

Writing Effective Letters

Objectives

1. Develop a system to keep your communications with employers organized during your job search.
2. Identify types of letters to use in your job search.
3. Learn do's and don'ts for writing a professional letter.
4. View sample letters.
5. Access additional sources of help.

Develop a System

Before you send any professional letters, it is important 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. If you are sending out 40 letters to various employers, it can be critical to know what you have said in a particular letter in order 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 taken. 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 both the letters you send out and those you receive. This can be done electronically or in a more traditional manner, depending on your style. The main idea is to have a system.

File System

Save copies of all the letters you send and file them in an electronic or paper folder. Set up another folder for the correspondence you receive that requires further action on your part and a third folder for your rejection letters. The file system can be especially helpful because you can access previous correspondence when composing additional letters. You also can look back over the letters and emails you have sent and see which ones were the most effective in generating interviews.



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Cover Letters: Choose an Approach

Cover letters are documents generally written as part of a job search campaign. They can either announce your availability for candidacy or accompany an application to help explain to an employer why you are a strong candidate for a particular position. When writing a cover letter, choose an approach based on what you are seeking to accomplish with the letter.

Broadcast Letter Approach

This type of letter is used to broadcast your availability to many employers in your field. Although it is not usually used to pursue a specific job lead, it is wise to personalize this letter. For example, "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

This approach is used to investigate a specific job lead. You may be answering an ad or investigating a suggestion offered from The Career Center, a relative, friend, faculty member, etc. You may also mention specific information you discovered through conversations or by doing research about the organization.

Tailor your letter to the job description specified in the ad. Some reading between the lines may be necessary so you can customize your response. Be sure to:

- Apply for the job posting as soon as possible after it appears. However, make sure you allow yourself enough time to adequately prepare.
- Be creative and authentic. Interpret the employer's needs and be sure to articulate how your qualifications and experiences meet these needs. Make sure your letter stands out from the wave of response letters the employer is sure to receive.
- Follow the instructions carefully regarding where the response should be directed and what to include (e.g., résumé, statement of geographic preference, etc.).
- Answer all questions, if provided, 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 salary is 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 marketing yourself. As with the résumé, stick to the facts.

View the "Example Cover Letters" on page 5 of this guide to get an idea of how to format and design content for a cover letter.

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

Cover Letter Do's and Don'ts

Do

- Spell, punctuate, and format correctly in print and email communication.
- Write in your own words and use conversational language.
- Whenever possible, address to an individual, with his/her correct title.
- Slant letter toward what you can offer employers, not what they should be offering you.
- Be brief, concise, and to the point.
- Take advantage of any link to the employer that can give you an edge over the competition (mentioning the name of someone you know in the organization or a mutual contact).
- If including an attachment with an email to an employer, make sure the document can be easily opened (a PDF, for example).
- Hand-sign in addition to typing your signature (unless the letter is sent electronically).
- Use quality paper.
- Close by expressing a wish to speak further about the position and how you might contribute to the organization.
- Include your contact information.

Don't

- Use overly formal language or use words incorrectly.
- Use gimmicks in an attempt to be original or clever.
- Lead with constant use of "I."
- Be arrogant or indicate the employer would be lucky to hire you.

organization as much as possible to give credibility and insight to your contact letter.

In your inquiry letter:

- Write to a specific person within the organization. As a general rule, send the letter to the Employment, Recruitment, or Personnel Manager in the Personnel or Human Resources Department. 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: "To whom it may concern" or "Dear Hiring Manager."

- 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 email where you can most easily be reached. You can also write that you will follow up via phone or email within a certain time frame.

Interview Appreciation Letter

Following the interview, send a thank you letter or email expressing appreciation for the interviewer's time. Not only is this an accepted courtesy, but your letter can also refresh your session in the mind of the interviewer. 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 a 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 acknowledgment letter:

- Acknowledge receipt of the 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 acceptance 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 events, such as graduation, certification, etc.
- Express appreciation to your 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 declination 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.

*Types of letters adapted from *The Princeton Review's Job Notes: Cover Letters*, by L. Michelle Tullier.

General Formatting Guidelines

Professional letters can be written in a number of formats and include various content depending on your intention for writing and the type of letter. How you format your document is really a matter of personal preference; however, below are some general guidelines to help you get started:

- Set margins between .05" and 1."
- Try to keep length to 1 page.
- Use a font size of 11 pt or 12 pt and an easy-to-read font style (such as Times New Roman).
- In general, do not use indentation for paragraphs and left-adjust text. There is some flexibility as to where you list contact information, but the body of the document should be left-adjusted (see sample letters in this guide).

Summary

There are a variety of formats, content choices, and purposes for writing professional letters. It is important to consider your intentions and the appropriate type of letter that corresponds to your current professional situation and needs. If you require additional assistance in writing a professional letter, visit The Career Center to have your document critiqued by a career advisor, view resources available in The Career Center Library, or attend a combination résumé and cover letter workshop. A schedule of workshops is available on The Career Center website, career.fsu.edu.

Additional Resources

Select Career Center Library Resources

<i>Best Keywords for Résumés, Cover Letters and Interviews: Powerful Communication Tools for Success</i>	VA E6
<i>Cover Letters that Knock 'Em Dead</i>	VC Y2
<i>Gallery of Best Cover Letters</i>	VC N6
<i>Get the Interview Every Time: Fortune 500 Hiring Professionals' Tips for Writing Winning Résumés and Cover Letters</i>	VA G7
<i>How to Land a Top-Paying Federal Job: Your Complete Guide to Opportunities, Internships, Résumés and Cover Letters, Networking, Interviews, Salaries, Promotions, and more!</i>	VIB2 W5
<i>Knock 'Em Dead Cover Letters: Cover Letter Samples and Strategies to Get the Job You Want</i>	VC Y3
<i>Monster Careers: How to Land the Job of Your Life</i>	V T3
<i>Sample Letters: Book A</i>	VC F5511
<i>Sample Letters: Book B</i>	VC F551
<i>The Elements of Résumé Style: Essential Rules for Writing Résumés and Cover Letters that Work</i>	VA B4
<i>The Quick Résumé & Cover Letter Book: Write and Use and Effective Résumé in Only One Day</i>	VA F2
<i>Vault Guide to Résumés, Cover Letters & Interviews</i>	V L4
<i>What Color is Your Parachute? Guide to Rethinking Résumés: Write a Winning Résumé and Cover Letter and Land Your Dream Job</i>	VA B43

Example Cover Letters

Cover Letter Template

Name (Optional)
Your Present Address
City, State, Zip Code

Today's Date

Person's Name
Title
Organization
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Name/Title:

1st Paragraph: Introduction. Greet the reader and inform him or her of the position title and area/department to which you are applying. Reference how you found the position or who referred you to apply. Summarize your intention and reason for submitting yourself as a candidate. Transition into the next paragraph.

2nd and/or 3rd Paragraph: Qualifications and Fit. Help the employer see how your qualifications and experiences meet the needs of the position. Mention specific qualifications that you believe will be of greatest interest to the organization, slanting your remarks toward addressing specified requirements needed for success in the position. Do not simply restate your résumé. Rather, summarize your most relevant skills and experiences as they relate to the employer's needs. Help the employer see how you are a strong fit for the organization's culture by highlighting what interests you about the mission, vision, values, and/or projects and services. Emphasize how you would like to contribute your qualifications to benefit the organization.

Final Paragraph: Conclusion. Close by making a request for an opportunity to talk with the employer and include your contact information. If you intend to follow up with an email or phone call, you may say so here. If your request is not concerning an interview, but more information about the organization and current job openings, you can request the information be sent electronically. Prior to requesting this information, make sure it is not readily available on the organization's website. Include your contact information and any preferences for how you prefer to be contacted. Thank the employer for their consideration of your application materials.

Complimentary Close (such as "Sincerely" or "Best Regards"),

Your Handwritten Signature

Your typed name

Example Letters: Broadcast Cover Letter

Jennifer Stevenson
222 Ocala Drive
Tallahassee, FL 32306

April 5th, 2015

Mr. Alex Johnson
Vice President
Johnson & Johnson, Medical Products Division
One Johnson & Johnson Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08933

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Greetings, and I hope this finds you well. My name is Jennifer Stevenson, and I am currently a senior at Florida State University graduating with honors this spring with a degree in Biology. My goal is to pursue a position as a medical sales representative upon graduation in May, and I would like to present myself as a candidate for any open positions you may have at this time. I believe I am a strong fit for the Johnson & Johnson company culture, and I would love to contribute my qualifications to a professional environment of committed employees.

While attending Florida State University, I have held many leadership positions, which 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 my sales and marketing experience, will enable me to play a strong role as an employee with Johnson & Johnson.

I have enclosed my résumé for your review and would appreciate an opportunity to discuss my qualifications and potential employment with Johnson & Johnson. I can be reached at (850) 555-5544 or via email at zyx@fsu.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Stevenson

Example Letters: Targeted Cover Letter

105 Seminole Lane, #100
Tallahassee, FL 32304
September 23, 2015

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

Dear Ms. Ross:

I am interested in the Spring 2016 Merchandising or Retail Buying internship in California or New York with Guess, Inc., which was advertised on the Guess website. I feel my experience in retail sales and customer relations, combined with my courses in retail merchandising and product management at Florida State University, make me a strong candidate for an internship position with Guess, Inc.

In reading the position description, I understand that this internship requires past experience and knowledge in retail. My work experiences include positions in three separate 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 Retail Merchandising and Product Management program at Florida State has taught me valuable skills in business administration and management. I would very much like to contribute the knowledge and skills I gained through these experiences to serve customers as a member of the Guess, Inc. team.

What draws me most to your organization is the success of Guess, Inc.'s ability to merge European and American style into a unique branding concept. I feel that working for an organization that transforms opposing global perspectives into iconic fashion would allow me to build my skills portfolio while working toward my long-term career goal of managing the buying division of an international fashion label. It would be an honor to work alongside individuals with goals and passions that mirror my own.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss how my experiences would benefit Guess. I will follow up via email in the next week. Should you need to contact me, I can be reached via phone at (850) 474-7214 or email at abc12d@fsu.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Joanne Taylor

Contributors: Amanda Sargent, Casey Dozier, Kristin Zaideman, Emily Kennelly



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Alternative Format Available
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