

LETTER WRITING GUIDE

SUNY Potsdam, Career Planning Office
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Communication skills are among the most important skills you will bring to your career. Your job search letters, usually, will be the first samples employers will have of your communication skills. Your letters should be functional, understandable, easy to read, and pleasant in tone. REMEMBER: Every communication act is a message about you.

The Career Planning Office has compiled this handout to guide you into putting power, punch, and energy into your letters. Effective letters involve more than demonstrating good writing style on pretty paper. As you use the guide, you will find information on the following topics:

- ◆ Top Ten Tips For Writing Effective Cover Letters
- ◆ Types of Cover Letters
- ◆ Three Basic Sections of a Cover Letter
- ◆ Thank You Letters
- ◆ Confirmation Letters
- ◆ Special Situation Letters

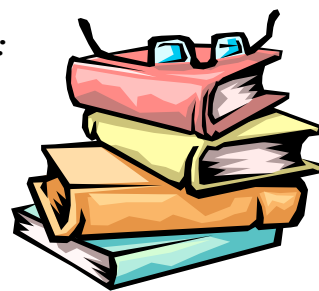
Thoughts for Effective Letter Writing

Remember, you and your situation are unique. Strive to allow your individuality to be expressed through your writing. With a little practice, you will develop lifelong business writing skills that will support and enhance your career. Good Luck!

There are samples of letters which students/alumni have granted us permission to use as guides in our office. They are located in a binder on the research table. Come in and look them over if you still need more guidance.

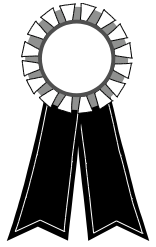
Books you might like to read to further your knowledge of putting letters together:

- ◆ 200 Letters for Job Hunters
- ◆ Job Search Letters that Get Results: 201 Great Examples
- ◆ Dynamite Cover Letters
- ◆ High Impact Resume and Letters
- ◆ College Grad Job Hunter



All of these books are located in our Career Library in our office at 106 Sisson Hall. You don't need an appointment to read through these books. If you still need additional assistance with writing your cover letter, please set up an appointment with one of our career counselors.

Top Ten Tips For Writing an Effective Cover Letter



1. ***Make Your Letter Employer-Centered.*** Design your letters to be work-centered and employer-centered not self-centered. Your letters are marketing tools that should address the needs of employers and evoke a desire for them to learn more about you. Stress the benefits of your employment for the reader.
2. ***Write a Draft First.*** You can edit a draft several times and still finish quicker than writing a final copy first.
3. ***Simplicity is the Key to Clarity, Quickness and Credibility.*** Respect the reader's time. Your letter should inform, interest, and establish rapport with the reader. Ask for the reader to take an action, and make the action convenient to take.
4. ***Keep Your Letters to One Page with Three Targeted Paragraphs or Sections.*** Eliminate extraneous words and avoid rehashing material from your resume. Say what you mean directly without a lot of verbiage. Demonstrate you understand the value of the reader's time by being as brief as possible.
5. ***Be Positive in Content, Tone, Word Choice and Expectations.*** Some of the most common problems with letters are they are poorly organized, confusing, unclear, and choppy. Keep your letter flowing smoothly and watch your transitions.
6. ***Tailor Your Letters for Each Position.*** Your cover letter is a bridge between your resume and the position. Review whatever information you know about the open position. Address the key points from your research or the advertisement when highlighting your qualifications. You may want to include additional information not mentioned in your resume. Be honest – back up your claims with evidence and specific examples from your experience.
7. ***Keep Your Letters Personal, Warm and Professional.*** Avoid being either overly familiar or overly intrusive in tone. Remember business letters are formal. Be timely. Demonstrate that you know how to do business for yourself and, by implication, for others.
8. ***Salutation:*** Always address your letters to a specific individual with his or her correct title and business address. When addressing a woman, the safest choice is "Ms." unless you know for sure that a woman is married and prefers "Mrs."
9. ***Format/Layout:*** Polish your writing style. Good writing requires good editing. Produce an error-free, clean copy. Stand back and take a visual look at the entire letter.
 - ◆ Is there enough white space to relax the reader's eye?
 - ◆ Are your margins at least 3/4 to 1 inch in width?
 - ◆ Is the letter roughly in the center of the page, not concentrated at the top?

The following is the format for a business letter:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ◆ address listed first | ◆ double space, type the body of the letter |
| ◆ immediately followed by the date | ◆ double space, type the closing |
| ◆ double space, type the inside address (where are you are sending the letter) | ◆ return four lines to allow room for your signature |
| ◆ double space, type the salutation followed by a colon | ◆ type your full name |
| | ◆ A postscript (P.S.) is sometimes helpful |
10. ***Use High-Quality Printing, Stationary and Envelopes.*** The best choice for printing is a laser printer. Your stationary should be the same for your resume and cover letter. You may want to get 9 x12 matching envelopes as well. An alternative is to use large manila envelopes so your application, resume and supporting materials arrive crisp, clean and free of creases. *Never fold or staple your resume and/or cover letter.*

THREE BASIC SECTIONS OF A COVER LETTER

In all types of cover letters, you will want to review the basic writing criteria stated earlier in the guide. The contents of a Letter of Inquiry or Broadcast Letter should be confined to the three sections, as outlined below.

Your Street Address
City, State, Zip Code
Date

Employer's Name
Employer's Title
Company Name
Street Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Employer's Name:

Introduction: At the very minimum, the first section should address the job name, department name or the advertised description and indicate what you have enclosed. In other words, tell why you are writing.

Body: The second section should establish rapport with the addressee. You should state why you are interested in this employer and what you have to offer to the employer. In other words, why they should hire you instead of someone else; possibly focus on a few of your top skills. If you don't have a career objective stated on your resume, this is the area in which to state it. The cover letter should be brief, so you might want to consider limiting yourself to two small paragraphs as the maximum for this section.

Closing: The third section is the conclusion of the letter. Here you need to state what you want the employer to do for you (i.e. schedule an appointment) and how you wish them to do it. For example, if you preserve the initiative, you might write about when you will telephone them to ensure that you have given them enough information, and to see whether an appointment can be arranged for an interview in person or by telephone. If you surrender initiative, you might write where and when you can be reached by telephone, especially if you will be at a different address or telephone number than printed on your resume or stationery.

Lastly, thank them for considering your interest in the position and avoid the cliché, I look forward to hearing from you soon. Follow up the letter with a courteous phone call within 3 weeks.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Enclosure (If you are including other material with the letter like your resume, references, etc.)

NOTE: Be sure to sign your name after you have printed the letter out!



TYPES OF COVER LETTERS

NOTE: You should never send out your resume without a cover letter. Samples of cover letters shown in this guide use the professional, business style showing the style's use with or without letterhead stationary.

When the employer's vacancy announcement requests a **Letter of Inquiry or Interest**: This is a brief screening method, and your cover letter should give enough resume-type information to solicit their request for more information about you with an interview.

Sample of this type of cover letter:

2589 Pierrepont Avenue
Potsdam, NY 13676
January 13, 2003

Sharon A. Waters, Personnel Director
New York State Police Department
892 South Park
Albany, NY 11108

Dear Ms. Waters:

I enclose my resume in response to your January 2, 2003 listing in the SUNY Potsdam Career Planning Job Vacancies for a research and data analyst with your department.

The position interests me for several reasons. My education and work experience have prepared me for this position, as I will receive my B.A. degree on May 18, 2003 in Criminal Justice, with specialties in research and data analysis. I am, also, familiar with the New York State Police operations based upon my work in your Albany office this past summer and upon my research and apprehension rates. The position you outline is one, which I can enhance with my technical background as well as my active leadership roles, which involve extensive planning, organizing, and communicating. I am a responsible person who is concerned with performance and accountability.

I would appreciate an opportunity to discuss with you how I might best meet your needs. I will call your office next week to inquire about an interview. If you have questions in the meantime, please feel free to call me at 315-825-6549.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Austin L. Rush

Enclosure

Having trouble writing your cover letter, CALL 267-2344
to set up an appointment with a career counselor!

When you are not sure a vacancy exists and you are interested in working for a specific employer, you might send a **Broadcast Letter**.

Richard Mathews
100 Job Hunting Avenue
New York, NY 10000

September 19, 2002

John White, Vice President of Sales & Marketing
White's Nuts & Bolts, Inc.
299 Main Street
Someplace, CA 93333

Dear Mr. White:

Your sales and marketing operations interests me and I believe, with my experience, I would be of value to your company. As a Sales and Marketing Director for a major manufacturing firm, I doubled regional sales in two years to more than \$55 million.

Several other accomplishments which will make me the best candidate for the position are:

- I have increased orders from our single largest customer by \$850, 000 annually.
- I introduced a cost-cutting measure, which saved \$150,000 through inventory control.
- I raised plant productivity by 8%.
- I created a highly profitable new product line with \$3.5 million in sales in the first year.

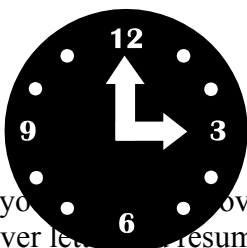
I would like to further discuss details of my experience with you and will call on Thursday morning to set up a meeting at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Martin

Enclosure

Note: When using a Broadcast Letter, you must quickly make your points, address the employer's interests and quantify accomplishments. You must research the employer prior to writing a Broadcast Letter.



**DON'T LET THE CLOCK RUN OUT ON YOU!
GET TO CAREER PLANNING AND START
PLANNING FOR YOUR FUTURE TODAY!**

If you want to improve your odds of receiving a reply to your letters, try enclosing a **Reply Postcard** with your cover letter and resume, **but** be selective in its use.

Use 4" x6" or a 3 ½" x 5 ½" standard postcard stock. On one side include your name, return address, and a 20 cent return stamp. On the other side you can provide a series of follow up questions for the employer to complete. An example would be to give the employer several "outcome options" and a place for the name and title and phone number of the contact.

| |
|--|
| <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">20 cent Stamp</div> |
| <p>Ms. Mackenzie Smith 200 Employment Lane Hopeful, NY 13666</p> |

| |
|--|
| <p>_____ Please call me to arrange an interview.</p> <p>_____ Please call me to further discuss your background.</p> <p>_____ We will contact you within _____ months to follow up.</p> <p>_____ We currently have no interest for the following reason:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Name: _____ Title: _____</p> <p>Company: _____ Phone: _____</p> |
|--|

Using the Reply Postcard Technique will greatly increase your chances of further contact with a perspective employer. Not only will they be more likely to respond to you, they will be more likely to review your materials, since they feel at least some guilt and obligation for the extra effort you have out forth.

THANK YOU LETTERS

These are some of the most effective job search letters, as they communicate an important quality employers readily seek – thoughtfulness. As a result, they set you apart from other job seekers who fail to write such letters. Thank you letters should always be sent to individuals who have provided assistance, be it in the form of information, advice, referrals or an actual job interview. Thank you letters demonstrate an important social grace that says something about you as an individual – your personality and how you probably relate to others. Beyond courtesy, the thank you letter affords you an opportunity to restate your qualifications and interest or possibly add remarks.

Thank you letters should always be written in a timely manner. Make it a practice to sit down and write these letters within 12 hours of the situation that prompts the letter. It should be mailed immediately to reach the recipient within three to four days. If you wait longer, the letter will have less impact on the situation.

After the Interview – Since few individuals write thank you letters, the letter recipient remembers those who do write them. Consider this scenario:

After interviewing for a position, Sally receives a rejection letter from an employer indicating the job was offered to another individual. Rather than getting upset, Sally sends a nice thank you letter noting her disappointment in not being selected and thanks the employer for the opportunity to interview for the position. Sally reiterates continuing interest in working for the organization. The employer remembers Sally from the interview process and several things can happen.

- A. Rather than let the job seeker get away, the employer decides to create a new position for him/her.
- B. Another position becomes available and the employer offers it to the job seeker before going through any other hiring process.
- C. The employer gives the job seeker's name to a colleague who has an opening.

Sally H. Gunner
123 My Street
Someplace, NY 12345

December 8, 2002

Peter Harris, Director of Personnel
Ocean Mist Products, Inc.
San Diego, CA 15478

Dear Mr. Harris:

Thank you again for the opportunity to interview for the marketing position. I appreciate your hospitality and enjoyed meeting you and members of your staff.

The interview convinced me of how compatible my background, interests, and skills are with the goals of Ocean Mist Products Incorporated. My prior marketing experience as a student intern with the Rural Institute Services has prepared me to take a major role in developing both domestic and international marketing strategies. I am confident my work would result in increased market shares for your company.

I look forward to meeting you and your staff again.

Sincerely,

Sally H. Gunner

Withdrawing from Consideration – At some point, you may decide to withdraw from further consideration. Perhaps you have accepted another job or the position no longer interests you. Write a short thank you letter

withdrawing from consideration. Explain in positive terms why you are no longer interested. Thank them for their time and consideration.

4621 Chester Lane
Hometown, NY 12345
January 2, 2003

Ms. Melissa Bliss, Executive Director
Some Company, Inc.
4567 A Street
Someplace, VA 23568

Dear Ms. Bliss

Please withdraw my application for the Program Coordinator position at the Virginia School of Performing Arts. During my interview with you, I indicated that I have been exploring several other employment possibilities. A local city government offered me an administrative position and after careful consideration, I accepted the offer. The position provides an excellent match for my interests at this point in my career.

Thank you very much for interviewing me and considering me for the position, I enjoyed meeting you and learning about innovative community programs you are planning to implement. The Performing Arts School is an excellent school and I wish you and your staff well.

Sincerely,

Marsha A. Wells

In Response to Advice or Special Treatment – Remember you might have had an interview with the president of the company, but others might be involved in organizing the interview. Excerpts from the thank you letter might be:

Secretary – I learned that Mr. Westwood and Ms. Smith were out of town the week before I arrived. Scheduling them on short notice must have been difficult. I appreciate you making the arrangements. Our meetings were informative, enjoyable, and not at all rushed.

Co-Worker – I was apprehensive about renting a car then traversing unfamiliar territory in the city. Your thoughtfulness of meeting my plane helped me concentrate on my meeting with Ms. Smith so that my short visit could be more effective. I appreciated your tour of Chicago on the way from the airport and am looking forward to the opportunity to explore it further.

Career Advice – The new insurance licensing procedure was a surprise to me, and I've sent for the test review book you mentioned. I will keep you posted on my progress in refining my career goal. Also, I especially appreciate your referring me to John Buckner. I'll telephone his office next week and let you know what develops from our meeting.

How to Send Your Letter

E-mail – Using this medium for thank you letters depends on the employer. It demonstrates your computer ease and equally, if not more important, it is fast and should arrive before they make their hiring decision if they check their e-mail daily. Use your best judgment. If the employer used computers extensively, fine. If they don't, your message may never be seen and a letter is best.

Handwritten vs. Typed – Job search thank you letters should always be typed as this will express your professional style and respond to the expectations appropriate for the situation. It tells the reader you know proper business etiquette, you know this is a business situation, and you demonstrate your best professional effort.

Confirmation Letters

Confirmation letters should always be typewritten using the business style of writing that was described earlier in the handout.

Interview – If the interview is scheduled with enough time for a letter to arrive, you might want to write a confirmation letter to insure you have written down the correct information or that the individual scheduling the appointment wrote the appointment in the proper section of the appointment book. You might want to try something like this:

2356 Main Street
Potsdam, NY 13676
November 23, 2002

Mrs. Suzanne Birdwell
66 Nesting Place
Virginia Beach, VA 45678

Dear Mrs. Birdwell:

I just wanted to send a quick note to reconfirm our appointment next Tuesday at 10:00 a.m. I look forward to discussing with you how my interests, skills and experience can promote the Virginia Beach Convention Center.

As you requested, I have enclosed my portfolio for your reference and would be delighted to speak about these exhibits in more detail during the interview. Please let me know if you need any additional information prior to our meeting on Tuesday.

Sincerely,

Sandy Smith

Enclosure

Congratulations!



Job Offer – However well they think they hire, employers are still uncertain about the outcome of their hiring decision until new employees perform in their organization. Why not put their anxieties at ease and get off on the right foot? Write a letter expressing your appreciation for having received the confidence and trust of the employers. Reiterate what you told the employer during the job interview(s) about your goals and expected performance. Conclude with a reaffirmation of your starting date as well as a statement about how much you look forward to becoming a productive member of the team.

570 Shoreline Drive
Oswego, NY 13126
August 2, 2002

Mr. Jack Sprat, Division Manager
Data International, Inc.
123 Company Lane
Tickle, CT 23568

Dear Mr. Sprat:

I am writing to confirm my acceptance of your employment offer of July 30, 2002, and to tell you how delighted I am to be joining the Data International, Inc. in Tickle. I am confident that I can make significant contributions to your corporation, and I am grateful for the opportunity you have given me.

As we discussed in my telephone acceptance earlier today, I will report to work at 8:00 a.m. on September 1, 2002 and will have completed my medical examination and drug testing by the start date. Additionally, I shall complete all employment and insurance forms for the new employee orientation on September 5, 2002.

I look forward to working with you and your fine team and I appreciate your confidence in me and am happy to be joining your staff.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Smith



Special Situation Letters

No two-job searches are identical. There are always questions about what you should do next. Letter guides and books can only steer you in a direction. YOU were there, and you are the one who must assess the tone of the situation and proceed to the next step. A few special situation letters are detailed below, but if you still have trouble deciding about a situation, call the Career Planning Office at 267-2344 or stop by 106 Sisson Hall and ask the advice of a career counselor.

1. **Networking Letters** – When you are networking with professionals in your field, you might write something like, *“I am interested in a career that will utilize my background skill in negotiating and understand that you are an expert in this area. If possible, I would like to meet with you briefly to speak about possible positions and avenues that I might pursue.”*

2. **The employer told me that I would hear of their decision in three weeks. Four weeks have passed. What should I do?**

Rejection letters are form letters and are the easiest to send. No news can be good news. A week’s delay is not unusual, but you may reach a point where you’re beginning to worry. You don’t want to push the employer to a hasty decision. Write or call. You might write something like this:

I know that it may be difficult to reach me, as no two days seem to be the same in my college schedule. Since our meeting four weeks ago, my interest in Smithville Central School has remained strong and I hope that you have decided in my favor. If you are still in the process of reaching a decision, is there any additional information or reference you would like to have to assist you in your decision making process? If so, please contact me at 315-555-8989.

I appreciate your consideration of my interest in the Smithville Central School District.

A telephone conversation might have the same content.

3. **I am not too sure about an association or an employer and would like to attain some background information about them to use in writing my cover letter or preparing for an interview. How can I phrase this inquiry?**

There are several approaches that you can take to attain such information. First, check to see if the Career Planning Office employer files have any information on the employer. Second, contact the association or employer directly by letter, e-mail or by telephone about getting the information. You might try something like this:

I am (a student at or alumnus of SUNY Potsdam, and I am working with the Career Planning staff to develop my long-range career plans. I am interested in (the association name or company name) and the (name of the career) field. I would appreciate any career information or marketing pieces you could send me.

NOTE: *Conclude the special situation letter with a simple thank you. Be sure to type your name and address on the letter itself as envelopes tend to be separated when opened.*