

BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE

OVERVIEW

This packet of information contains helpful hints and examples that you can use to create personalized, professional business letters. Drafting business correspondence may be different than the writing you do for classes. Use this packet and have your letter proofread by a career counselor to ensure that you are presenting yourself in the best possible light to employers. Types of business correspondence covered include:

- ▶ Cover Letters
- ▶ Thank You Letters
- ▶ Acceptance Letters
- ▶ Rejection Letters
- ▶ Withdrawal Letters

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- ▶ Use professional business letter format.
- ▶ Make sure you sign all your letters in blue or black ink.
- ▶ Address cover letters to a specific person. Call if you do not have a contact person. Avoid sending letters to “Human Resources Manager” or “Hiring Coordinator.”
- ▶ Confirm gender on ambiguous names (Chris, Kelly, etc).
- ▶ Use standard, easy-to-read fonts such as Times New Roman or Arial.
- ▶ Use the same paper and font as your resume.
- ▶ Use envelopes that match your paper. Type, not handwrite, addresses on envelopes.
- ▶ Proofread your letters carefully.
- ▶ Use professional writing style (i.e. do not use contractions, slang, etc.) Language should be polite and to the point.
- ▶ Avoid simply using photocopied “To Whom It May Concern” letters.
- ▶ Don’t forget to send a cover letter with a resume and vice versa!
- ▶ Don’t rush the cover letter process. Many people find that writing a cover letter is more difficult than writing a resume. Let someone in Career Services proofread drafts of your cover letter.
- ▶ Keep copies of all correspondence with employers.
- ▶ Use a laser printer.
- ▶ Close each letter with an appropriate salutation such as Sincerely, Cordially, Gratefully, Best regards, etc.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

Chances are good that you will be using email for part, if not all, of your job search written communication. Here are several suggestions for ensuring clear, effective, and professional electronic communication:

Sending Email to Employers

- ▶ Make your subject line as specific as possible (i.e. “Resume for Management Trainee Opening,” “Follow Up from Interview 6/14/07,” etc.) Avoid subject lines that are too general such as “Job Search” or “Resume.” Some companies will ask that you reference a job title, code, or number in your subject line.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION (CONTINUED)

- ▶ Address and sign your emails. Begin messages with “Dear Ms. Brown:” or “Mr. McNulty:” and sign your messages with your full name and contact information. If you use the signature feature of your email system, do not include unnecessary quotations.
- ▶ Use plain text, not HTML email. Some systems cannot support HTML email.
- ▶ Use an easy to decipher and professional email address. While “cutiepie@aol.com” might be appropriate for informal personal communication, it’s better to use an email that includes part of your name for professional email correspondence (i.e. bgibson@hotmail.com). It’s recommended to have one email address that you check daily just for your job search. Free email accounts are readily available on the web.
- ▶ Spelling and grammar count, even on email. Again, proofread your message carefully before hitting “send.”
- ▶ Provide a personal name if your email system allows it. People are more likely to read an email from “John Doe” than “jd1455@aol.com.”
- ▶ Don’t expect an immediate answer. Electronic mail is about dealing with communication when you are able to do so.

Issues Specific to Resumes and Cover Letters

Follow the employer’s guidelines for sending resumes. Some will indicate that they prefer attachments in MS Word, for example, and others will expect you to use the form on their website. To be on the safe side, include your cover letter, in plain text, inside the body of the email. Cut and paste your plain text resume in the body, too, using “[start of resume]” as a divider. If a company does want you to send attachments, make sure you are not sending any viruses. Since you cannot physically add your signature to your letters, you might want to add “[sent via email]” at the top of any cover letters sent as attachments.

Basic Netiquette

- ▶ Do not type in all capital letters. It is distracting and considered rude. Likewise, do not use all lowercase letters either. This may be considered a sign of laziness. Take your time and craft a well thought out email message just as you would if you were sending the same message as a letter via US Mail.
- ▶ Keep in mind that email is a form of written communication that creates a written record. Choose your words wisely.
- ▶ Break your email message into short paragraphs and leave a blank line in between each paragraph. This makes your message much easier to read.
- ▶ Avoid using e-speak acronyms such as BTW (by the way) and IMO (in my opinion).
- ▶ Avoid using emotions (i.e. ;-) smiley faces) in professional correspondence.
- ▶ If you are replying to a previous email, include enough of that original message for context. Do not simply send a one or two word answer without any reference.
- ▶ Use “please” and “thank you” when appropriate.

COVER LETTERS

A cover letter accompanies any correspondence to an employer where you present your resume for consideration. A cover letter allows you to showcase your writing skills and to sell yourself more directly than a resume. The purpose of a cover letter is to convey a specific message, which generates interest in you as a person and increases your chances of getting an interview. Cover letters are personalized and the content should reflect your objective and interest in that particular employer. Cover letters are generally organized into 3 or 4 paragraphs:

First paragraph: *Introduce yourself.*

Explain why you are writing by indicating in which position you are interested. You may also reference how you learned of the company or opening (newspaper ad, mutual contact, website, etc). If you are interested in an internship, indicate such in the first paragraph and include the semester you hope to intern (i.e. “summer internship in the marketing department.”)

Second paragraph: *Demonstrate your knowledge of the open position and the company. Sell yourself.*

The second, and sometimes third, paragraph(s) should address the employer’s needs. The needs of the employer are the skills that an employer lists as requirements for a particular position. Highlight and expand upon a few of your accomplishments from your resume, but do not simply restate your resume. You may choose to mention skills or personal characteristics that are not included in your resume. State with confidence, in assertive but pleasant language, that your demonstrated skills would be beneficial to the employer. Demonstrate knowledge you may have about the position or company (i.e. “I am impressed with ABC’s steady growth and commitment to customer service.”)

Last paragraph: *Close the letter in a friendly and professional manner.*

This closing paragraph should thank the employer for his or her time and consideration and also indicate an active means in which you will follow up. (i.e. “I will contact you next week to confirm receipt of these materials.”) You may also directly ask for an interview.

If you are applying for an out-of-state position, state your travel plans and availability for interviewing (i.e. “I will be traveling to Boston on November 10-15, and I would be delighted to meet with you during that time, at your convenience.”) It is also a good idea to comment on your interest in relocating (i.e. “After graduation, I will be relocating to the Denver area.”)

Finally, avoid letters that are too long or stray from your major theme. To ensure high quality cover letters, proofread several times for content and grammar, and seek feedback from a career counselor. An error on a cover letter or resume may indicate to an employer that you are not a detail-oriented person.

Each cover letter is unique to each person’s background and objective and to the needs of the employer. The samples provided and the information above is intended to serve as a guideline for students creating their own cover letters. Students are discouraged from copying the exact wording of the sample letters.

OTHER CORRESPONDENCE

Thank You Letter

Thank you letters should be sent within 24 hours of an interview. In most situations, a formal typed thank you letter is appropriate (see sample letter). A handwritten note card may also be a suitable way to thank the employer in some situations. Your letter should:

- Indicate how and why you met.
- Reiterate your enthusiasm and continued interest in the position.
- Highlight your qualifications.
- Provide important information, which may not have been discussed in the interview.
- Convey your appreciation for the interviewer's time and consideration.

Acceptance Letter

This letter usually follows a telephone conversation and is used to confirm a job offer. The letter should convey acceptance of the offer and express appreciation for the opportunity to work for their organization. Your letter should also restate any terms of employment agreed upon during your telephone conversation (i.e. job title, salary, benefits, and start date.) While an acceptance letter is not a necessity, it is an appreciated courtesy and may serve as record of your conversation.

Rejection Letter

The employer is not the only one looking for the right match. Candidates may decline employment offers that do not fit their career objectives. This letter should be brief and indicate that after thoughtful consideration you have decided not to accept this offer. Thank the employer for his or her time and consideration. This gesture is a professional courtesy and is often appreciated. While this employer may not fit your needs today, perhaps you may be seeking employment there in the future.

Withdrawal Letter

If you have accepted an offer of employment, you have an obligation to inform employers if you wish to withdraw your application from consideration. Your letter should express appreciation for the employer's time. It also should indicate that after much thought you have decided to accept an offer from another organization most suited to your present stage of career development.

SAMPLE COVER LETTER I

You can use the same heading as your resume for a uniformed look.

Kevin Downey

8651 South Howell Avenue Oak Creek, WI 53154 ♦ 414.768.8876 ♦ kbdowney@aol.com

March 25, 2007

Don't guess the gender on ambiguous first names. Whenever possible, send letter to specific person, not "Hiring Coordinator."

Mr. Chris Dunkin
Director of Human Resources
Upscale Corporation
6201 Washington Avenue
Racine, WI 53406

Dear Mr. Dunkin:

I am very impressed with the recent growth of Upscale Corporation, so it was with great interest that I read your advertisement in The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. I will be graduating from Carthage College in June with a degree in Marketing. Please accept the enclosed resume as indication of my interest in a sales representative position with your company.

Highlight a few key points and accomplishments. Avoid simply restating your resume.

As part of my degree requirements, I have taken courses in marketing, advertising, and management. All of these courses, combined with my liberal arts education, provide me with a strong foundation for a career in sales. Additionally, I worked as a sales trainee with XYZ Industries for the past two summers. This work experience provided me with the opportunity to closely interact with retailers in the distribution of XYZ products. Through persistence, hard work, and my ability to relate well with people, I was able to contribute to a 50 percent increase in sales.

Quantify as much as possible.

I believe my educational background and experience fit well with the expectations your corporation has outlined for the vacant sales representative position. I welcome the opportunity to further discuss my qualifications with you. I will contact you within a few days to discuss a possible interview. Thank you for your consideration.

Indicate an active means of follow up. Do what you say you will!

Sincerely,

Don't forget to sign your letter.

Kevin Downey

Encl.

SAMPLE COVER LETTER II

This is an example of a standard professional business letter heading.

John Reid
11229 Oak Street
Pleasant Prairie, WI 53158
(262) 942-6768
reid@carthage.edu

May 5, 2007

Dr. Claudia Thompson
Director, Research Operations
BioTech Advantage
2133 Half Day Road
Lincolnshire, IL 60052

Use your networking contacts as much as possible in your job search.

Dear Dr. Thompson:

At the suggestion of our mutual friend, Professor David Hill, I am writing to you today to express my interest in working in the Research and Development division of BioTech Advantage. I will be receiving my Bachelor of Arts degree in biology from Carthage College at the end of this month. I have enclosed my resume for your review.

As your website indicates, BioTech Advantage seeks hardworking, flexible individuals with exceptional scientific knowledge and problem solving capabilities to serve its clients. As you can see from the attached resume, my particular skills and interests include:

- Summer internship experiences in both Research and Development at Abbott Laboratories and the Medical Lab at St. Luke's Hospital
- Honors in Senior Thesis "Asexual Reproduction in Clonal Genotypes in *Haliplanella lineata*"
- Advanced lab skills including spectrometry, PCR, Gel Electrophoresis, DNA and RNA Isolation Techniques, Light and Electron Microscopy
- Knowledge of laboratory sterilization and safety procedures
- Strong computer skills including SPSS, HTML, and Java capabilities
- Excellent communication skills, leadership potential, and the ability to manage my time effectively.

You may elect to use a bulleted list in your resume instead of a paragraph form. This allows you to showcase your main selling points in a format that is easy to read.

I believe that my unique combination of skills and experiences would fit well with the demands of the position. I am greatly interested in the field of medical biology and understand that BioTech Advantage is making great strides in the advancement of medical technology.

Dr. Thompson, thank you for your time and consideration. I would be delighted to meet with you, at your convenience, to discuss our mutual goals. I will contact you early next week to confirm receipt of these materials. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

John Reid

Enclosure

SAMPLE INTERNSHIP COVER LETTER

Erica R. Smith

erica83@yahoo.com

Carthage College Box 777
2001 Alford Park Drive
Kenosha, WI 53140
262/551.5555

1252 Green Bay Road
Highland Park, IL 60043
847/735.5665

When writing a business letter to a woman, always use the title "Ms.", regardless of her marital status, unless she holds a professional title such as "Dr."

January 19, 2007

Ms. Carrie Brown
Hiring Coordinator
Windy City Events
16 East Pearson Street
Chicago, IL 60610

Dear Ms. Brown:

For internships, indicate for which term you would like to work.

I am writing in response to the Communications Intern position that was posted on www.monstertrak.com. I am a junior at Carthage College and am interested in interning at Windy City Events beginning in early June, earning credit for the summer term. An internship at Windy City Events would compliment my communications coursework.

Quantify as much as possible.

As my resume indicates, I possess excellent experience in special events planning. As Social Chair for the Residence Life Council, I organized a successful "Campus Carnival 2007," an outdoor event in which 47 different student organizations hosted game booths with profits donated to a charity of the organization's choice. This event, the first of its kind at Carthage, attracted over 500 students and raised close to \$4,000. Through this experience of motivating other students, coordinating details with vendors, and publicizing the event, I realized my talent for event planning. I have also been actively involved in other student organization while effectively balancing my academic work.

You may elect to include an additional paragraph outlining your personal skills and characteristics.

I am highly organized, detail-oriented, and creative. My peers would describe me as enthusiastic and hard working. I am eager to learn the different facets of event planning and believe that you would be impressed with my work ethic and interpersonal communication skills.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I will be contacting you in early February regarding a possible interview date. Should you have questions before that, please feel free to contact me.

The "Encl." abbreviation indicates that additional materials (such as your resume) are enclosed with this letter.

Cordially,

Erica Smith

Encl.

Sample Thank You Letter

Allison Smith

518 North 81st Street / Kenosha, WI 53140 / (262) 846-1234 / asmith@carthage.edu

May 15, 2007

Mr. James Johnson, Director
Human Resource Department
Wohl Shoe Company
2290 Cambridge Street
Geneva, IL 60134

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Thank you for the opportunity to interview with you yesterday for the Sales Trainee position. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about Wohl Shoe Company. The interview with you and your staff confirmed my initial positive impressions of your company.

My enthusiasm for the position and my interest in working for Wohl were only strengthened as a result of the interview. I believe my academic preparation, competitive nature, and desire for success qualifies me as a strong candidate for your sales force.

Again, thank you for your consideration. If you need any additional information, please call (262) 846-1234.

Regards,

Allison Smith

Sample Acceptance Letter

Jane Lewis

jane_lewis@yahoo.com

Current Address

2001 Alford Park Drive
Box 1234
Kenosha, WI 53140
262/551-6560

Permanent Address

11735 South Kostner Ave.
Alsip, IL 60803
708/371.9877

April 9, 2007

Ms. Jackie Green
Executive Director
Somerset House
5001 N. Sheridan Road
Chicago, IL 60640

Dear Ms. Green:

I was delighted to receive your telephone call on April 7. During this conversation, you offered me the position of case manager for Somerset House at a monthly take-home salary of \$1,800. I am pleased to accept your offer.

As we discussed, I will report for new employee orientation at 8:00 am on May 15, 2007. In addition, I have completed all of the employment and insurance forms you have sent and I am returning those with this letter.

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

Warmly,

Jane Lewis

Enc.

Sample Rejection Letter

Sandra White
1919 – 15th Avenue
Kenosha, WI 53140

June 10, 2007

Mr. Thomas Dunn
Director of Recruiting
Johnson and Sons
1520 Locus
Kenosha, WI 53140

Dear Mr. Dunn:

Thank you for the offer of employment as sales representative with your company. Your confidence in me is greatly appreciated.

You have a fine organization and there are many aspects of the position which are very appealing to me. However, after careful consideration, I have decided to accept another position which more closely meets my long-term goals.

I want to thank you for the consideration given to me. It was a pleasure meeting you.

Sincerely,

Sandra White

Sample Withdrawal Letter

Dan Block
2633 North Hamden Court #3N
Chicago, IL 60614
773-534-6651
dblock@carthage.edu

April 2, 2007

Mr. Dave Schultz
President
Graphic Production
PO Box 2199
Oak Park, IL 60303

Dear Mr. Schultz:

I am writing to inform you that I am withdrawing my application for the graphic design position with your company. As I had indicated earlier, I have been exploring various employment options. After careful consideration, I have decided to accept another position which more closely matches my career interests.

I want to thank you again for the interview. It was an honor to be considered for the position. Graphic Production is a fine organization and I wish you well.

Sincerely,

Dan Block