

Cover Letters and Other Correspondence

The success of your career search efforts depends to a large degree on your ability to communicate effectively in writing. As an applicant seeking employment, you may find yourself writing different types of letters. The following are the most common:

COVER LETTER (Letter of Application):

When you are responding to an announced opening

LETTER OF INQUIRY:

When you are seeking information about a possible opening

FOLLOW-UP LETTERS:

Thank-you letter, acceptance letter, declining job offer letter

COVER LETTER

A cover letter is a necessary companion to your resume. The content of your cover letter will make an important first impression since it is often the initial contact between you and the employer. A good letter will complement and selectively expand upon your resume while conveying your intelligence, skills, and confidence. As with most well-written documents, your letter will need to be reviewed, critiqued, edited, and reviewed again. The cover letter should highlight your strongest qualifications and how they match what the employer seeks. Adding PAR statements or accomplishment statements (see Resumes publication) would be appropriate. Mass-produced form letters will not be well received by employers because they convey "going through the motions" and lack sincerity. You may want to develop a general format, but it is critical that you prepare a personalized copy of your letter for each employer.

➤ 10 HELPFUL TIPS:

1. Before writing your cover letter, research the intended recipient thoroughly. Have a clear notion of the nature of the organization's products/services and indicate that you are familiar with the organization. Use information available online and in Orradre Library. Know where your talents might be utilized in the organization.
2. Keep your letter short to hold the reader's interest. Be brief and concise.

3. Prepare each letter individually. Generic, mass-produced letters are less effective.
4. When possible, address each employer by name and title. When a name is not available, use a title that is non-gender specific (Dear Human Resources Professional, Marketing Director, etc.).
5. Open your letter with a strong sentence that will encourage the potential employer to keep reading. The first twenty words must attract the employer's interest.
6. Devote the center of your letter to brief facts about your experience and accomplishments that will arouse the employer's curiosity. The core should demonstrate how you can support the organization rather than how you hope to benefit from the job.
7. Tailor your letter to the interests and needs of the person to whom you are writing. Include facts that indicate that hiring you will lead to higher production, greater efficiency, reduced waste, better sales, higher profits, etc., in other words, outcomes that will help solve the employer's problems. Picture yourself as the person receiving the letter when you decide what to include.
8. If at all possible, include some challenging thoughts that will cause employers to feel that a discussion with you would be worthwhile even if they really hadn't planned on hiring anyone right now.
9. Ask directly for an interview and indicate when you will call to arrange a suitable time.
10. Check carefully for grammatical and typing errors. Easily correctable errors can send a strong message about your lack of attention to detail and thoughtlessness.

If you intend to send your cover letter and resume via e-mail or online, please consult the Career Center's Resumes publication for step-by-step directions on how best to format your electronic documents.

BASIC STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF A COVER LETTER (LETTER OF APPLICATION)

Your street address
City, State, Zip Code
Phone number/E-mail

Date

Name of Employer (Mr./Ms.)
Title
Company/Organization Name
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr., Ms., Dr. _____: (Avoid using "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Sir/Madam.")

Opening Paragraph: Announce the purpose of your letter and provide the reader with a compelling reason to read on. Indicate who you are and what you want. State the reason for writing, naming the position or type of work for which you are applying. Identify how you heard of the opening or how the employer's name was obtained (e.g., "Dr. Smith in the Sociology Department at Santa Clara University recommended that I contact you"). If you aren't able to use someone else's name as an introduction, leverage your knowledge about and enthusiasm for this particular organization.

Body Paragraph(s): What can you offer to the employer? Describe your strongest qualifications that match the position requirements. A description of significant accomplishments can be made, but the resume should not be repeated any more than is absolutely necessary. Basically, you are emphasizing your key qualifications, selling yourself, and elaborating on background areas that will attract a specific employer for the specific field of work or job in which you're interested. Refer the employer to your resume and again emphasize your career objective.

Closing Paragraph: Assert your confidence that you are qualified for the position (e.g., "I believe that my skills and experience make me an excellent match for this position"). State your next step, whether it's to make the statement that you will call to follow up on your letter (demonstrates your initiative and follow-through as well as helping you maintain some control of your efforts), or that you look forward to the opportunity to discuss your qualifications in detail at their convenience. Thank the person receiving your letter for his/her time and interest.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)
Your name

Enclosure

SAMPLE COVER LETTER

123 Market Street
Santa Clara, CA 95053

April 3, 2005

Ms. Marsha Goulart
Human Resources
Silicon Tech
555 Technology Drive
Mountain View, CA 95555

Dear Ms. Goulart:

I read with interest your recent job posting on BroncoTrak for an entry-level Electrical Engineer. From what I know about your company and the unprecedented work that you do in the telecommunications industry, I feel confident that I can bring a great deal to the position advertised.

As you can see from my attached resume [or, "the resume that follows this letter"], I am graduating this June with my Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from Santa Clara University. Not only have I gained tremendous experience and exposure to the field of electrical engineering, I've also received hands-on training through various engineering projects. In addition, I've coupled my educational learning in a co-operative training experience by working during my senior year of college at Varian Associates. At Varian, I was able to solidify my classroom experience and put it to use in the real world.

In addition to the technical skills that I would bring to your organization, I am a natural leader. I've held two leadership positions in various school-affiliated organizations. Specifically, during my tenure as President of Tau Beta Pi, we organized an event that raised \$3K for our operating budget. Our team efforts and my leadership abilities contributed to this successful effort. I'd like to continue putting to use my leadership abilities and technical skills in the field of electrical engineering at Silicon Tech.

I believe that my skills and experience make me an excellent match for this position. I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person or to speak with you over the phone. In the meantime, I thank you for your time and interest, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)
Cynthia Senior

Enclosure

SAMPLE LETTER OF INQUIRY

500 El Camino Real, Mail Box 1042
Santa Clara, CA 95053

January 5, 2005

Mr. Charlie Blackstone
Director of Human Resources
Marshall Field's
1 Chicago Place
Chicago, IL 60601

Dear Mr. Blackstone:

I read your company's description in CPC's Job Choices In Business and would like to inquire about employment opportunities in your management training program. I am interested in working in retail management and would like to relocate to the Chicago area after graduation.

I will receive my Bachelor of Science in Commerce from Santa Clara University this June. My interest in business started in Junior Achievement while in high school and developed further through a variety of sales and retail positions during college. My internship with a large department store convinced me to pursue a career in retail. When I researched the top retailers in Chicago, Marshall Field's emerged as having a strong market position, an excellent training program, and a reputation for outstanding customer service. In short, you provide the kind of professional retail environment where I can make an immediate contribution.

My resume is enclosed for your consideration. My education and experience match the qualifications you seek in your management trainees, but they don't tell the whole story. I know from customer and supervisor feedback that I have the interpersonal skills and motivation needed to build a successful career in retail management. My recent experience gives me confidence in my career direction and in my ability to perform competently.

I know how busy you must be during this time of year, but I would appreciate a few minutes of your time. I will call you during the week of January 24 to discuss employment possibilities. In the meantime, if you would like to contact me, my number is 408/XXX-XXXX and my email is mlopez@scu.edu.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)
Mark Lopez

Enclosure

"NUTS & BOLTS" CHECKLIST:

- Is the letter one page in length?
- Is the source of the job lead mentioned?
- Is the job title from the ad mentioned?
- Does the language "flow" (not stiff or generic)?
- Are you using your own words and not borrowing or copying someone else's writing?
- Does the letter address how your skills specifically match the employer's requirements?
- Are there PAR (problem, action, result) statements?
- Are key skills and appropriate "hot" skills mentioned?
- Are numbers given in numeric form (50%, \$40K, etc.) for best impact?
- Are action verbs used to full advantage?
- Is a follow-up technique suggested? (If possible, take personal responsibility for the next step.)
- Is an interview requested?
- Is it grammatically correct (spelling, verb tense, punctuation, etc.)?
- Is the type font and size (preferably 12 point) easy to read?
- Is there at least ½" of white margin around the body of print?
- Is your enthusiasm for the opportunity apparent?

THANK-YOU LETTER

You should send a thank-you letter after any professional contact has been made. Whether you are writing to express your appreciation for being given a job interview or an informational interview, a thank-you letter is essential in your job search. You should write and mail the letter the same day of your interview or meeting, and your letter should be brief and personalized. Did you know that only 36% of students follow up an interview with any type of formal business communication? Employers tell us they not only appreciate a well-crafted and sincere thank-you; they often expect one. More importantly, a good letter sets you apart from other candidates and can influence a hiring decision in your favor. Keep in mind the following:

- ◆ Express your appreciation for the time and consideration given to you by the interviewer.
- ◆ Emphasize significant information that might *not* have been shared during the interview. Restate ideas or examples you shared in the interview that were well received. This helps the interviewer remember *you*.
- ◆ Your letter is additional evidence of your communication and writing ability.
- ◆ Reiterate your interest in the position! Tell them specifically what impressed you about the position and organization.

It's important to consider the type of letter you write. An e-mailed letter will get to the intended person very quickly, especially if the recipient uses e-mail extensively. However, a handwritten or typed and mailed letter can be more personal and can create more of a connection. As an applicant seeking employment, you need to get a feel of how the interviewer typically communicates. Certain industries are more "high tech" than others and in researching the organization, you should be aware of the nature of the organization and the method of communicating that would be most effective. If mailing, use a laser-printed letter on resume-quality paper or write your note on a simple note card.

SAMPLE THANK-YOU LETTER

500 El Camino Real, Mail Box 1042
Santa Clara, CA 95053

January 5, 20XX

Ms. Patricia Smith
Editor
PC Publication
110 Main Street
Nashua, OH 03061

Dear Ms. Smith:

I want to thank you for interviewing me yesterday for the Assistant Editor position. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more exciting information about your organization.

My enthusiasm for the position and my interest in working for PC Publication were strengthened as a result of our meeting. I am confident that my education and experience, especially my year as editor of Santa Clara University's literary magazine *The Santa Clara Review*, fit nicely with the job requirements. I have also worked with the Society of Women Engineers to put together a quarterly newsletter that goes out to engineering alumni and current students.

I would like to reiterate my strong interest in the position and in working with you. The Assistant Editor position is the ideal opportunity that I seek. Please feel free to call me at (925) 123-4567 if I can provide you with any additional information. Otherwise, I will call you on Friday to check on the status of the search.

Again, thank you for the interview and consideration.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)
Tamara Joyner

SAMPLE ACCEPTANCE LETTER

500 El Camino Real, Mail Box 1042
Santa Clara, CA 95053

January 5, 20XX

Ms. Hannah Holt
Director of Human Resources
City of Palo Alto
250 Hamilton Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 91234

Dear Ms. Holt:

Per our conversation on April 1, 20XX, I would like to confirm my acceptance of your employment offer. The position of Human Resources Assistant will provide exactly the kind of experience I have been seeking. I feel very confident that I can make a significant contribution to the City of Palo Alto, and I am grateful for the opportunity you have given me.

As we discussed, I will report to work on Monday, June 30, 20XX. I understand that I will have a starting salary of \$40K. Again, thank you for your offer. I will keep in touch as my start date nears.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)
David Nguyen

SAMPLE DECLINING JOB OFFER LETTER

500 El Camino Real, Mail Box 1042
Santa Clara, CA 95053

January 5, 20XX

Dr. Amy Little
Senior Research Manager
Clingenix, Inc.
871 Industrial Road
San Carlos, CA 91234

Dear Dr. Little:

Thank you for meeting with me on Friday to discuss the opportunity for employment within your Research and Development Department. The enthusiasm and warmth of the Clingenix people I met impressed me, and the position is challenging.

However, while I appreciate your generous offer and after considerable thought, I have decided to decline the position. I have accepted a position elsewhere that I feel is better suited to my long-term goals.

Again, thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)
Paul Carter