

Writing Effective Letters

Objectives

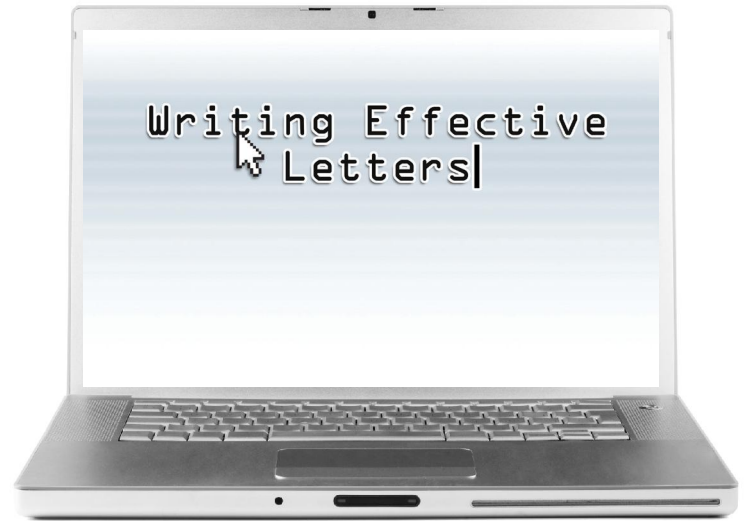
1. Develop a system to keep your communications with employers organized during your job search.
2. Identify the types of letters.
3. Know what to do and not do when writing a letter.
4. View sample letters.
5. Access additional sources of help.

Develop A System

Before you send any letters, it is important that you devise some way of keeping track of when and what you have sent. For instance, if you send a letter to Mr. X asking for an interview and offer to call him during the week of June 6, you need to have that date on record so you can be sure to meet that commitment. Also, if you are sending out 40 letters to various employers, it can be critical to know what you have said in a particular letter to be able to follow it up with accuracy. Two methods of organizing your letter campaign are to use a chart or file system.

Chart System

Create a chart with columns for the prospective employer's name, the person contacted, the date sent, any commitments you made in the letter, and follow-up actions. Make another chart showing the response you received from each letter with column headings, such as prospective employer's name, person who replied, date of reply, and action taken. Keep these charts current and file the letters you receive. This can be done electronically or in a more traditional manner—whatever suits your style. The main thing is to have a system.



File System

Save copies of all the letters that you send out and file them in a electronic or paper folder. Set up another folder for the correspondence you receive which calls for further action to be taken on your part and a separate folder for your rejection letters. This method can be especially helpful because you have access to all your letters for use when composing other letters. Also, you can look back over the letters and e-mails you have sent and see which ones were the most effective in generating interviews.

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Choice of Cover Letter Format

Although cover letters come in a variety of styles, this guide demonstrates two basic formats which may aid you in writing your individualized letter of application.

Broadcast Letter

Used to broadcast your availability to many employers in your field without composing a separate letter for each one. Although it is not usually used to pursue a specific job lead, it is wise to personalize it. Examples: "I am writing to highlight my qualifications for a position as an account executive at..." or "I am very aware of the changing role of the nurse in today's (hospital, clinic, etc.)." By inserting the appropriate word or phrase, you can tailor each correspondence with much less effort than individually composed letters.

Targeted Approach

Used to investigate a specific job lead. You may be answering an ad or following up on a suggestion offered from the Career Center, a relative, friend, etc. Since the position requirements are known to you, you would construct your letter to show how your abilities can be applied to meet the employer's needs. You also can make reference to specific information you discovered through conversations or by doing research about the organization. Examples: "My academic background, together with my work experience, has prepared me to function especially well as a Marketing Specialist for IBM." Or "I am impressed by your continual growth through grant-funded activities." See the *Cover Letter Outline* included in this guide.

Do s and Don t s of Letter Writing

Do

- Follow rules of layout and format of a standard business letter.
- Slant letter toward what you can offer employers, not what they should be offering you.
- Address, whenever possible, to an individual, with his/her correct title.
- Spell, punctuate, and format correctly in print and e-mail communication!
- Write in your own words and use conversational language.
- Hand-sign, rather than type your signature (unless the letter is sent electronically).
- Use good quality paper.
- Be brief, concise, and to the point.
- Close with a direct request for some sort of action (an initial phone conversation or meeting).
- Take advantage of any link to the employer that can give you an edge over the competition (for example, mentioning the name of someone you know in the organization).
- If you are communicating with employers via e-mail and are including an attachment, make sure the document is one they can easily open.

Don t

- Use stilted language or phrasing.
- Use gimmicks in an attempt to be original or clever.
- Load with constant use of "I."
- Be arrogant or indicate the employer would be lucky to hire you.
- Be excessively emphatic about your reliability, capacity for hard work, or intelligence. This kind of self-appraisal is usually best understated. The appearance and tone of your letter and resume can say more about you than you can gracefully say about yourself.

Other Types of Letters

Inquiry Letter

First, prepare a list of organizations which complement the position you are seeking, as well as your interest and training. Then, write a letter of inquiry to contact employers requesting employment information. It is important to research the organization as much as possible to give credibility and insight to your contact letter. In your letter:

- Write to a specific person within the organization. As a general rule, in larger organizations, send the letter to the Personnel or Human Resources Department - the Manager of Employment, Recruitment, or Personnel. Directing your letter to the key executive or manager in the department to which you are applying is also advisable. If the contact person's name is not available, address your letter: "Dear Madam or Sir" or "Dear Selection Committee chair."
- State your exact interest in the organization and explain why they should be interested in you. The more you know about employers, the easier it will be to tailor your letter to their needs and interests.
- Emphasize your positive assets and skills. Be as specific as possible about the type of position you are seeking and tie this to your knowledge of the organization and its products, services, or business.
- State when you would be available to meet for an interview and include a phone number and/or e-mail where you can most easily be reached.

Response Letter to Help Wanted Ad

It is important to thoroughly read and reread the job advertisement to determine what the potential employer is looking for. Try to speak to the "needs" of the organization evidenced through the ad. Some reading between the lines may be necessary so that you can tailor your response. Be sure to:

- Answer the ad as soon as possible after it appears. However, make sure that you allow yourself enough time to prepare adequately.
- Be as innovative as possible. Make sure your letter stands out from the wave of response letters the employer is sure to receive.
- Follow the advertisement's instructions

carefully regarding where the response should be directed and what to include (e.g., resume, statement of geographic preference, etc.) Answer all questions, with the exception of responding to a request for salary requirements. In this case, it is advisable to avoid the question and simply indicate that it is open or negotiable.

- Be brief. Letters should be individualized, concise, and factual.
- Always consider the reaction of employers by putting yourself in their place. Try to determine what accomplishments and skills would be most attractive to a particular employer.
- Be straightforward, professional, and businesslike—remember you are selling yourself. As with the resume, stick to the facts.

Remember that the primary purpose of the letter is to get you in the door for the interview—make sure the letter has impact.

Interview Appreciation Letter

Follow up interviews with a thank-you letter or e-mail expressing appreciation for the interviewer's time. Not only is this an accepted courtesy, your letter can also refresh your session in the mind of the interviewer. When a trip to the organization was required, the appreciation letter may accompany your expense account for the visit. In your letter:

- Express appreciation for the interviewer's consideration and arrangement of the meeting.
- State the date of the interview and name of the employer.
- Reiterate your interest in the employer by mentioning new points or assets you may have forgotten to address in the original interview.
- Ask any questions you may have which were not answered in the original interview.
- Express your anticipation to receive word regarding their decision.

Letter of Acknowledgment

Once you have received an offer from an organization, it is important to respond as soon as possible. While an immediate “yes” or “no” is not essential, acknowledgment of the offer is expected. In your letter:

- Acknowledge receipt of offer.
- Express your appreciation for the offer.
- Notify the employer of the date by which you expect to make your decision.

Letter of Acceptance

Once you have decided to accept the offer, the employer should be notified immediately. It is not necessary to wait until the offer expiration date before contacting the person making the offer. Employers will appreciate your promptness as it will allow them to assess the status of their personnel selection process. In your letter:

- Acknowledge your receipt of the offer by letter, face to face meeting, or telephone call on the date it occurred.
- Be as specific as possible, mentioning starting salary and supervisor’s name. Be sure to list and detail all items (benefits, moving expenses, etc.) agreed to in the offer.
- State when you will be able to report to work. Acknowledge if employment is contingent on any events, such as award of a degree, passing of physical examination, etc.
- Express appreciation to contact person and anyone else who has been particularly helpful.
- Ask if any other information is required, or if additional details should be attended to prior to reporting.

Letter of Declination

As a matter of courtesy, a letter of declination is due to those organizations whose offers you are rejecting. Despite the negative nature of the correspondence, it is vital that these employers know your decisions. Such a letter often follows a telephone call, making your decision a matter of record and avoiding any confusion arising from verbal communication. In your letter:

- Express your appreciation for the offer.
- State the exact position for which you were being considered.
- Mention the name of your potential supervisor.
- Decline graciously.
- Briefly explain the reason for your choice, sticking to the facts.
- Do not profusely apologize as it is not necessary. Simply re-express your appreciation.

Additional Resources

For further assistance in the development of your letter(s), the following resources are available.

1. Sections I, IV, and V in the Career Center Library contain books, chapters, or partial units on letter preparation. Check Career Key for specific resources.
2. Attend one of the combination cover letter and resume writing workshops held in the Career Center periodically during the semester. A schedule of these workshops is available on the Career Center Web site, career.fsu.edu.
3. Review “Sample Letters” in notebooks at the Career Center Library.
4. Read *Job Choices*, available through the Career Center, particularly the letter strategy and sample section.
5. Have your letter(s) critiqued by a career advisor.

* Cover letter formats adapted from The Princeton Review’s *Job Notes: Cover Letters*, by L. Michelle Tullier.

Cover Letter Outline: Semi-Block Format

Your name
Your street address
City, State, Zip Code
Date

Ms. Jane Employer
Title
Organization
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Ms. Employer:

First paragraph • Tell why you are writing; name the position, field, or general career area in which you are interested. Tell how you heard of the opening or organization (this is especially important if you were referred by a mutual contact).

Second paragraph • Mention one or two of your qualifications that you believe will be of greatest interest to the organization, slanting your remarks to their point of view. Tell why you are particularly interested in the employer, location, or type of work. If you have related experience or specialized training, be sure to point it out. Refer the reader to the enclosed application form, resume, and/or the fact that XYZ Career Center has on file or will send full credentials to provide additional information concerning your background and qualifications.

Third paragraph • Close by making a request for an opportunity to talk with the employer. Indicate that you will follow up with a phone call or e-mail about the possibility of a meeting. If your request is not concerning an interview but more information on the organization and current job openings, you can request that the information be sent electronically. Prior to requesting this information, make sure it is not readily available on the organization's Web site. Thank the employer for his/her consideration of your application materials.

Sincerely,

Your handwritten signature

Your typed name

Encl.

Sample Cover Letter: Block Format (the most acceptable and formal)

Jennifer Stevenson
222 Ocala Drive
Tallahassee, FL 32306
October 15, 2008

Mr. Alex Johnson
Vice President
Johnson & Johnson, Medical Products Division
One Johnson & Johnson Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08993

Dear Mr. Johnson:

I am currently a senior at Florida State University and will graduate with honors this spring with a degree in Biology. My goal is to pursue a position as a medical representative with Johnson & Johnson. In this position, I hope to contribute to a professional environment of committed employees working together to achieve goals set by Johnson & Johnson.

While attending Florida State University, I have held many leadership positions that required organization, discipline, and commitment. These experiences have provided the opportunity for me to obtain wisdom and understanding in guiding a group of individuals. Through my academic achievements, I have gained acceptance to several honor societies, including Phi Beta Kappa, and university-wide recognition for dedication to leadership in the form of the Golden Key Leadership Award. My academic achievements, combined with experience in sales and marketing, will enable me to play a strong role as an employee with Johnson & Johnson.

I have enclosed my resume and look forward to discussing an opportunity to interview for a professional position with Johnson & Johnson. I will follow up in the next week regarding this request. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Stevenson

Encl.

Sample Cover Letter: Modified Block

Joanne Taylor
105 Seminole Lane #100
Tallahassee, FL 32304
October 24, 2008

Mary Ross
Human Resources Manager
Guess, Inc.
1444 South Alameda Street
Los Angeles, CA 90021

Dear Ms. Ross:

I am interested in the spring 2009 merchandising or retail buying internship in California or New York that was advertised on the Guess Web site. My experience in retail sales and customer relations, combined with my courses in fashion merchandising at Florida State University, make me an excellent candidate for an internship position with Guess.

Your internship position requires past experience in and knowledge of retail. I have worked in three Express stores where I received several awards for outstanding sales performance. My work at Express also helped me develop a greater understanding of customer relations. In addition, the Fashion Merchandising program at Florida State has taught me countless business skills to further my career. A recent presentation I gave as part of a group project in Merchandising class resulted in praise from the professor and the highest grade for the group. Many of my portfolios also received high marks and approval from several professors in my program. I have enclosed a resume with additional details of my qualifications.

My experiences and education match well with your internship requirements, and I am genuinely interested in a position with Guess. I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss how my experiences would benefit Guess, and will contact you within a week to see if a meeting can be arranged. If you have any questions, please call me at (850) 474-7214 or e-mail jbt06@fsu.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Joanne Taylor

Encl.



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Alternative Format Available.
Revised 5/09 Pub ID: 50
