

Cover Letter Writing

There are several types of letters used during the job search process: **Cover letters** (including application letters and letters of inquiry), **thank you letters** (a follow-up to an interview), **acceptance letters** (to accept a job offer), or **letters declining an offer** (used to thank an employer for a job offer, but to decline it).

Many job seekers concentrate their efforts on developing a resume, but dedicate little time to writing effective letters. While a resume is important, a letter is an opportunity to further market your qualifications. And both the resume and cover letter provide the employer with a first impression of your communication skills.



Cover Letters

Below is an overview of two common types of cover letters:

Application Letters

This type of letter is used to apply for specific openings and accompanies your resume. It gives you an opportunity to introduce yourself to an employer and provides a link between the job, your skills, and experience.

- ✦ Inform the reader of why he or she is receiving the resume. If you have already spoken to him/her by phone or in person, note this in your letter (preferably in the first paragraph!) Hiring officials talk to many applicants each day. Do not assume they will remember you.
- ✦ Give detailed information about your qualifications without repeating information from your resume verbatim. Instead, state the value of your experiences, education, or personal qualities. Ask yourself “What have I learned from these experiences?” Then relate this to the skills you can provide to the employer. **Emphasize what you can do for the employer**, not how you will personally benefit from being hired for the job.
- ✦ When applying for a specific position, your letter should reflect the qualifications listed in the actual job posting. The closer the match between the employer’s requirements and your background, the more likely you will be contacted for an interview.
- ✦ Letters should be professional, yet written creatively enough to attract the attention of the reader.

Letters of Interest/Letters of Inquiry

Letters of interest are sent to organizations to investigate possible job vacancies. State your reason for inquiry in the letter. How did you find out about the organization? What prompted you to send a letter? Did you receive a referral from someone who works at the organization?

- ✦ The central paragraphs will be much the same as an application letter. Provide examples of your qualifications to persuade the employer to consider you for a position.
- ✦ It is important to follow these letters with a phone call, since you may never receive a response if no positions exist. In your letter mention the time frame in which you will be contacting the person. Then make sure you follow-up as promised. Allow 5-10 business days before you contact them.

Application Letters

The purpose of this letter is to get your enclosed resume read and to generate interviews. Use this type of letter in response to specific job advertisements and vacancy announcements. Your strategy is to demonstrate that your qualifications fit the requirements of the position. Study the position description carefully and decide on one or more themes – education, experience, interests, responsibility, etc. – that show persuasively how well you fit the position. Link major job dimensions with your related past performance and experience.

Frank N. Senz
44 Railroad Street
Johnson, VT 05656

July 18, 2003

Ms. Jill Smith
Manager of Human Resources
IBM
Burlington, VT 00000

Dear Ms. Smith:

I would like to express an interest in the position of Systems Analyst at IBM that is currently posted on your website. The position requirements fit nicely with my education, experience, and career interests.

Your position requires experience in computer systems, financial applications software, and end-user consulting. With a major in computer systems and a minor in business management, I have training on mainframes, minicomputers, and microcomputers as well as with a variety of software programs and applications. My practical experience in the Johnson State College computer lab as a programmer and as a student consultant for system users has given me valuable exposure to complex computer operations. My experience and career goals match your job requirements well and I am confident that I can perform the job effectively.

I look forward to discussing my qualifications with you further. I may be reached at 802-635-0000. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Frank N. Senz

Frank N. Senz

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First Paragraph

State why you are writing, identify the position for which you would like to be considered, and indicate how you heard about the position. Be specific.

Second Paragraph

The goal here is to show how you can be useful to this particular organization. Describe what strengths you have to offer this employer. You might use one of the following approaches:

- 1) Illustrate the relationship between your skills and experience and the position for which you are applying.
- 2) Describe your previous accomplishments as they relate to the position.
- 3) Identify three reasons for the employer to consider you for the position.

Third Paragraph

End your letter by clarifying what will happen next and how they can most easily reach you.

Example of a Letter of Inquiry

Alan Blanchard

14 West Ridge Road

Stowe, VT 05672

(802) 253-0000 | alan@hotmail.com

August 2, 2004

Mr. Joe Schmo
Director of Human Resources
Burton Snowboard Company
80 Industrial Parkway
Burlington, VT 05401

Dear Mr. Schmo:

Professor Michael Frapple suggested that I contact you regarding a possible opening for the position of Human Resources Intern at Burton Snowboard Company. I am looking for an internship in human resources and feel that my experience, education, and interest in snowboarding make me a perfect candidate for this position.

I have studied Human Resource Management at Johnson State College. Through my courses, I have gained an understanding of topics such as selecting, training, and evaluating personnel as well as compensation, health and safety, and human relations. In addition to my educational background, I thoroughly enjoy working with and helping people. Working in group projects for many of my business courses and interacting with customers as a teller at Union Bank has strengthened my interpersonal skills. I would welcome the opportunity to put these skills to work for Burton and bring together my interest in human resources and passion for snowboarding. I am confident that I can be an asset to Burton.

I will call you next week to ensure that you have received my resume and to discuss a chance to meet personally. If you prefer, you may reach me at (555) 555-5555.
Thank you and I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Alan Blanchard

Alan Blanchard

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Cover Letter Critiquing Guide

Layout/Appearance

- Always type your letters. Because of wider access to computers and printers, employers expect your letter to be printed in a quality, professional-looking font. Adhere to the block style format for business correspondence (double-space between paragraphs; text flush to the left).
- Typos, misspellings and grammatical errors can leave a negative impression with employers and cause your application to be rejected. Have at least two other people proofread to make sure your letter is error-free.
- Have you signed your letter at the bottom of the page in blue or black ink?
- Have you printed your letter on quality paper that matches your resume? (When possible, match the heading of your resume and the heading of your cover letter for a professional look).
- Cover letters should be concise and simple, yet still fully discuss your qualifications. Have you kept your letter to one page?

Writing Style

- Have you avoided beginning all your sentences with the word “I”? (Place a greater emphasis on the word “you” when possible!)
- Avoid the phrase “I am writing” in your opening paragraph, as this is understood in a letter.
- Lengthy paragraphs are overwhelming to read. Have you divided text into several paragraphs when necessary to keep paragraphs short?
- Have you used transition phrases and topic sentences to improve the flow of the letter between paragraphs?
- Have you eliminated statements of doubt? Your cover letter should always convey confidence and a positive attitude. Avoid any statements or words that sound like you are unsure of your abilities or the contributions you have and can make. For instance, statements like, “If you think I am qualified”, or “I hope you find my...” will not assure the reader that you are a confident individual.

Overall Impression/Marketing Effectiveness of Content

- Is your letter addressed to a specific person, and have you spelled the individual’s name correctly? (If the job posting did not indicate a name, you may need to call the organization to obtain this information.)
- Is your letter individually tailored to the position and organization, emphasizing how your specific qualifications match the employer’s needs?
- Have you used factual statements regarding an organization rather than flattery to gain attention of the employer?
- Is the tone of your letter professional, yet show enthusiasm for the job and the organization?
- Have you written your letter in a style that conveys self-confidence in your abilities without being egotistical or overly aggressive?
- Do not oversell yourself or appear too desperate. Phrases such as “I will work for free if you give me the chance,” or “I will take any job you have available” are not effective.
- Did you skirt the salary issue? If you are requested to provide salary requirements explain that you need more information regarding the position and provide a range of what you consider appropriate for the market and your experience. Avoid commenting on your salary history as it may or may not be relevant to the position you are applying for.
- Are you prepared to follow through on any action stated in your letter, such as a phone call to the employer?

Thank-You Notes & Letters

A letter sent following an interview or informational interview is not only good manners, it is **essential**. It assists the employer in remembering you and your unique qualifications. A recruiter may interview many candidates throughout the day. Letters serve as a reminder, and can also be considered as **marketing tools**. A thank-you letter also leaves the employer with a favorable impression. If the employer is having difficulty deciding between you and another candidate, a well-written thank-you letter could play an important role in the decision to hire you.

Send a thank-you letter within 48 hours of your interview and keep it to two to three short paragraphs. A short statement about your qualifications and continued interest in the position may be added. Be sure to get the correct spelling of the person(s) who conducted the interview and try to send a thank-you letter to each person who interviewed you. It's ok to send a handwritten thank-you note as long as it's on professional card stock and if the interview was not in a strictly formal setting. Use a type written letter if you have handwriting that is difficult to read or if the interview was very formal.

Ivana B. Jung

Current: 1234 Portland Street, Morrisville, VT 54022 (802) 888-0000
Permanent: 12 Roxy Lane, Greenfield, MA, 01314 (555) 555-5555

February 12, 2004

Mr. Thomas Life
Principle
Yorktown High School
555 Sandland Rd.
Boston, MA 22222

Dear Mr. Life:

I want to thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me yesterday to discuss the teaching position available at Yorktown High School. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about your school's mission and educational goals.

My enthusiasm for the position and my interest in working for Yorktown High School were strengthened as a result of the interview. I believe that my education and student teaching experiences fit well with the job requirements, and I'm sure that I could make a significant contribution to your school.

I want to reiterate my strong interest in the position and in working with you, your staff, and students. Please feel free to call me at 555/555-5555 if I can provide you with any additional information.

Again, thank you for the interview and your consideration.

Respectfully,

Ivana B. Jung

Ivana B. Jung

First Paragraph

Express thanks and appreciation for the interview, courtesy, and consideration extended to you. State job for which you were interviewed, date of interview, and place where it was conducted.

Second Paragraph

Reaffirm your interest in the position or company. Reemphasize your strongest qualifications. Draw attention to the good match between your qualifications and the job requirements.

Third Paragraph

Show willingness to provide additional clarifying data or statements and submit any further information you may want to add to your application.

Acceptance Letter Example

Wilma Flynn-Stone

1068 Bedrock Lane, Montpelier, VT 05602

June 5, 2003

Ms. Mary Trendel
Human Resources Manager
PO Box 608
Burlington, VT 05402

Dear Ms. Trendel:

It is with great pleasure that I accept your offer to serve as Video Editor for WCAX-TV3 in Burlington, VT. I look forward to joining WCAX beginning on July 1, 2003 with a starting salary of \$28,000 per year.

I am especially looking forward to working with Sharon Meyer in her nature segments with Brian Pfeiffer and other environmental experts.

Thank you for choosing me to be a part of your team. I am most enthusiastic about the opportunity to work with you while making a contribution to Vermont's most watched news program.

Sincerely,

Wilma Flynn-Stone

Wilma Flynn-Stone

Letter Declining a Job Offer

A polite refusal is an applicant's responsibility as well as a professional courtesy. You notify the employer that you are not interested in working for the company and thereby allow him/her to continue to search as quickly as possible. Also closing the door gently, ending negotiation pleasantly on a note of goodwill, makes good sense in terms of the future. In writing a refusal letter, use the indirect plan, giving reasons before saying no as shown below.

Chris P. Treets
RR 15 Box 4645
Jeffersonville, VT 05489

March 12, 2003

Ms. Yvette Rockwell
Human Resource Manager
Free Times Magazine
6733 Williston Ave.
Williston, VT 07891

Dear Ms. Rockwell:

Thank you very much for offering me the position of Marketing Director for the Free Times Magazine. I enjoyed meeting with you and learning more about your company. Unfortunately, because I have just accepted a position with another organization, I am unable to join the Free Times Magazine at this time.

I appreciate all of your time and effort in reviewing my resume and interviewing me. Thank you very much for considering me for this position.

Sincerely,

Chris P. Treets

Chris P. Treets

First Paragraph

Thank the company for their time, consideration, and offer. Politely reject the offer and provide reason for not accepting.

Second Paragraph

Close by expressing an appreciation for their considering your application.