

THE ART OF LETTER WRITING

Portland Community College – Cascade Career Services

Why letters are an important part of your job search?

The **cover letter**, or letter of application, gives you the opportunity to introduce yourself to an employer and to draw connections between the position you seek and the skills or experiences you have to offer listed on your resume. While a resume is often more broad, a cover letter can be tailored to address specific employment situations, questions, or positions. A cover letter must always accompany your resume so the recipient knows why s/he has received your resume.

Besides the cover letter, there are several other types of letters you will want to utilize in your job search. For instance, you may write an **inquiry letter** to an organization to find out more about employment opportunities for networking purposes or personal referral. Letters to **acknowledge** receiving an employment offer as well as to **accept or decline** an offer for employment are all useful communication tools. Finally, a **thank you letter** is appropriate to acknowledge a personal response or interview you have had recently.

Preparing to write your cover letter:

Before you actually write your cover letter, it is important for you to conduct some research on the position you are applying for. You will want to know as much as possible about the organization or business you are applying to. Identify and find out more about the organization's goals, growth potential, products, and services. The next step in your preparation is to identify why you want to work for a particular organization. Communicate your reasons and interest to them in your cover letter. You will then sound much more convincing that you are the person for the job.

GENERAL GUIDELINES IN LETTER WRITING

Depending on your situation, you will first need to decide what type of letter is appropriate for your situation. Regardless of the type of letter you are writing, keep the following points in mind:

- Individually type and hand-sign all letters.
- Do not allow letter to exceed one page.
- Use good-quality bond paper and matching business size envelopes.
- Make sure the type/font is of letter quality.
- It is preferable to address letters to a specific individual by name and title.
- Proofread your letter for typos, misspellings, and grammatical errors.
- Keep copies of all letters written and correspondence received for reference purposes.

SAMPLE FORMAT FOR COVER LETTERS

(Top and bottom margins should be approximately equal)

Date

Your street address
City, State, Zip

Ms. Maria Wells, Director
Marketing Division
American Industrial Corporation
1111 American Avenue
America, OR 97000

(Be sure to address the letter to the correct person, spelled correctly with their correct title.)

Dear Ms. Wells:

Opening Paragraph: State why you are writing, identify the position for which you would like to be considered, and indicate how you heard of the position. Mention any individuals who may have referred you to the position. If you are sending an inquiry letter, simply indicate the type of work or position you are seeking. Be specific. It is in your interest to come up with a targeted opening sentence that grabs the reader.

Middle Paragraph(s): Your goal here is to show how you can be useful to this particular organization. Describe what strengths you have to offer this employer. Highlight particular classes, internships, achievements, and extracurricular activities as they relate to the position you are interested in. You might want to use one of the following approaches.

- Identify three reasons for the employer to consider you for the position.
- Describe your previous accomplishments as they relate to the position.
- Illustrate the relationship between your skills and experience and the position you are applying for.
- State why you want to work for their organization.

Refer the reader to your enclosed resume for additional information.

Closing paragraph: End your letter by clarifying what will happen next and how they can most easily reach you. If you are applying for a specific job which has been posted, you might say, "I look forward to meeting with you to discuss my qualifications in more detail. I can be reached between (time) on (days) or a message may be left at (phone # or email)." If you are not applying for an existing opening, indicate that you will call them on a particular date to see if it would be convenient to set up a meeting, and also indicate how they can most easily reach you.

Sincerely,
(Always sign your name)

Allow 4 line spaces then type your name beneath your signature.

Enclosure (to indicate your resume and application materials are enclosed) abbreviation enc:

SAMPLE LETTER OF APPLICATION

September 19, 2008

705 N Killingsworth
Portland, OR 97217

Ms. Jan Williams
Director
International Volunteer Enterprises
123 Anywhere street N.E.
Anytown, OR 97000

Dear Ms. Williams:

I read the job announcement you recently sent to Portland Community College's CareerConnections web site, for students and alumni. I am writing to say that I would like to be considered for employment as the Coordinator of Volunteer Services. I will be graduating from the Portland Community College this June and I believe my educational background and work experience would contribute significantly to your organization.

Through my education at PCC, I acquired a strong background in international affairs and developed proficiency in both the German and Russian languages. As the coordinator of the community service program on campus, I have learned to plan and organize events, work with people from a variety of backgrounds as well as become more familiar with the needs and motivations of volunteers. My employment as a student assistant in the financial aid office has provided me with the opportunity to organize and evaluate data along with developing skills in customer service.

I am very interested in working for International Volunteer Enterprises because I believe the programs which it promotes make an extremely important contribution toward the attainment of international understanding. I am confident I have the skills and knowledge required to be a contributing member of the International Volunteer Enterprises team.

A letter and resume can tell you only so much about my motivation and qualifications. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my background with you in person at any time possible. I will call you at the end of next week to discuss whether such a meeting would be possible and to confirm appropriate next steps.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ivanna Job

Enclosure

SAMPLE COVER LETTER

Jane Doe
705 N Killingsworth Street
Portland, OR 97217

February 8, 2008

Ms. Louise Kratt
Manager of College Relations
PNW Publications
1234 XXXX Street
Portland, OR 97000

Dear Ms. Kratt:

Your February 6th ad in The Oregonian suggests that you need someone with a background in journalism and management for the position of Marketing Intern. This employment opportunity is of particular interest to me as I plan my graduation from Portland Community College in June with a transfer degree. I have been accepted to Portland State University where I will work towards my Bachelor's degree.

As a Communications major with an interest in Journalism, I would very much like to work in the public relations field. As my enclosed resume indicates, my work experiences revolve around journalism and administration. As a writer/editor for my high school paper and my church's newsletter, I've written more than thirty articles on various topics ranging from sports and entertainment to editorial commentary. I also developed my computer skills and was instrumental in the purchase and implementation of the newspaper's first computer-layout system. As a manager and administrator, I was able to successfully direct a 15 person writing staff by assigning story ideas, balancing deadlines, and giving the paper its overall editorial direction.

Through independent research, I have learned that PNW Publications is on the leading edge of developing communications through computer technology. I believe my experience with this area as well as my desire to succeed make me a strong candidate for the position. My enclosed resume will provide you with further information regarding my other related work experiences.

I look forward to meeting with you to discuss my qualifications in detail. As my resume indicates, I can always be reached at 421-7854c. or email Jane.Doe@pcc.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe

Enclosure

SAMPLE LETTER OF INQUIRY

October 3, 2008

705 N Killingsworth
Portland, OR 97217

Mr. Paul Jones
Nike Inc.
75 Bowerman Dr.
Beaverton, OR 97000

Dear Mr. Jones:

In a recent conversation with Mr. David Giles he suggested I contact you to explore a Legal Research Intern position with Nike Inc. I am familiar with the scope of Nike's projects and am eager to become part of such a dynamic organization.

I will complete the Paralegal Program this December and I am excited to utilize my research skills developed from work experience and my Bachelor's in English. As the enclosed resume indicates, I also hold a minor in Economics and have worked as an intern while earning my Bachelor's degree. In my work and internship positions I work independently and efficiently using communication, organization, research, and problem-solving skills on a daily basis.

I will contact you next week to see if an interview can be arranged.

Sincerely,

John Doe

Enclosure

SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

October 3, 2008

705 N Killingsworth
Portland, OR 97217

Ms. Ellen Humphries
President
Humphries and Associates
000 World Trade Center
Portland, OR 97000

Dear Ms. Humphries:

I appreciated the opportunity to talk with you on Monday, Oct. 2. The information you shared with me about Humphries and Associates was excellent and I am excited about the possibility of applying my education and experience to the position of Office Administrator as we discussed.

In addition to strong analytical skills and an ability to manage several projects simultaneously, I have much energy and enthusiasm to bring to the position.

If I can provide you with any additional information, please let me know. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe

SAMPLE LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE

June 24, 2008

705 N Killingsworth St.
Portland, OR 97217

Mr. Daniel Stone
Director of Personnel
Oregon Public Broadcasting
1234 Any Street
Portland OR 97222

Dear Mr. Stone:

I am writing to confirm my acceptance of the offer for a Community Outreach position at \$30,000 with OPB. As we discussed, I will begin on July 1, 2008 and will report to Ms. Sarah Piper at 8:00 a.m. on that day.

As I expressed to you on the telephone, I am very excited about this opportunity and look forward to being a member of the OPB team. Should you need additional information before my starting date, do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your offer, and I will see you on July 1.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe