

SKILLS AREA RESOURCE SERIES:

COVER LETTERS

(and other Job Search Correspondence)

COVER LETTERS:

Purpose: A cover letter serves as a first opportunity for a candidate to present herself to a potential employer in a favorable light. It should be direct, persuasive, descriptive, attractive, and tailored to a specific employer and position. Your cover letter can differentiate you significantly from other applicants competing for the same position by emphasizing credentials and experience that closely match the position. **A cover letter should always accompany your resume in any employment inquiry.**

Format: The following is a basic cover letter format used in most business correspondence. When drafting a cover letter, begin with the basic format, and then complete the paragraphs with pertinent information. **Remember to tailor each cover letter with information relevant to each job application.**

- ⇒ Approximately four to six lines below the date, the name, title, if known and full address of the person to whom you are addressing the letter should appear. Place the greeting lines below the address.
- ⇒ For the letter body, use block style with no indentations for each paragraph or semi-block style with an indentation of five spaces at the beginning of each paragraph. Paragraphs are single-spaced internally, and double-spaced between paragraphs.
- ⇒ Ideally, business letters are to be kept to one page; if a second page is necessary, follow this format: Continuation sheets should contain at least three message lines. The last word on a sheet should never be divided. The heading begins at least six lines from the top edge of the page, and should include the name of the person to whom you are writing, the page number and the date. In other aspects, follow the first page's format.
- ⇒ Place the complimentary close two lines below the last line of the message and align it with the center of the page, as with the date/address at the top of the letter. Align the signature line with the complimentary close, and place it far enough down to leave space to clearly sign your name.
- ⇒ Enclosure(s) should be noted two lines below the signature line, flush and aligned with the left margin.

Alternative Style: Use the modern letter, full block format in which every line begins at the left margin, with no indentations.

Paragraph Structure:

First Paragraph:

Who are you and why are you writing? Use this paragraph to grab the attention of reader and to answer the questions: who are you and why are you writing? The response can be as simple as stating you are "a second-year law student with three years of professional business experience seeking summer employment at [employer's name]" and/or you are "responding to a job posting from the GW Career Development Office."

Ideally, you will be referred by a professional or personal contact to an employment opportunity. If so, your opening should also state: "John Smith recommended that I contact you regarding employment upon graduation."

Second Paragraph:

Why should they pick you? This paragraph (or two) details your interest and fit with the particular organization. Employers are more interested in what you can do for them, rather than the experience they can give you. Answer such questions as:

- Why are you interested in working for the firm or organization? The answer may include the organization's mission, type of work, geographic location, size, or reputation. Employers can be particular about hiring based not only on your qualifications, but also on your interest in that organization. Be genuine. This is an opportunity to show that you researched the employer.
- Why are you the right person for the job? Why should they hire you? Tell the employer what skills you bring to the particular job **without** reiterating the details of your resume. Give specific examples your relevant skills/accomplishments. You can refer to a few specific employers, but avoid repeating your resume. Consider a wrap-up sentence commenting on how this particular job utilizes your skills/experience.

Final Paragraph:

What are you going to do next? Thank the employer for his/her time and consideration, and state what you plan to do next. Tell them how to contact you, especially if you will not be reachable for a period of time at the contact information on your resume. Don't just ride off into the sunset. Suggest ways to connect, especially if they are outside of the DC Metro area. Tell them if/when you will be visiting their city. It is always appropriate to state that you look forward to hearing from them.

OTHER JOB SEARCH CORRESPONDENCE

In addition to the introductory cover letter, there exist other opportunities during your job search to correspond with those individuals supporting your efforts and with prospective employers. These opportunities may include:

- ☒ Writing a letter asking for an informational interview

- ☒ Following up with an employer that failed to respond to your initial letter of inquiry
- ☒ Sending a thank you letters to an individual following a personal meeting (employment/informational interview)
- ☒ Responding to a job offer in order to accept or reject the offer or to request an extended period during which to consider the offer
- ☒ A letter offering further information in support of your credentials (subsequent to the interview and prior to the final employment decision—either in response to an employer request or self-initiated)
- ☒ Writing a letter to thank those persons who have agreed to act as references or who have offered direct personal referrals.

GUIDELINES FOR ALL JOB SEARCH CORRESPONDENCE: When corresponding with supporters or potential employers, consider the following guidelines:

- Keep letters no longer than three or four relatively short and tight paragraphs.
- All letters should be in professional, standard business letter format.
- You must **PROOFREAD** each letter carefully to ensure accurate grammar, spelling, and **NO TYPOGRAPHICAL ERRORS**.
- All letters should be on quality bond paper, and individually typed/word processed.

THANK YOU LETTERS:

Necessity: Thank you letters are an essential part of the application/interview process, and should be written within 24 hours following the interview. **Note: During the Fall Recruitment Program, it is not necessary and employers do not expect to receive thank you letters after initial screening interviews. However employers do expect to receive thank you letters after call-back interviews.**

Purpose: Thank you letters should highlight an element of the interview that will enable the interviewer to quickly recall your conversation. The purpose of the letter is to remind the interviewer of who you are, to emphasize your qualifications for the job and to express your continuing interest in the firm/organization.

Multiple Interviewer Protocol: If you interview with several attorneys within an organization, send one letter to the most influential person or to the person with whom you had the best rapport and ask that individual to convey your gratitude to the others. Include the names of the other interviewers within your letter, indicating your enjoyment in meeting with all of them. If you chose to write more than one thank-you note to an employer, keep in mind all of your letters to the firm will be kept in the same file, so make each letter slightly different. Handwritten thank-you notes are preferred unless your handwriting is illegible, if you interviewed with an Intellectual Property firm or all of your communications with an employer have been through e-mail.

PLEASE NOTE: Do not copy verbatim CDO sample letters; they are intended to provide stylistic ideas.