

Because they are so critical to your success in obtaining interviews and to your ultimate goal of accepting a job offer, all forms of written communication (either hard copy or email) must be *carefully thought out, composed, and edited*. There are basically two types of letters:

A *letter of inquiry* (Prospecting Letter) is used to inquire if there are openings related to your professional interests, educational background, skills, and abilities.

A *cover letter* (Letter of Application) is used as an introduction and should grab the employer's attention, highlighting why you -- above all other applicants -- are a great fit for the position (and organization) and therefore should be contacted for an interview.

Recommendations for Effective Cover Letters

- **Personalize Each Letter:** Address the letter to a specific individual using a name, courtesy title (Dr., Mr., or Ms.) and job title. You can find this information on the employer's web site, through Google or LinkedIn, in the SCC or Cullom-Davis Libraries, or you may need to call the organization. Avoid ineffective "GENERIC" letters (i.e. To Whom it May Concern, Sir or Madam, or Hiring Manager).
- **Use Non-Sexist Language:** If you do not know the contact person's gender (e.g. Pat Smith), it is appropriate to use "Dear Pat Smith" or a job title salutation like "Dear Director of Human Resources" or "Dear Marketing Coordinator."
- **Customize Each Letter:** Modify your core set of facts and phrases depending on the employer and type of job. DO NOT copy letters from web sites, books or other sources. Use the employer's name rather than the generic "your company."
- **Give Examples:** Provide specifics and highlight strengths and be clear about the aspects of the position and organization that interest you. Draw a match between your background, abilities, and interests and how they would meet the employer's needs.
- **Vary the Writing Style:** Offset long sentences with shorter ones to help create a more interesting, effective letter. DON'T overuse "I" especially at the beginning of sentences.
- **Use Attention Getting Words:** Use descriptive adjectives, action verbs, and KEYWORDS. More employers are using electronic scanners to read and evaluate letters and resumes, which may eliminate those without certain keywords.
- **Proofread:** Don't just rely on spell-check. Proofread for spelling by reading the letter backwards from end to beginning, focusing on each word. Then proofread from beginning to end for grammatical errors and flow. Have a friend review, just in case you missed something.
- **Finish Strong:** Prompt the reader to take action regarding your application, which should ultimately result in an interview (Ex., I look forward to hearing from you soon.).
- **Best Practices:** Use high quality paper and limit to ONE PAGE with easy-to-read font. A cover letter should always accompany a resume.

Accepted Formats of Cover Letters

- **Full Block Style** is the most commonly used business letter format, where all lines begin at the left-hand margin. Paragraphs are not indented and lines are single-spaced. There should be spaces between each paragraph. *This is an easy style to copy into an email.*
- **Modified Block Style** is where all parts of the letter line up at the left margin except the return address, date, complimentary closing and signature line, which begin at (or a few spaces to the right of) the centerline of the page. *This style is not commonly used.*

Types of Letters

Networking Letters (*asking for information, not a job*)

- Give the name of the referral person and your relationship (or the source you used in locating the person) in the opening paragraph.
- Indicate your reasons for writing (e.g. informational interview or assistance in locating employment, internships, or volunteer possibilities).
- Explain your interests, talents, skills, and experience.
- Ask them for a meeting or telephone appointment. Follow-up!

Thank-You Letters

- Thank the employer and express your enthusiasm by restating your interest and qualifications and how they fit. If there were multiple interviewers, send separate letters to each or ask the main interviewer to thank the others for you. Make sure to send a thank you letter or email in one to two days.

Acknowledgement of a Job Offer

- Acknowledge the offer stating the specifics: job title, salary, starting date, starting location or any other terms that were conveyed verbally or in writing. Express appreciation and supply the date by which you will make a decision.

Declining an Offer

- Express appreciation of the offer along with regrets that you are declining. You do not need to give specific reasons. Be professional! You may decide to pursue employment opportunities with the organization in the future.

Accepting a Job Offer

- State your acceptance at the beginning, mentioning specifics of the offer: job title, salary, starting date, and other particulars. Express thanks and enthusiasm about the career opportunity.

Talk with a Smith Career Center Career Advisor about other forms of letters, how and when to use each, and to have your documents reviewed.

[Sample Cover Letter, Full-Block Style]

<p><i>½" to 1" margins</i></p> <p><i>If submitting electronically, this area may be omitted.</i></p> <p><i>Attach the complete/formal cover letter to the email though.</i></p>	<p>Thomas F. Green 1234 East St., Apt. 456 Peoria, IL 61606</p> <p>November 1, 2016</p> <p>Ms. Patricia M. Benjamin Director of Human Resources UniTech, Inc. 2692 N. New Hampshire Rd. Chicago, IL 60606</p> <p style="text-align: center;">1-2 blank lines</p>
<p><i>May be omitted if sent electronically.</i></p>	<p>Dear Ms. Benjamin:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">1 blank line</p>
<p><i>Attract attention.</i></p>	<p>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, giving the name and date and of the publication or website where you saw the listing. If you learned of the position through a friend, faculty member, or other contact, mention the person’s name.</p>
<p><i>Provide supporting evidence.</i></p> <p><i>Don’t repeat your resume, use this to encourage them to read it.</i></p>	<p>In the second paragraph, elaborate briefly on your degree/major, related experience, and 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 (<i>this will require research about the organization</i>). Avoid “self-serving” statements about what the job will do for you.</p>
<p><i>Emphasize your related skills, abilities, and qualifications.</i></p>	<p>In another (<i>optional</i>) paragraph, provide additional proof of your abilities by describing specific accomplishments or highlighting specific job-related skills and qualities. Have at least one sentence explaining why you are interested in the company/organization. What makes it special? What attraction does it hold?</p>
<p><i>Actionable items and next steps</i></p>	<p>Whenever possible, avoid closing on a passive note (“I will wait to hear from you.”). State that you will follow up by phone (unless ad says “no calls”) or email and provide your phone number and email address. Remember to thank him/her for reviewing your qualifications.</p>
	<p>Sincerely,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">3-4 blank lines for your signature (if submitting electronically, reduce to 2 lines and omit signature)</p> <p>Thomas F. Green</p> <p>Enclosure(s) (<i>Attachment(s) if sent via email</i>)</p>

[Sample Thank You Notes, Electronic]

Dear Ms. Benjamin:

Your opening paragraph should contain some form of “thank you” in the first twelve words. Remind them about your interaction with them (as an interview follow up, for attending an event, for speaking with you, etc.). Use this note as a means to further the conversation you had with the individual.

The second paragraph can be used for a variety of purposes. You could elaborate on the interaction with the individual, clarify anything you feel was unclear, re-answer a question, answer an unasked (but necessary) question, etc. Use as many sentences as you feel are necessary. This is your opportunity to emphasize your strongest qualities and show how you are a good fit.

Your final paragraph should end with a different form of “thank you” in the last twelve words. State that you will follow up by phone or email and provide phone number and email.

Sincerely,
Thomas F. Green

Attachment(s) *(if any)*

[Sample Acceptance Letter, Full-Block Style]

Thomas F. Green
1234 East St., Apt. 456
Peoria, IL 61606

November 1, 2014

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

Dear Ms. Benjamin:

In your opening paragraph, state that you accept the offer (employment, internship, acceptance into a program, etc.). Restate any details to show you understand the offer. For example, the title of the position, start date, location, etc.

Indicate the next steps that have been shared with you. These could involve providing any additional documents, undergoing required exams, and/or completing specific forms.

The final paragraph should end with some form of “thank you” along with how much you look forward to joining the team, organization, and/or program.

Sincerely,

Thomas F. Green