) to confirm the receipt of your letter and discuss the possibility of an interview. Alternatively, you can state your availability for an interview at the employer's convenience. Mention any specific dates you will be in the employer's area. List your phone number again and the most likely times you can be reached. An expression of appreciation adds a nice final touch.

As is the case with your resume, it is imperative that your cover letter be free of typing mistakes, grammatical errors, and incorrect spelling. Also, make sure that you are as clear and concise as possible. Generally, cover letters are not longer than one page. The letter should be typed in a professional business-style structure (see this handout's example). Ideally, your cover letter paper and envelope should match your resume paper. Keep copies of all correspondence for later reference. Lastly, in all the excitement of getting your letter mailed, don't forget to SIGN YOUR NAME to the letter.

THANK YOU LETTERS

Thank you letters should be sent promptly after each interview. This is not only a business courtesy but a technique to enhance the effectiveness of your job search. Thank you letters do not need to be lengthy or elaborate. Use an enthusiastic but professional tone for the best results.

Your principle objectives in preparing thank you letters are: (1) to express appreciation for the opportunity to meet with the employer to discuss your qualifications; (2) to indicate your continued interest in the position; (3) to reiterate skills and experience relevant for the job; (4) to state that you are looking forward to the employer's favorable consideration of your candidacy.

In general, thank you letters sent after formal interviews should be typed and formatted as business letters. Use high-quality paper and, as always, make certain that thank you letters are error-free.

ACTION WORDS FOR PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS

Accomplish	Account	Acquire
Act	Analyze	Assemble
Calculate	Classify	Compete
Compile	Compute	Compose

Construct	Coordinate	Counsel
Create	Deal	Decision-making
Demonstrate	Design	Develop ideas
Direct	Edit	Empathy
Evaluate	Expedite	Foresight
Implement	Inform	Initiate
Innovate	Inspire	Instruct
Lead	Manage	Merchandise
Motivate	Negotiate	Organize
Persuade	Plan	Predict
Problem-Solving	Program	Promote
Question	Rapport	Relate
Research	Represent	Review
Sell	Speak	Structure
Systematize	Supervise	Train
Write		Visualize

PERSONAL DESCRIPTORS

Able	Achiever	Active
Adaptable	Alert	Ambitious
Analytical	Animated	Articulate
Assertive	Attractive	Bold
Bright	Caring	Certain
Cheerful	Competitive	Competent
Confident	Conscientious	Controlled
Cooperative	Courteous	Creative
Decisive	Dependable	Determine
Disciplined	Direct	Diplomatic
Driven	Efficient	Energetic
Enterprising	Enthusiastic	Expressive
Extrovert	Fair	Flexible
Friendly	Gentle	Giving
Gregarious	Honest	Hard-worker
Honorable	Humorous	Imaginative
Independent	Innovative	Inspiring
Intellectual	Intuitive	Kind
Knowledgeable	Leader	Lively
Logical	Loyal	Mature
Methodical	Meticulous	Observant
Optimistic	Organized	Original
Patient	Perceptive	Personable
Persuasive	Pleasant	Practical
Pragmatic	Precise	Progressive
Punctual	Questioning	Realistic
Reasonable	Relaxed	Reliable
Respectful	Responsible	Secure
Self-confident	Self-reliant	Self-starter
Sensitive	Sincere	Skillful
Spokesman	Sociable	Sophisticated
Stable	Supervisor	Supportive
Systematic	Tactful	Trustful

SUGGESTED COVER LETTER FORMAT

Current Address
City, State Zip Code

Today's Date

Mr./Ms. Person to Whom You Are Writing
Title
Name of Organization
Street Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name:

State why you are writing. Indicate the position, field, or general area about which you are writing. Explain how you found out about the opening/organization and briefly tell why you are interested in the organization, type of work, or location. Use caution when using I and me to avoid a self-centered tone throughout the letter.

Refer the reader to your resume and mention a few of your main qualifications and skills from past experience/education, which directly relate to the organization/position at hand. Describe some of your personal characteristics which are especially relevant. Always write from the reader's point of view, emphasizing what you have to offer. Avoid vague statements; give proof by concrete examples without repeating your entire resume.

In closing, seek to elicit a response from the employer. Restate your interest in the position; indicate your willingness to arrange an appointment at the convenience of the employer, suggesting possible dates and times. Another good option is to indicate that you plan to follow-up the receipt of your letter by making a phone call within a specific time period. Thank the reader for his/her interest and state that you are looking forward to talking with the employer.

Sincerely,

(Your handwritten signature)

Your typed name

Enclosures
(includes resume and reference page)

CORRESPONDENCE EXAMPLES

Use these examples simply as guidelines - your own letters should reflect careful self-analysis, research of the employer, and creativity.

Thank You Letter

Thank you for meeting with me Wednesday, April 14th to discuss the position of Copywriter at Burston-Marstellar. I appreciated the opportunity to discuss Burston-Marstellar's future and enjoyed interacting with the staff.

My ability to work under pressure and meet deadlines has been proven. I feel confident from our discussion of the special qualifications for this position that my skills and experience mirror your needs. As indicated, I enjoy the challenge of a competitive environment in which success is based on achievement.

Again, thank you for considering me for the position of copywriter. I look forward to hearing from you.

Application Status (*typical telephone guidelines*)

"Hello, this is _____. I am calling to check on the status of my application for the position of Human Resources Specialist. During our January 30th interview, you indicated a decision would be made by February 7th. I am still very interest in this position. *Could you tell me where you are in the hiring process? or Could I supply you with further information to facilitate the process? or When do you hope to make a decision?"*

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Letter of Acknowledgement

It was my pleasure to receive your phone call today offering the position of Branch Manager Trainee. The time you have given me to make my decision is appreciated. I am anxious to review the formal offer and benefits information you are forwarding to me.

Thank you for your positive response. I look forward to talking with you the first week of May.

Letter of Acceptance

I am pleased to accept your offer to begin employment with Memorial Hospital as a Public Relations Specialist. I look forward to a successful future working with the public relations team.

Per our conversation, I plan to begin work on June 15th. Thank you for the opportunity to work in such a dynamic health care organization.

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