

Correspondence with Employers

Whether you are conducting a job search for a full-time position, a summer job, or an internship, you will need to correspond with employers in the form of a letter. This handout will explain different types of letters, give you some tips on how to get started, and show you some examples to guide you through the process.

Cover Letters

A cover letter or application letter is used when applying for a position. It is your personal introduction to a prospective employer. It outlines your interest in the position and the career field, what appeals to you about the organization, and why you are qualified for the position. A cover letter should not be a written version of your resume. Make sure to include only your most relevant skills and experiences.

Unless instructed otherwise by the potential employer, you should always include a cover letter with your resume. A resume alone does not articulate your interests, skills, and qualifications for a position. Like the resume, a cover letter is used to convince the reader that you will be a good match for the position in their organization. Each cover letter you write should be tailored to a specific job description and/or organization.

Keep in mind employers want to know what you can do for them, not why the position would benefit you. Promote your knowledge, strengths and relevant qualifying experience. Pay attention to details! Spelling and grammatical errors will undermine even the best candidate's chances. Proofread your cover letters carefully. If submitting a hard copy, use resume-quality paper, print on a laser printer, and sign each letter individually. Limit the letter to one page, single-spaced and address it to the appropriate hiring official.

Other Types of Letters

Prospecting Letter

A prospecting letter is written to indicate your interest in an organization or a specific department within an organization. The purpose of the letter is to prospect for possible vacancies and to submit your resume to generate interviews.

Target Audience: Potential Employer

Networking Letter

A networking letter is written to generate informational interviews, which allow you to obtain job search advice in a specific career area.

Target audience: May include alumni, professional association members, or a referral from a faculty member or a supervisor.

Acceptance Letter

An acceptance letter is written to officially accept a job or internship offer, confirm the terms of employment, and reinforce the employer's decision to hire you.

Target audience: Hiring employer.

Withdrawal Letter

A withdrawal letter is written to inform an employer that you have accepted another offer or that you will not be accepting their offer and that you are withdrawing your application from further consideration.

Target audience: Employer.

Thank You Letter

A thank you letter is written to express appreciation for a job search action or opportunity and to establish goodwill and to strengthen your candidacy.

Target audience: Anyone who helps you in any way, such as interviewers, network contacts, and references.

Getting Started

Know Yourself

Identify your interests, skills, and any experiences that would be of interest to the employer. Identify your objective for writing the letter. Is it to apply for a specific position? Is it to thank someone or to network? When job seeking, you should answer the employer's ultimate question: "Why should I hire you?" Schedule a meeting with a career counselor if you need assistance identifying your key skills, interests and values.

Know the Target Audience

Research the organization you are writing to by reviewing their web site and reading industry literature. Talk to someone who already works in the career field. You may want to use InCircle (www.alumni.jhu.edu) to identify alumni that may be able to help you. Try to figure out what is important to the organization. Reading a vision and/or mission statement is a great place to start. What is the organizational culture like? What predictions are available about the future of the organization? What literature is available about the organization? After completing your research, try to parallel your own relevant skills and experience to the information you have gathered about your audience.

Addressing the Letter

Be sure to address the letter to a specific person rather than "To Whom It May Concern." It is better to send your letter to someone you have already contacted and who is in a position to hire you, than to send a generic letter. When you research the company you may be referred to someone or you may meet an employer at a career fair or networking event. Ask for the contact person's name, job title, mailing address, phone and e-mail address.

Format and Style

All letters require your return address, the date, and the full name, title and address of the recipient. If communicating electronically, also include the recipient's and your email address. Each letter must have a salutation (Dear Mr. Career: or Ms. Center:). If you are unsure about the recipient's gender, write out the full name (Dear Chris Houston:). Close your letter with Sincerely, Yours truly, or Regards, followed by four returned blank lines and your name typed. Remember to sign your letters neatly if you are mailing a hard copy.

For the letter layout you may use a Full Block format by aligning all of your information to the left margin. You can also use a Modified Block format by moving your return address, date, and closing to the right margin. Both formats are acceptable; however, you may consider reviewing correspondence received from the target organization and adopt a style that closely mirrors what is used inside the company.

In general, your letter should contain 3-5 paragraphs. Make sure to double space between paragraphs. The introductory and concluding paragraphs should be between 1-3 sentences. Body paragraphs should be between 3-5 sentences. Varying the sentence length and structure throughout your letter will help the document flow nicely. Times New Roman or Arial fonts are acceptable.

General Tips for Writing Cover Letters

- Communicate a clear objective. Organize your thoughts and present them in a way that is easy for the reader to follow.
- Articulate why you would be a good match for the organization. Link the needs of the employer with your experiences. Highlight your relevant interests, skills, and accomplishments. Emphasize the 2 or 3 strongest reasons why you are the best candidate. Make sure you not only describe your actions in relevant experiences, but also the results or outcomes of your actions.
- Make sure the letter looks professional in its format, structure, and design.
- Be sure your letter is free of spelling and grammatical errors.
- Use compelling language in an active voice.
- Use words that assert your confidence, but do not make you seem overly aggressive.
- Be sure to include your contact information including name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address.
- Check to be sure that you address the letter to the correct organization and contact name and, that they are spelled correctly.

EXAMPLE #1: COVER LETTER

Format: Full Block

Purpose: To get your resume read and generate an interview opportunities

Your Current Address
City, State Zip Code

Date

Mr./Ms. Name of Person to Whom You are Writing Job
Title Name of Organization
Street Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name (Write the full name if you are unsure about gender):

In the first paragraph clearly state your objective, why you are interested in the position, how you found out about the organization or the position, and why you are qualified.

I am interested in applying for the Junior Analyst position with your organization advertised with the Johns Hopkins University Career Center online job database. This position seems to fit well with my education, experience, and career interests.

In the second and/or third paragraph(s), use specific examples to demonstrate why you would be a good match for the position. Focus especially on your transferrable skills. Examples may come from course work, research, internships, summer jobs, campus activities, and other experiences.

Through my coursework in Economics, I have gained an understanding of the stock market and what it takes to make sound financial decisions. As an Intern for Merrill Lynch, I analyzed client portfolios, created report spreadsheets, and attended strategic planning meetings. This experience illustrated the importance of client-relations and reaffirmed my interest in pursuing a career in financial services. Additionally, as student body class governor, I developed the interpersonal and organizational skills necessary to succeed in the business world today.

The fourth paragraph tells the employer what attracts you to the organization, displays how your relevant skills and experience will add value and fit into the organization.

After taking time to research your organization, I am impressed with your excellent reputation for training new financial analysts. At the Johns Hopkins University fall career fair, I had the opportunity to meet with representatives from your organization. I learned you recruit highly motivated, results oriented employees. My 3.9 GPA in Economics, my leadership in student government and my experience in the financial services industry make me an excellent fit for your organization.

The fifth paragraph closes the letter, requests a personal meeting and indicates your follow-up plans.

Enclosed is my resume for your review. I have the desire and enthusiasm to make a difference in your firm. I welcome the opportunity for a personal meeting to discuss my qualifications. Please contact me should you have any questions regarding my candidacy. I will call in two weeks to ensure receipt of my materials. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

(Sign Your Name)

Your Full Name

EXAMPLE #2: NETWORKING LETTER

Format: Modified Block

Purpose: Generate informational interviews, which allow you to research career fields and obtain job search advice

Johns Hopkins University Box 0000

Baltimore, MD 21218

October 1, 2006

Ms. B. Friendly Associate Media Planner
What-U-Want Company
001 Park Avenue
New York, NY 11111

Dear Ms. Friendly:

I was delighted to find your name in the Johns Hopkins Alumni Career Network listing as I am seeking an opportunity to speak with an experienced professional regarding career opportunities in advertising and public relations. I completed an internship with a local advertising company last summer and gained an overall understanding of the business. However, I would like to learn more about the national and international advertising marketplace and would appreciate hearing your perspective.

As an intern for XYZ Advertising, I gained an appreciation for the creative and organizational aspects of communicating effectively with targeted consumers of media. My coursework in International Relations, volunteer work in Students for Good Causes, and my study abroad experience in Spain helped me to develop excellent analytical, decision making, and interpersonal skills. My goal is to find the best way of presenting my skills and abilities to potential employers.

I would greatly appreciate having an opportunity to talk with you about your work and your point of view on effective job search strategies for entry-level positions in the advertising field. I will call you in the next week to see if we might be able to arrange a convenient time to talk. In the meantime, feel free to contact me at 555-555-5555. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

(Sign Your Name)

Your Full Name

EXAMPLE #3: THANK YOU LETTER

Format: Modified Block

Purpose: Express appreciation, establish good will, and strengthen your candidacy

Johns Hopkins University Box 0000
Baltimore, MD 21218

February 5, 2007

Mr. Jon Smith Oakdale
Outdoor Education Center
Box 4000
Slippery Sands, PA 00006

Dear Mr. Smith:

Thank you very much for interviewing me yesterday for the position of Program Coordinator. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about the mission of the Oakdale Outdoor Education Center. After talking with your staff and visiting the excellent facilities at Oakdale, I am eager to reaffirm my interest in the position.

My self-designed major in environmental studies and previous experience leading environmental education programs fit nicely with the job requirements you outlined. The potential to contribute to Oakdale's three-part mission of awareness, action, and accountability is very exciting to me. Again, thank you for your time and giving me a chance to learn more about the work of Oakdale Outdoor Education Center.

If I can provide you with any additional information, please do not hesitate to call me at 555-555-5555. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

(Sign Your Name)

Your Full Name

EXAMPLE #4: ACCEPTANCE LETTER

Purpose: Accept a job offer, confirm terms of employment, and reinforce the employer's decision to hire you

Format: Modified Block

41 Pine Drive
Fair Haven, NJ 07171

May 15, 2005

Mr. B. Flat General Manager WXYZ
Radio Super Station
1 Media Tower
Fairfax, VA 02122

Dear Mr. Flat:

It is with great pleasure that I accept the position of Production Assistant that we discussed on May 13th. I am confident that I will make a valuable contribution to the production team at WXYZ and I am grateful for this exciting opportunity to join the staff of The Super Station.

As we discussed on Friday, I will report to Ms. Brinkley in the Human Resources Office on Monday, June 6th. Additionally, I shall complete the new employee orientation you mentioned prior to the start date. Thank you for your assistance during the interview process. I am very excited about my new responsibilities at WXYZ and look forward to joining your team.

Sincerely,

(Sign Your Name)

Your Full Name

EXAMPLE #5: WITHDRAWAL LETTER

Purpose: Decline a job offer, inform other employers you have accepted a position and withdraw your application from further consideration

Format: Full Block

31 Spruce Drive
Pine Needle, NY 12122

June 10, 2004

Ms. Gayle Storm
Customer Relations Manager ABC Financial
420 Park Avenue
New York, NY 14411

Dear Ms. Storm:

I am writing to inform you that I wish to withdraw my name from the applicant pool for the Client Services position as I have accepted another job offer. My decision was difficult, as the Client Services position with your firm seemed challenging to me.

I appreciate your full consideration of my application and the time you took explaining the position to me on my interview day. I enjoyed meeting with you and learning more about ABC Financial.

Thank you, again, for your consideration.

Sincerely,

(Sign Your Name)

Type Your Full Name