

Career Development Center

OccidentalCollege



THE PURPOSE OF A COVER LETTER

The cover letter is a formal business letter which is often the first contact with a prospective employer. It serves as an introduction of you and your background experience. Since it is usually the first impression you make on the employer, you want it to be your best.

Many employers will not look at a resume that arrives without a cover letter. The cover letter is a marketing tool; it communicates to the employer that you are interested in their position and their company and that you have something valuable to contribute. In certain situations, a well-written cover letter can be more effective than the resume itself. Therefore, *do your homework!* Before writing your letter, find out as much as you can about the organization and the specific position. This research enables you to better relate your skills and qualifications to the organization and the position.

Anyone who can write a grammatically correct letter can write a good cover letter. However, it takes thinking and planning in order to create a cover letter that will set the stage for the employer to accept your resume as something special.

Step One: The Introduction

Indicate why you are contacting the employer, the position you are applying for, and how you became aware of this position. If you are responding to an position announcement, mention where you saw it. If an individual refers you, definitely mention their name.

Step Two: Their Need – Your Experience

Let them know that you have know something about their organization, their services or products. Address the hiring need they have and how you specifically meet their qualifications. Here is where your research will pay off. Highlight the best evidence of your qualifications. Convince the reader that what you have is exactly what they want. Do not copy your resume.

Step Three: Conclusion and Contact

State that you are interested in having an interview. Include where, when, and how you can be contacted; however, the best technique is to be pro-active by telling the employer exactly when you will initiate your follow-up telephone call or email and stick to this date!

BUSINESS FORMAT

A business format is the most recommended form for the cover letter. The block-style format with all text beginning at the left margin is preferred. Paragraphs are not indented. Handwritten notes are *only* appropriate for certain thank you notes.

Address your cover letter to the individual, business function, or discipline most clearly related to the position for which you are applying. Always try to get the name and job title of the person who could hire you. It is okay to call the Human Resource Department to find out the above information. Your letter and resume are most likely to be read if you are sending them to someone specific. Cover letters that are sent to personnel departments usually do not get read. However, there will be situations where you will not be able to obtain the name of a specific person, so you may want to use a title such as Personnel Director or Selection Committee.

WRITING STYLE GUIDE

- Concentrate on "why" you desire to work in that particular organization or field.
- Focus on what you can offer the employer *rather than* what you can gain by working for their organization.
- Your letter should be original, brief (one page), business-like, and it should be a good example of your ability to write clearly and concisely!
- Keep your sentences ten to twenty words long.
- Limit paragraph length to five to seven sentences.
- Use powerful action phrases to describe accomplishments, qualities and experiences.
- Try to avoid the overuse of "I."
- Personalize; reflect your style by balancing professionalism with personal warmth and friendliness.
- Convey enthusiasm, commitment, and confidence.

PRESENTATION

- Send a clean original signed with black ink; do not use a ballpoint pen.
- Use the same high-quality paper as you do for your resume.
- Stay away from bright colors.
- Use a common font with a professional appearance, such as Bookman, New York, Times New Roman.
- Keep a copy of your letter on file for future reference.
- Proofread each letter carefully for proper spelling, syntax, grammar, and typographical errors.
- Have someone else critique your letter to offer constructive feedback.

THANK YOU LETTERS USED IN JOB SEARCH

A thank you, or follow-up letter, may be one of the most important letters of your job search. It is a way of offering your appreciation for being given an interview and, in some cases, accepting or declining an offer. Most importantly, it is another way of further marketing yourself and impressing potential employers.

Thank you letters are usually personal and express your sincere interest in the position and the organization. They expand upon your qualifications, illustrate examples of your work, and further develop issues discussed in the interview. Customize your letter to meet each individual situation. Few individuals remember to send letters, so this will set you apart!

Some suggestions:

- Address the letter to key person(s) with whom you interviewed.
- Send the letter within one or two days following the interview.
- Be personal, specific, and sincere in your thanks.
- Provide any additional information that might have been requested during the interview.
- Confirm the employer's or your follow-up action (if any).
- As always, proofread for errors.

TYPES OF THANK YOU LETTERS

Following the Job Interview

Indicate your appreciation for the opportunity to interview and your interest in working with the organization. Reiterate your qualifications; highlight strengths that may or may not have been mentioned in the interview. Keep it short and to the point.

Following an Informational Interview

Thank the individual for taking the time to speak with you regarding his/her field. Mention how the interview was informative and helpful to you. Note that you are following up on any referrals the individual may have made and indicate that you will keep him/her apprised of your progress. A thank you should be sent for telephone interviews as well as personal interviews.

Accepting a Job Offer

Your job search is a success! More than likely, the employer will request a letter of acceptance. It should be brief. The letter should refer to the offer letter or telephone conversation stating that you accept the offer at a specified salary and starting date. You may express your eagerness to join the organization and confirm any instructions for travel, where to report, etc.

Declining a Job Offer

Should you decide not to accept a job offer, a thank you letter is mandatory and should be sent as soon as possible. Indicate your appreciation of the offer and the time invested in your

interview. State that you are removing yourself as a candidate for consideration and explain your reason. Even when declining a position, a thank you letter keeps the lines of communication open should you need to contact that organization in the future.

Letter of Application

This type of letter serves as an alternative to a resume and cover letter, particularly if your background and reasons for interest in a specific job cannot be effectively and/or appropriately expressed in the resume. Though not frequently used, the letter of application combines the content of the resume and cover letter in a narrative summary of your background and experience.

Request for Additional Information

On occasion you may need additional information about a position or organization before considering or accepting employment. A position should not be accepted until you are aware of all aspects of employment. Either a telephone call or a letter would be appropriate for obtaining the needed information. The letter should make reference to the last communication and/or the job offer. Questions should be specific.

COVER LETTER FORMAT GUIDELINES

Your Name
Your Address
City, State, Zip Code

Date

Name of Contact Person, Title
Organization/Company
Street Address
City, State, Zip

Dear (Contact Person):

Opening Paragraph: Opening salvo, make it good!

- Establish tone in the first sentence to make the reader want to continue reading.
- Name the job for which you are applying. Tell how you learned about it.
- Mention the name of the person (if any) who referred you to the organization.

Body Paragraph: This is the critical content section.

- Knowledge of organization/company is important. Do research! (Why them?)
- Acknowledge the skills required by the open position.
- State the skills/strengths you will bring to the job and parallel them to the position.
- Give examples of your skills and work experience – quantified results, accomplishments, achievements and how they will transfer to the job.

Closing Paragraph: Push for personal contact – an interview.

- Refer to documents enclosed or available, such as your portfolio with resume, reference letters, a reference sheet and, if applicable, writing samples.
- Assert yourself by telling the contact person you will call him/her on a designated date to set up an interview. Alternatively, state you are available at his/her convenience.
- Make it very easy for the person to contact you. List your best phone number and email as well as days and times when you can be reached.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Typed Name

COVER LETTER SAMPLE 1: Employment

John T. Smith
1600 Campus Road, Box 123
Los Angeles, CA 90041

March 6, 20xx

Mr. John Bowman, Vice President
California Federal Credit
800 Travis Avenue, Suite 1404
Houston, TX 77002

Dear Mr. Bowman:

I am interested in applying for a position within your organization's management training program, where I can strengthen my knowledge and exposure to the consumer finance industry. Your organization was represented at an information session at Occidental College.

I plan to pursue a career in financial management and would like to begin my career in banking and consumer finance. From looking at your site on the web, I feel your management program offers a wonderful opportunity to learn both banking and consumer finance. I was impressed by the organization's growth in the past five years, as well as how it is implementing new programs.

As current president of Occidental's Senate, I have had the opportunity to strengthen my leadership and organizational skills by planning and coordinating various fundraising and special event activities for the campus community. Through my academic coursework in English and the Liberal Arts, I have also developed strong communicative, analytical, and problem-solving skills which will be necessary not only as a management trainee, but also in a future role as a branch manager. Furthermore, while attending college, I gained experience in customer relations and sales through various part-time positions in retail sales and telemarketing. In addition to these experiences, my interpersonal skills, self-motivation, and willingness to learn will also enable me to be a strong candidate for your excellent management-training program.

I have attached my resume for your consideration. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to further discuss my qualifications. I plan to contact you within the next week to determine the possibility of arranging an interview time. However, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (323) 456-7890 or jtsmith@oxy.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
John T. Smith

Enclosure

COVER LETTER SAMPLE 2: Employment

Ray Johnson
1567 California Avenue, #560
Pasadena, CA 91101

March 20, 20xx

Mark Patterson, Section Manager
Hewlett-Packard Company
16399 W. Bennett Drive
San Diego, CA 92717

Dear Mr. Patterson:

I am applying for the position of systems analyst in your San Diego office that was advertised on MonsterTRAK. My friend, John Brown, is employed in the Los Angeles office and highly recommends Hewlett-Packard.

Early in my coursework in Physics and Mathematics at Occidental, I began seriously considering future employment with Hewlett-Packard Company. We use a number of your products in our laboratory work. The design, precision, and reliability of these products are impressive. More recently, I noted in a professional computing journal that you are undertaking a new project to apply microcomputers in automatic control systems.

Many of my electives were in the fields of control systems and computers, and I worked for three summers in microcomputer applications. I believe that I am well qualified to begin my career employment on your new project; I know that it is directly related to my interests.

I have enclosed my resume for your consideration. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how my education and experience would be consistent with your needs. I will contact you by phone within five to seven days to discuss the possibility of an interview. If you need to reach me, my phone number is (626) 359-1234 and my email is rjohnson@oxy.edu

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Ray Johnson

Enclosure
(If faxing, use Attachment instead)

COVER LETTER SAMPLE 3: Internship

Amy Jones
1600 Campus Road, Box 123
Los Angeles, CA 90041

March 6, 20xx

Intern Coordinator, Personnel Department
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
1615 H Street, NW
Washington, DC 20062

Dear Intern Coordinator:

I am interested in applying for an internship within the Policy Group of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce for the summer of 20xx. I would like the opportunity to apply my knowledge and interests in economics, international relations, and public policy through an internship in one of the following divisions: International Policy, Economic Policy, or Domestic Policy. By participating in your organization's internship program, I will gain a better understanding of how policies addressing the concerns of the business community are developed and implemented.

I have taken various courses in international relations, American and comparative politics, and economics. In addition, in my current position as a research fellow, I assist an economics faculty member in conducting research on the relationship between international trade and the growth of small businesses specializing in manufacturing. This position has enabled me to strengthen my research and analytical skills by utilizing a variety of government publications and resources describing economic and business forecast trends. Furthermore, I have increased my understanding of the interrelationship among international relations, the types of services/products provided by the small-business market, and the fluctuation in international trade. As indicated on my enclosed resume, I have also developed communication and organizational skills through my involvement in campus activities and other work experiences.

I am excited about the opportunity to work for your organization. I would like to work full-time as an intern, from approximately June 4 through August 31, 20xx. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (987) 654-3210 or ajones@oxy.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Amy Jones

THANK YOU LETTER SAMPLE: Following a Job Interview

Your Name
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Date

Name of Interviewer(s)
Position/Title of Interviewer
Name of Company/Organization
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. Interviewer:

I appreciated the opportunity to talk with you on (date). The information you shared with me about (company name) was excellent, and I am excited about the possibility of applying my education to the position (identify the position) we discussed.

I am confident that my education, skills, and experience provide me with a solid foundation for the position of (identify the position). I feel I can be an asset to your organization.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to hear about your organization. If I can provide you with any additional information, please let me know. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Typed Name

THANK YOU LETTER SAMPLE: Following an Informational Interview

Your Name
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Date

Name of Individual Interviewed
Position/Title
Name of Company/Organization
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. Individual:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to discuss the field of physical therapy with you yesterday. Your enthusiasm for your work and career has encouraged me to pursue this field further.

Also, thank you for referring me to Ms. Sheila Garcia. I have contacted her and will be working in her office as an aide during my final semester of school.

Again, I appreciate your time, honesty, and encouragement.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Typed Name

ACCEPTANCE LETTER SAMPLE

Your Name
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Date

Name of Individual Offering You Employment
Company Address
City, State, Zip

Dear Mr./Ms.:

I am very pleased to accept your offer (state offer) as outlined in your letter of (date). (Include all details of offer—location, starting salary, starting date, etc.).

(Mention enclosures, applications, employee forms, and other information, if applicable.)

I have been very impressed with your organization throughout the interview process and in discussions with your colleagues. I am looking forward to joining (the company name).

Thank you for all you have done.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Typed name