

TYPES OF LETTERS

Job search letters may include cover letters (also known as application letters), prospecting letters, thank-you letters, acceptance letters, withdrawal letters, and declination letters.

COVER LETTERS

When you submit your résumé, a cover letter always should accompany it. Many employers receive hundreds of résumés each week. The letter introduces the résumé, demonstrates that you have researched the organization, and shows why you believe you are a good match for the position and the company. Following are some important tips for the cover letter:

- Address the letter to a specific person rather than “To whom it may concern” or “Dear Sir or Madam.”
- Catch the reader’s attention with a strong leading paragraph. Avoid lackluster openings.
- Explain your reason for writing.
- Show your knowledge of the company.
- Highlight significant qualifications mentioned in your résumé, but don’t merely repeat the information.
- Sign your name in black or blue ink.
- If applying via e-mail, the body of the e-mail is the cover letter. Do not send an attachment unless required.

PROSPECTING LETTERS

Prospecting letters are very similar to cover letters. However, the cover letter is used for applying to a specific position, whereas the prospecting letter is for exploring possibilities with the organization. Reveal your source of information on the organization (e.g. website, publication, etc.). As with cover letters, you should market yourself to the employer and convince the reader you have the characteristics that will contribute to the organization’s success.

WITHDRAWAL LETTERS

Withdrawal letters express appreciation while asking that you be removed from consideration for the position at this time. Since you are removing your application before the employer has made a decision, you should provide an explanation. Be courteous and remember that you may want to apply for a position with this employer at a later date.

DECLINATION LETTERS

When declining a job offer, show genuine appreciation for the offer of employment, explain your rationale for declining, be courteous and respectful, and leave the employer with a positive impression.

ACCEPTANCE LETTERS

Even if you had a telephone discussion and verbally accepted the position, you still need to follow up with an acceptance letter:

- Use a standard business-letter format.
- Accept the offer.
- Outline what you understand to be the parameters of your employment. This would include salary, benefits, relocation compensation, employment tests and forms, and the details of any negotiated items.
- Confirm the date your employment will begin.
- Express your appreciation and pleasure in joining the company.

THANK-YOU LETTERS

Many job seekers do not send thank-you letters to employers after an interview. Unfortunately, this is an oversight that could adversely affect their chances of receiving an offer. In situations where the competition is especially keen, a thank-you letter may give you an edge over a candidate who fails to send one. It shows you are detail oriented, professional, and truly interested in the job. A thank-you letter should—

- be sent within 24 hours of the interview,
- state your appreciation for the interview; you may also want to include the date of your interview
- reiterate your interest in the position; you may also want to refer to specific points in your discussion that particularly interest you
- discuss a point you may have forgotten during the interview
- be carefully proofread; if the employer receives a letter filled with typos, grammatical mistakes, or spelling errors, the letter will do more harm than good

If you were interviewed by a panel, send personalized letters to each panel member in the interview. Do not send the same letter to each person. Avoid emailing a thank-you letter unless the employer will be making a decision quickly; emailed letters are more impersonal than hard-copy letters.

Remember that thank-you *letters* should be typed in standard business letter format, whereas thank-you *notes* are handwritten on cards.

FORMATTING AND APPEARANCE

Job search letters are a form of business communication and should be formatted appropriately. The cover letter is an extension of your résumé and should be formatted as follows:

- Margins set 1" around the entire document.
- 11–12 point professional font; no decorative font.
- Limit the document to one page.
- Use proper business-letter format, such as full block or modified block.
- One-column cover letters are most common; two-column cover letters are useful when comparing your specific qualifications with the skills required for the position.
- Print on the same paper as the résumé; use only black ink.

COVER LETTER CONTENT

Certain information must be included in a cover letter: your contact information, a salutation, explanations of why you are writing and why you are qualified for the job, a complimentary close, your signature, and an enclosure line. Following are recommendations for developing the first, middle, and final paragraphs.

FIRST PARAGRAPH

The introductory paragraph is designed to entice the reader to review the rest of the letter. The first sentence should identify the title or type of the position you are applying for and the name of the organization. Include an explanation of why you are interested in THIS position with THIS company. Be sure to do your research. Mention how you learned about the position, and provide the names of people you have spoken to within the company.

MIDDLE PARAGRAPH(S)

The middle paragraphs address your education and experience. If you wish to emphasize your education, then place it first. If your experience is more relevant, then discuss it first.

For your education, mention your degree title (Bachelor of Science/Arts in . . .), your university name, and location. If you are a recent graduate or are approaching graduation, you also may want to include the month and year of your graduation.

Instead of simply repeating information from your résumé, demonstrate how your prior education and experiences qualify you for this position. Use the job posting to identify

the responsibilities for the position and use your prior work experience, academic projects, and volunteer or extracurricular activities to showcase your skills. The key is to demonstrate how your experience and skills will benefit the company, so include some company/position-specific information.

FINAL PARAGRAPH

Your final paragraph should thank the reader for his or her consideration and request a plan of action. If the employer has stipulated “no phone calls,” request a meeting. If there is no such stipulation, it would be appropriate to indicate that you will call in a certain time frame to set an appointment to meet.

If the employer is in a different city/state, give a time frame in which you will be in the area and request a meeting during this time. It is important to sound assertive; avoid sounding too demanding or too passive.

EXAMPLES

Examples of a variety of job search letters can be found on the Career Center website (<http://careercenter.missouristate.edu/students>).

Current available examples include—

- standard business letter format
- one-column cover letter
- two-column cover letter
- thank-you letter
- acceptance letter
- declination letter
- follow-up to a rejection letter