

# Professional Correspondence: How to Write Effective Letters

Use the following resource as a  
guide to creating essential  
job search letters



## INTRODUCTION

Written correspondence, specifically your cover letter, may be the most important aspect of your job search. Students spend a great amount of time on their resume and neglect the importance of a strong cover letter. After all, a cover letter is often the first contact you will have with a prospective employer.

This guidebook will focus mainly on cover letter writing, but will also include information on other forms of professional correspondence including thank you letters, acceptance letters, and more.

### GENERAL RULES FOR ALL PROFESSIONAL CORRESPONDENCE

As you work your way through the job search process, there are several rules that must be followed for all types of correspondence. The physical layout and design of a professional letter enhances the appearance and creates a favorable impression on the reader.

- Choose a standard letter style; usually block format or letterhead format.
  - In block format, everything is left justified

5701 Delhi Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45233

March 17, 2009

Mr. Fred Brown  
Marketing Director  
ABCD Company  
1234 Main Street  
Cincinnati, OH 45222

Dear Mr. Brown:

Sincerely,

Enclosure

- In letterhead format, your heading should match the heading on your resume

**Jane Jones**  
5701 Delhi Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45233  
(513)456-7890 \* Jane\_Jones@mail.msje.edu

March 17, 2009

Mr. Fred Brown  
Marketing Director  
ABCD Company  
1234 Main Street  
Cincinnati, OH 45222

Dear Mr. Brown:

Sincerely,

Enclosure

- Your letter should have an overall balanced look.
  - It should be centered left to right and top to bottom.
  - Margins should be 1” to 1 ½”, or equivalent to the margins on your resume.
- Choose businesslike fonts that are easy to read.
  - The most common fonts are Times (Times Roman or Times New Roman) or Helvetica (Arial or Univers). Arial and Garamond are also acceptable alternatives.
  - The font size should be 10 to 12 point. Avoid smaller size fonts since they may be hard to read.
- Use good quality paper, 8 ½” by 11”, preferably in white or ivory.
  - Be sure the color and weight of the envelope matches the letter stationery.
- If your letter will accompany your resume, ideally it should share the same font, size and paper to match your resume.
- All subsequent letters should follow the same format and use the same font, size and paper. A coordinated letter writing campaign will present a professional package to the prospective employer.
- Proofread and check your letters thoroughly for errors.
  - Ask a friend or the Career Center staff to proofread your letter to make sure that it is error free and easy to read. Call the Career Center main office for an appointment, 513-244-4721.

## WRITING EFFECTIVE COVER LETTERS

The first task in writing an effective cover letter is to understand its purpose which is summarized as follows:

- To serve as a business transmittal letter for your resume.
- To introduce you and your employment credentials to the employer.
- To generate employer interest in interviewing you.

In general, keep in mind that a cover letter should complement, not duplicate your resume. Your cover letter should add a personal element to the factual resume.

## TYPES OF COVER LETTERS

There are three general types of cover letters:

- The **application letter** which responds to a known job opening (See attached sample).
- The **inquiry letter** which inquires about possible positions (See attached sample).
- The **informational interview letter** which requests information and assistance in your job search (See attached sample).

You will need to write cover letters for each purpose outlined above and also for every position you seek. Using the same letter repeatedly is not appropriate; you must personalize each letter to the specific position or purpose. A good cover letter should state the reasons for your interest in the employer and explain which of your skills and experiences are most important to that employer.

## COVER LETTER CONTENT & COMPONENTS

To be effective, your cover letter should address three general issues: why you are writing, what you have to offer, and how you will follow-up.

- Salutation/Greeting.
  - Make every effort to include a person’s name to address your letter. If you can’t locate the person’s name, address your letter to “Dear Sir/Madam:” or address it to “Dear Hiring Manager:” Another option is to address it to the search committee such as “Dear Marketing Associate Search Committee:”
- In the first paragraph, state why you are writing.

- If you are writing to apply for a position you saw advertised, indicate the position title, where and when you saw the advertisement.
- If you are writing a letter of inquiry – state that you are writing to inquire about the availability of positions you have an interest in.
- The next statement should grab the reader’s attention and indicate why you are interested in the company/position. This is where research on the company should be used. It will show the employer that you’ve done your homework.
- The middle paragraph(s) should emphasize your key accomplishments and skills in relationship to the employers needs.
  - Read the job description carefully and then match your accomplishments and skills to what the employer is seeking.
  - If you are writing a letter of inquiry – at least be aware of the attributes generally sought within your field of interest and then match your skills and accomplishments to those.
  - Remember to avoid repeating your resume; rather, enhance what is on your resume with more specific examples of your attributes related to the position requirements.
- Start the final paragraph with a statement that indicates how your skills and accomplishments will be of benefit to the employer in some way.
  - Next, specify what actions you desire and what action you plan to take by requesting an interview as well as specifying that you will follow up on your application materials with a phone call (identifying a specific date and time is recommended).
  - If the job posting or employer website indicates that you should not call the employer then do not include this information.
  - Thank the reader for their time and consideration.
- Closing.
  - Select a professional closing to your letter, such as: Sincerely, Sincerely Yours, Yours truly or Very truly yours.
  - Allow three spaces between your closing and your name.
  - If you are enclosing your resume, allow one space and type “Enclosure.”
- Sign your letter in blue or black ink if you are mailing documents.

### **OVERALL TIPS FOR WRITING COVER LETTERS**

- Every cover letter you send to an employer should be original and tailored to the position and organization.
- Each paragraph in your cover letter should be a separate but related idea.
- Keep focused on your central purpose and avoid including extraneous information. In other words, don’t babble, repeat yourself or use poor grammar.
- Keep the content interesting, energetic, and active by using lots of action verbs. Speak to your reader as if you were in a face-to-face conversation.
- Keep each paragraph relatively short: 4-5 sentences per paragraph is fine. Lengthy paragraphs are uninviting to the reader.
- Keep each sentence relatively short – 25 words or fewer per sentence. Long sentences are often difficult to follow, awkward, and irritating, especially if they require re-reading.
- Keep your letter reader-centered rather than self-centered. Avoid repeated reference to yourself as “I” or “my”. Instead, focus on the needs of the reader by referring to “you”, “your”, and “the company.” Remember the “Golden Rule” of writing: communicate what it is you will do for them rather than what you want them to do for you.
- Use action verbs and the active voice which energizes your writing. Avoid the passive voice which removes you from action and makes you sound less than enthusiastic. For example, contrast these two statements:
  - Passive: Production was expanded by 32 percent over a two-year period.
  - Active: Expanded production by 32 percent within two years.

The language of action verbs and the use of active voice are ideal for writing about your accomplishments. This allows you to sound like you can get things done.

- Inject energy, enthusiasm, and personality into your writing. Let the reader know that you are someone he or she will probably enjoy meeting in person.

## THE E-MAIL COVER LETTER

If you are sending your letters by e-mail, make sure they conform to the general requirements of a cover letter and to the requirements of your e-mail program. Your e-mail address, subject line, and content all have to be clear and appear appropriate to your recipient. Failure to do this can get your e-mail ignored and/or deleted as junk or spam. The following rules generally apply to e-mail:

- Only e-mail a letter and resume if requested or suggested to do so by the recipient.
- Send your letter from a professional e-mail address as that is the name the recipient will see in his inbox.
  - Your MSJ e-mail is acceptable and appropriate.
  - Something such as footballstar@... or cutegirl@... is not acceptable or appropriate.
- Use an attention-grabbing subject line.
  - Give the reader a reason to open your e-mail. One possibility is: "Information you requested." Another safe approach is to use the title of the position as the subject.
- Sending your cover letter and resume.
  - It is acceptable to send your cover letter as an attachment or as the body of your e-mail. However, it is highly recommended to send your resume as an attachment only. Keep in mind: the body of an email may look differently from another computer. Therefore, attachments tend to be the safest approach.
  - If you send your cover letter as an attachment, it is necessary to indicate this in the body of the e-mail. For example:

Dear Mr. Brown:

Attached please find my cover letter and resume in response to your job posting for a Marketing Associate. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jane Jones  
5701 Delhi Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45233  
(513)111-2222  
Jane\_Jones@mail.msj.edu

- If you are sending your cover letter and resume as an attachment, be sure to send them as a PDF file or Word document.
- Follow the rules for a professional e-mail.
  - Make sure to include a salutation (Dear Ms. Smith) and a standard closing (such as "Sincerely").
  - Leave blank lines between paragraphs.
  - Do not include abbreviations, emoticons (for example, smiley faces) or other shortcuts you may normally use in other e-mails.
  - Include complete contact information at the end of your message. This includes your name, mailing address, telephone number, and e-mail address.
- Stick with plain styling (ASCII text).
  - Save your cover letter as "plain text".

- Make sure your e-mail is also being sent in plain text – black font, normal size and typeface (10 point, Arial, Helvetica, Times Roman), on a white background.
- Always follow the company guidelines.
  - Many companies now have career centers on their corporate websites. It's better to take the time and check than to send something the company doesn't want.
- Carefully check your letter before sending it.
  - Proofread your letter after using your software's spellchecker.
- Send a test message to yourself or a friend before sending it to the company.
  - Even if you're sure your letter is perfect, send it to a friend or one of the Career Center staff first and ask them to check it once more. To e-mail an MSJ career counselor, the address is: [career\\_center@mail.msje.edu](mailto:career_center@mail.msje.edu).

## INTERVIEW THANK YOU LETTER

A thank you letter sent after an interview is a must. It is not only courteous but may give you an edge over other candidates. Your letter may be hand written, formal or e-mail. A hand written letter should only be used if you have good, clear handwriting, however, a handwritten letter may get you noticed. An e-mail letter should only be used if you have been communicating with the employer through e-mails. When in doubt, send a formal letter. Make sure you send a thank you letter within 24 hours. Your letter should:

- Be simple and brief, but add at least one specific detail from the interview.
- Express your appreciation for the interviewer's time.
- Show enthusiasm for the job.
- Get across that you want the job and can do it.

An example of the body of a formal thank you letter:

Dear Mr. Brown:

Thank you for the opportunity to interview with you last Thursday, June 12th to discuss the position of Marketing Associate at ABCD Company. It was a pleasure to meet with you and your staff. I am very impressed with your description of the future of ABCD Company.

The Marketing Associate position is exciting and I am confident that my background in marketing will enable me to contribute effectively to the team. As I stated during the interview, I have developed strong communication and leadership skills that will be useful in your collaborative work environment. My ability to work under pressure and meet tight deadlines has already been proven in the marketing co-op position I held with the EFGH Company. I hope to bring these skills to ABCD Company.

Again, thank you for considering me for the position of Marketing Associate. Should you need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

## 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 recommended without careful review, acknowledgment of the offer is generally expected. In your letter:

- Acknowledge receipt of offer.
- Express your appreciation for the offer.
- Confirm with the employer the date by which you agreed to make your decision.

An example of the body of an acknowledgment letter:

Dear Mr. Brown:

Thank you for your letter dated August 5<sup>th</sup> offering me the position of Marketing Associate with the ABCD Company. I appreciate your offer of the position with a starting salary of \$30,000 per year.

Thank you for allowing me time to consider the offer. I will let you know of my decision within two weeks, as discussed. I am very excited about this opportunity and again, thank you for the offer to join your company.

Sincerely,

## 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 or your agreed start date.
- 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.

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An example of the body of an acceptance letter:

Dear Mr. Brown:

As per our phone conversation, I am pleased to confirm my acceptance of the position of Marketing Associate. I am excited to join the ABCD Company team and am ready to make a positive contribution to the company.

As we discussed, my starting salary will be \$30,000 and will include the benefit package offered to all full time professional employees. I look forward to my first day of work on September 15, 2009.

Should you need any additional information, please feel free to contact me. Thank you again for the opportunity to join your company.

Sincerely,

## 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.

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An example of the body of a letter of declination:

Dear Mr. Brown:

Thank you for the offer of the position of Marketing Associate with ABCD Company. After careful consideration and as I stated in our phone conversation, I am declining your offer to take a position as Marketing Associate with ABCD Company to pursue graduate study in Marketing at XYZ University.

As I have expressed in previous conversations, I am impressed by the friendliness of your staff and the overall environment at ABCD Company. I sincerely thank you for the time and consideration you afforded me in this process. I wish your team continued success moving forward.

Sincerely,

## FINAL DO'S AND DON'TS OF LETTER WRITING

### DO

- Slant letter toward what you can offer employers, not what they should be offering you.
- Write in your own words and in conversational language.
- Be brief, concise, and to the point.
- Take advantage of any link to the employer that can give you an edge over the competition (e.g., mentioning the name of someone you know in the organization).

### DON'T

- Use stiff language or phrasing.
- Be gimmicky in an attempt to be original or clever.
- Load with constant use of the word "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.

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Please contact the Career & Experiential Education Center at 244-4721 or via AOL Instant Messenger (MSJCareerCenter) with any questions or for further assistance.

*Best of luck with your letter writing!*

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## SAMPLE APPLICATION COVER LETTER

1234 Amnesia Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45233

October 5, 2008

Ms. Mandy Moore  
Director, Human Resources  
Cincinnati Research Organization  
4444 Comedy Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45444

Dear Ms. Moore:

I am writing to express my strong interest in the Clinical Research position at the Cincinnati Research Organization. In addition to my education in psychology, my research background and proficiency in statistical programs demonstrates my passion to pursue a full-time position in clinical research and serve as an asset to your team. I am confident that my professional goals directly align with Cincinnati Research Organization's mission to provide innovative solutions to comprehensive questions utilizing a team approach.

My high level of motivation and excellent organizational skills allowed me to achieve a strong academic record at The College of Mount St. Joseph, reflecting my diligence and commitment to success. Rigorous liberal arts courses and a concentration in psychology provided me with a strong writing ability as well as sharp analytical and problem-solving skills necessary for this position. My refined research skills gained through my Senior Honors Thesis project and Research I & II courses will allow me to effectively compile and analyze data, as well as write reports from in-depth research to prove a specific thesis within this Clinical Research position. Through my liberal arts background and work history of completing reports, maintaining a database and managing files, I developed a strong sense of responsibility and effective interpersonal skills that will offer value to your team. I am confident that my extensive background, work ethic, and positive attitude will prepare me well for the Clinical Research position at Cincinnati Research Organization.

My enclosed resume will further outline my qualifications for the Clinical Research position. I look forward to an opportunity to discuss the position in detail with you in person. I will contact you in two weeks to follow up with my application. If you wish to arrange an interview, please contact me via email at Samantha\_Who@mail.msj.edu or by telephone at (513) 543-3210. I appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Samantha Who

Enclosure

## SAMPLE LETTER OF INQUIRY

### **Susan A. Educator**

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111 Monterey Lane  
Collegeville, California 45454  
(555)555-5555 Home \* (555)222-2222 Cell  
Susan\_Educator@mail.msjeu

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March 1, 2008

Dr. Harriet Hamilton  
Superintendent  
Desert Cove Unified School District  
333 Edgar Lane  
Desert Cove, California 55555

Dear Dr. Hamilton:

I am writing to inquire if you anticipate any elementary teaching vacancies in Fall 2008 in which I might be considered. Jane Harris, a former instructor in your district and currently my supervising teacher, recommended that I contact you. Desert Cove Unified School's goals of utilizing open classroom techniques and team teaching learning environments mesh well with my teaching philosophy. I am confident that I am well prepared for a position within your team given my comprehensive educational and teaching background.

As an honor student, I will receive my Bachelor of Arts degree in Inclusive Early Childhood Education and my teaching license in May 2008. My student teaching assignments provided me with team teaching opportunities in both primary and upper grades. As an actively involved team member, I participated with three teachers to target students' needs in Math and English. We developed small group and individualized instruction centers to reach clear objectives. As a result, we noticed significant improvement on weekly test scores. In addition to typical classroom proficiencies, I possess strong computer knowledge useful in assisting students on an individual basis in computer lab settings.

As you can see from my enclosed resume, teaching has been part of my life since 2002, when I was employed as an instructional aide. I sincerely look forward to sharing my enthusiasm, specialized educational training, and professional experience with Desert Cove Unified School District.

Should you foresee any positions for which I might be considered, I will complete the appropriate applications online. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to talk with you about elementary level teaching positions in your district and can be reached at (419) 999-8777 or (419) 666-5444. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Susan A. Educator

Enclosure

## SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW LETTER

5701 Delhi Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45233

March 23, 2009

Ms. Mary Smith, Director  
Public Relations  
Red, White and Blue  
1776 Patriotic Street  
Cincinnati, OH 45233

Dear Ms. Smith:

Fred Green, a professor in the Communications Department at the College of Mount St. Joseph, suggested I contact you regarding my interest in a career in Public Relations. I am exploring my career options upon graduation and Professor Green, knowing your extensive background in Public Relations, recommended you as a good person to offer advice.

As a junior at Mount St. Joseph, I am exploring different areas of the PR field. My coursework has introduced me to a variety of options and has helped me develop my writing and creative skills. I would appreciate the opportunity to talk with you about your career path, the pros and cons of PR, and the type of projects your agency accepts.

I would be pleased if you would be willing to meet with me for an informational interview. I will call next week to discuss an appointment time. In the meantime, if you would like to contact me, I can be reached by phone at (513) 123-4567 or email at [John\\_Student@mail.msj.edu](mailto:John_Student@mail.msj.edu). Thank you, in advance, for taking the time to talk with me about your public relations career.

Sincerely,

John Student

## COVER LETTER EVALUATION CHECKLIST

### Format:

- Is formatted in a standard letter style (block or letterhead format)
- Includes your complete contact information (name, address, phone number, and email address)
- Is addressed to a specific person by name
- Includes an appropriate salutation (Dear Mr. Smith)
- Includes a standard closing (Sincerely)
- Is signed in blue or black ink
- Is one page in length

### Content:

- Is original and is tailored to the position and organization
- Is well organized , clear, concise, and to the point
- Is focused on your purpose and is positive
- Is reader centered rather than self centered
- Each paragraph is a separate but related idea
- Clearly explains your objective – what you are seeking and what you have to offer
- Shows that you have researched the company and its mission
- Targets your skills and your qualities that will benefit the organization
- Contains complete sentences with action verbs
- Is interesting to the reader - demonstrates energy and enthusiasm - while still being professional
- Includes a follow up statement requesting the next step in the process

### Overall Appearance:

- Looks like a professional document and is pleasing to the eye
- Uses the same font, size, and paper as your resume
- Page margins are appropriate and the letter has an overall balanced look
- Is free of typos, spelling mistakes, and grammatical errors

# Still have questions? Need help on revisions?

Contact:

**Tricia Raiti**

Career Development Coordinator

Tricia\_Raiti@mail.msj.edu

Or

**Julie Keller**

Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator

Julie\_Keller@mail.msj.edu



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