

The SCC offers the following resources and services for job search letters.

Workshops: Resume and Cover Letter Tips are given each semester by SCC staff. Go to the SCC website and click on Calendar for times and locations.

Recommended Websites:

National Association of Colleges and Employers
www.jobweb.com

Cover letter sites from The Riley Guide
www.rileyguide.com/cover.html

Overnight Review Service: Drop your job search letters off at the front desk of the SCC. Your career advisor will review it for you. Pick it up after 4:00 p.m. the following day at the front desk.

Sample books available in the Pardieck Memorial Career Library:

Job Choices (pick up your free copy in the SCC)

The Guide to Basic Cover Letter Writing

Killer Cover Letters

What are Job Search Letters?

There are several types of letters used in a job search. Because these written forms of communication are so critical to your success in obtaining interviews and to your ultimate goal of accepting a job offer, cover letters must be carefully thought out, composed and edited. Several job search letters are described and outlined in this guide, but the most common fall under the category of "cover" letters.

What are the Two Types of Cover Letters?

There are basically two types of cover letters:

Letter of Inquiry, or "Prospecting" letter. Its purpose is to inquire if there are any openings related to your professional interests, educational background, skills and abilities.

Letter of Application, also known as a "Cover" Letter. Its purpose is to apply for what you know or assume to be a specific opening, based upon a written advertisement or a referral from another source (friend, faculty member, job fair, etc.). This letter is sent with your resume and expands upon the information found in your resume. Its intent is to get you an interview by clearly stating your educational background and work qualifications, plus any other related experiences that match the needs of the employer. It gives you the chance to distinguish yourself from other candidates.

Cover letters should always be limited to ONE PAGE (3-4 paragraphs). Because these are often your first contact with a prospective employer, effective cover letters should:

- Be addressed to an individual and targeted towards that particular employer – "GENERIC" letters are almost always INEFFECTIVE.
- Expand upon the facts in your resume; do not repeat the information. Talk about your skills and accomplishments related to target job. Bullets can be an effective way to visually emphasize them.
- Draw a match between your background, abilities and interests and how they would meet the needs of the employer.
- Demonstrate your communication skills and vocabulary.
- Prompt the reader to take some type of action regarding your application, which should ultimately result in an interview.

What are the Accepted Formats for Job Search Letters?

The following are two preferred formats or styles of letters:

Full Block Style

This is the most commonly used business letter format, where all lines begin at the left-hand margin of the page. Paragraphs are not indented and lines are single spaced. There should also be spaces between each paragraph. This is the easiest style to use on a computer.

Letter of Application or Inquiry

Full Block Style

1" margins on all 4 sides

4 -6 blank lines
Depending on the
length of the letter

1515 West Bradley
Peoria, IL 61606
January 25, 2002

Return address
with date

Ms. Patricia M. Benjamin
Director of Human Resources
UniTech, Inc.
2692 North New Hampshire Rd.
Chicago, IL 60606

Inside address -
Include name, title, organization
name, address, city, state, and zip

2 blank lines

Salutation
(Followed by a colon)

Dear Ms. Benjamin:

2 blank lines

ATTRACT
ATTENTION

Your opening paragraph should clearly state your reason for writing and spark the employer's interest. If you are responding to an advertisement, say so, living the name and date of the publication or Web site where you saw the listing. If you learned of the position through a friend or faculty member, mention the person's name.

EMPHASIZE
YOUR
QUALIFICATIONS

In a second paragraph elaborate briefly on your degree/major, related experience, strong set(s) of skills. Refer to portions of your enclosed resume that are particularly relevant to the job in question. This is much easier to do if you have a job description! Try to relate how your background and experience will benefit the employer. (This will require research about the organization). If possible, avoid "self-serving" statements about what the job can do for you.

PROVIDE
SUPPORTING
EVIDENCE

In another (optional) paragraph, provide additional proof of your abilities by:
- describing specific accomplishments or
- highlighting specific job-related skills, qualities

Complimentary
Closing

2 blank lines

Sincerely,

4 blank lines for your signature

Enclosure
notation

Thomas F. Green

2 blank lines

Enclosure

Modified Block Style

All parts of letters in this format line up at the left margin except the return address, date, complimentary closing and signature line. These entries begin at (or a few spaces to the right of) the center line of the page.

While there is not a preferred format, you should consider the following issues in all your job search correspondence:

- Use a high-quality printer
- Use resume paper
- Consider who the reader is...use easy to read fonts
- Should be written in YOUR OWN WORDS—AVOID USING LETTERS FOUND IN BOOKS AND ON THE INTERNET, ETC.

What are the components of a cover letter?

There are basically eight parts to a cover letter: return address, date, inside address, salutation, body, complimentary closing, signature, and enclosure line (to identify any additional documents in the envelope you may have included, such as a resume or transcript. Consult the layout on the next page and also take note of the space allotted between each part.

What are the differences if I use email?

If you are emailing your resume to a prospective employer, you should always include a cover letter either in the body of the email or as an attachment. While it has become a comfortable and informal means of communicating, we suggest that you remember that this is still a business communication. While the formatting issues are different, the body of your cover letter, or other types of correspondence should remain the same. Remember, too, that emails should be proofed just as carefully as you would a hard copy of your cover letter or resume.

Your email address is also an issue to consider when you begin your job search. Employers may not want to reply to your message if your e-mail address is inappropriate. You may want to consider using your B-mail account.

Recommendations for Effective Cover Letters

Personalize Each Letter

Address the letter to a specific individual using his/her name, courtesy title (Dr., Ms., Mr., etc.) and his/her position in the organization - as always, with correct spelling! The SCC or the Cullom-Davis Library (or employer's Web site) may have this information, but you may have to telephone the organization to verify it.

Use Non-Sexist Language

When answering a blind advertisement where no name is provided, do not assume the gender of the contact person by opening the letter with "Dear Sir" or "Dear Madam." It is appropriate to use "Dear Director of Human Resources" or "Dear Marketing Coordinator." Rely on your best judgment in such cases. Also, if you have a contact name, but do not know the gender of the person, (e.g., "Pat Smith"), either call to find out the appropriate courtesy title, or use the salutation: "Dear Pat Smith."

Customize Each Letter

As you develop and polish your letter writing skills, you probably will rely on a core set of facts and phrases that best describes you and your job target(s).

Be sure you modify this information in each letter, depending on the employer and type of job opportunity. DO NOT copy letters from books or other sources. Remember to use the name of the employer in the body of the letter. Try to avoid using "your company" which may come across as generic.

Vary the Writing Style

Within the body of the letter, try to offset long sentences with shorter ones. Varying the sentence structure also helps to create a more interesting, effective letter. Another suggestion: DO NOT overuse the first person pronoun "I" especially at the beginning of sentences. Try to keep sentences short, concise and to the point.

Use Attention Getting Words

Create a positive "spin" by using descriptive adjectives and action verbs. Also, don't forget about NOUNS! More employers are using electronic scanners to read and evaluate letters and resumes. Be sure to use the key "buzz words" that are important in your career field when describing your training and work-related skills. It is important to speak positively, while providing an accurate description of your talents.

Proofread for Errors

Computer spell-checkers do not go far enough. To proofread for spelling errors, read the letter backwards from end to beginning, and really focus on each word. Also, proofread from beginning to end for grammatical errors.

Networking Letter (asking for information, not a job)

Personalize the Opening Paragraph

Develop rapport by giving the name of the person making the referral and the relationship to you. Or, indicate the source you used in locating the person.

State Your Purpose

Indicate your reasons for writing (e.g. arranging informational interviews or assistance in locating employment opportunities, internships or volunteer possibilities).

Tell a Little About Yourself

Give the person an idea of your interests, talents, skills and experience as they would relate to your purpose in writing.

Request Action

Request a response of desired action, such as arranging a meeting or a telephone conversation at a mutually agreeable time. Follow-up!

Thank-You Letter

Express Gratitude

Thank the employer for his or her time. Express your enthusiasm for the position. Send separate letters to each interviewer, if each interviewed you separately. However, in certain instances, you can ask the main interviewer to thank the others for you.

Restate your Interest and Qualifications

Explain how your qualifications fit with the position for which you have applied or interviewed. Mention highlights of the interview and how your background meets the need of the employer.

Note:

Send your thank you letter within a day or two of the interview. This can distinguish you from other candidates. You can also email a "thank you" to the employer.

Acknowledgement of a Job Offer

Acknowledge the Offer

Acknowledge the offer stating the specifics of the opportunity: job title, salary, starting date, starting location or any other terms of the contract that were conveyed to you verbally or in writing.

Extend Thanks and State Decision Date

Express appreciation and supply the date by which you will make a decision.

Declining an Offer

Express Thanks and Regrets

Express appreciation of the offer along with regrets that you are declining it. You do not need to give specific reasons for declining or the name of the organization whose offer you have accepted, if such is the case.

Note

Don't burn any bridges...you may decide to pursue employment opportunities with the organization in the future.

Accepting a Job Offer

Accept

State your acceptance at the very beginning, mentioning specifics of the offer: job title, salary, starting date, and other particulars.

Express Thanks and Enthusiasm

Indicate your enthusiasm about the career opportunity and your appreciation for their confidence in you reflected in the offer.