

Job Search Letters

Introduction

Most job hunters are intimidated by the thought of writing a job search letter. They are hard to write, take brain power and a lot of time. However, if you are sincere about getting a job, you must develop strong letter writing skills.

You will gain the attention of employers if you take time to compose and produce professional letters for requesting information or application material, introducing your resume, accompanying your application, showing appreciation, or following your interview.

Before You Begin To Write

Effective letters are part of a larger career planning and job search process. Ideally, your letters should flow from and be linked to the following tasks:

- ✓ Assessing your abilities, skills, knowledge, interests, preferences, values, and motivations;
- ✓ Researching and evaluating occupations, jobs and employers;
- ✓ Defining your work objectives and career goals;
- ✓ Writing a professional resume;
- ✓ Planning and implementing your job search;
- ✓ Interviewing for job opportunities;
- ✓ Choosing appropriate work

If you are struggling unduly with your written communications, perhaps you need to do more foundational work in clarifying your career direction and assessing your value to employers.

Writing Style

To create a positive impact, analyze your "audience." Put yourself in the employer's situation in order to understand his or her needs. After such analysis, you can then compose your letters to show how your background and talents meet the reader's needs, convince him/her of your value as a prospective employee, and persuade him/her to take action in your favor. Ask yourself:

- Whom do you picture reading your letter?
- Which qualities do you want to emphasize in your letter?
- Why will your letter be interesting and important to the reader?
- What benefits do you bring to the reader's organization?
- What special skills or talents set you apart from the competition?
- Why do you think your skills will help you fit into the organization?
- How are previous job experiences similar to those you now seek? If the experiences are different, what skills are the same and transferable to this position?
- What do you like about the organization to which you are applying?

Types of Letters

Communications skills are among the most important skills you bring to your career, and your job search letters may be the first sample employers have of your competency in this area. There are several basic letters you will probably use during your job search:

- Application
- Request
- Prospecting
- Networking
- Thank-You
- Acceptance
- Withdrawal
- Rejection

This publication provides a definition and an example of each type.

Application Letter or Cover Letter: Use this type of letter in response to a job advertisement. State immediately the position for which you wish to be considered and why you are the best candidate for the position. Study the job description carefully and determine your qualifications (e.g., knowledge, skills, achievements, and/or experiences) which fit the position. Relate your past performance and experience to the major responsibilities of the job.

Letter Requesting Information or Materials: Use this letter when you want information from an employer. When you first learn about a prospective employer, you may want to write a letter requesting an annual report, a brochure on career opportunities, application forms, or other information that will help you decide if this is an employer you want to pursue. You should not send a resume with the letter of inquiry, but you can take this opportunity to provide information about yourself and how it relates to the materials you requested, how you learned about the employer, and your reasons for exploring career opportunities with the employer.

Prospecting Letter: The purpose of this letter is to prospect or investigate possible vacancies in your field. Prospecting letters are helpful when conducting long-distance searches.

Target specific individuals in specific organizations. Structure this letter similarly to the application letter, but instead of using vacancy information, focus on broader occupational and organizational dimensions to describe how your qualifications match the work environment.

Networking Letter: This letter is designed to generate *information* interviews (not *job* interviews) which allow you to

meet individuals who can give you specific information about your intended career. Your reasons for seeking an information interview may vary, but your reasons for wanting to meet with a contact person must be genuine and sincere. Information interviewing, or “networking,” is a viable way to define (or refine) career goals, conduct job market research, and uncover vacancy information in an industry or geographical region. Normally, a resume is not attached to a networking letter, but it may be presented during the information interview to help the interviewer address your questions.

Thank-You Letter: This letter is used to establish goodwill, express appreciation, and strengthen your candidacy. The basic rule of thumb is that everyone who helps you in any way gets a thank-you letter. As a follow-up to an interview, the thank-you letter should:

- Be sent within 24 hours of the interview
- Express your appreciation for the interview
- Re-emphasize your strongest qualifications
- Mention key points discussed during the interview
- Reiterate your continued interest in the possibility of employment
- Draw attention to the good match between your qualifications and the job requirements

Send thank-you letters to each of your contacts who grant you information interviews and people who provide references for you.

Acceptance Letter: Use this letter to accept a job offer, confirm the terms of your employment (salary, starting date, medical examinations, etc.) and positively reinforce the employer's decision to hire you. Most often an acceptance letter follows a telephone conversation during which the details of the offer and the terms of employment are discussed.

Withdrawal Letter: Once you accept a position, you have an ethical obligation to inform all other employers of your decision and withdraw your employment application from consideration. Your withdrawal letter should express appreciation for the employer's consideration and courtesy. It is appropriate to state that your decision to go with another organization was based on having better "person-to-job match" for this stage in your career. Do not say that you obtained a better job!

Rejection Letter: Employers aren't the only ones to send rejection letters. Candidates may have to decline employment offers that do not fit their career objectives and interests. Rejecting an employment offer should be done thoughtfully. Indicate that you have carefully considered the offer and have decided not to accept it. Thank the employer for the offer and for considering you as a candidate.

Guidelines for Writing Letters

You must promote your candidacy and communicate your value to an employer in a letter which is concise, understandable, and positive in tone. In addition, the letter should reflect your knowledge of sound writing practices. The following guidelines should help you achieve these goals:

1. Do your homework! Before writing, research the field, position, or employer.
2. Know your abilities, how your qualifications relate to the position's requirements, and why you want to work for the employer.
3. Design your letters to be work and employer-centered, not self-centered. Your letters are marketing tools that should address the needs of the employer and evoke a desire to learn more about you. Be sure to emphasize what you can do for the employer, not what you think they can offer you.
4. Write the letter yourself. Begin with an outline to originate ideas.
5. Address your letters to a specific individual with his or her correct title and address.
6. Use high quality stationery and envelopes, preferably 20-pound bond paper in white or cream. Type each letter on 8 1/2" by 11" paper.
7. Keep the letter to one page. Eliminate extraneous words and avoid rehashing material from your resume.
8. Check spelling, punctuation, and paragraph division. Produce error-free, clean copy. The letter reflects your level of neatness and attention to detail.
9. Tailor your letters for each situation. Generic, mass-produced letters are ineffective.
10. Show appreciation to the employer for considering your application or granting you an interview.
11. Always keep your reader in mind. Keep your letter easy to read and attractive.
12. Be timely. Demonstrate that you know how to do business for yourself and by implication, for others.
13. Be honest. Always be able to back up your claims with evidence and specific examples from your experiences.
14. Keep your letters warm and personal, but professional. They are formal documents.
15. Be positive in content, tone, word choice and expectations. Show that you are an optimistic, responsible, and productive person.
16. Close with a direct request for some sort of action or response. Suggest a date and time for an interview.
17. Enclose your resume with an application letter.
18. Hand sign your letters above your typed name.

Common Letter-Writing Mistakes

- Crowded and cluttered copy. Don't write 300-word paragraphs
- Handwritten letters
- Mailing the letter to a job title instead of a person ("Director of Personnel" instead of "John Smith, Director of Personnel")
- Addressing correspondence to "Dear Sir/Madam." Try to learn the name of the person you are targeting, and don't use "To Whom It May Concern." Find out whom it does concern and send the letter to that person.
- Misspelling the recipient's name. Always verify the spelling of names, even common ones.
- Talking mostly about yourself. Minimize the word "I" in your letters. Focus on employer needs.
- Typos.
- Lack of focus. The letter should highlight a few key points.
- Promising too much. Don't promise what you can't deliver. Be able to back up your statements with hard evidence (in terms of knowledge, experience, etc.)

Career Services Center
Clarion University
114 Egbert
Clarion, PA 16214
Phone: 814-393-2323
Fax: 814-393-2054
Web: www.clarion.edu/career

9/12/2006

Content and Format of an Application Letter

Your Street Address
City, State, Zip Code
Date

Individual's name
Title
Organization
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear (Mr., Mrs.,) _____,

1st Paragraph: Create interest. State the reason you are writing the letter. Name the position, field or general area for which you are applying. Indicate how you learned of the opening or organization.

2nd Paragraph: Highlight the qualifications you think would be of greatest interest to the employer keeping in mind your reader's needs. Tell why you are particularly interested in the position, organization, or location. If you are a recent graduate, explain how your academic background and skills make you a qualified candidate for the position. If you have some practical work or internship experience, emphasize specific accomplishments or unique responsibilities that relate to the position. Do not restate complete sections of your resume.

3rd Paragraph: Refer the reader to the enclosed resume or application form which summarizes your qualifications, training, or experiences. Mention that your references are available and can provide additional information concerning your background and interests.

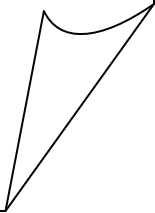
4th Paragraph: Indicate you desire for a personal interview, suggesting a date and time when you are available. Avoid vague endings. Close your letter with a statement or question that makes a specific action from the reader likely. Or take the initiative and suggest that you will call on a certain date to set up an interview.

Sincerely,

(Your handwritten signature)

Type your name

Enclosure



Sample Application Letter (full block format)

234 Main Street
Clarion, PA 16214
March 15, 2006

Ms. Diane C. Mainframe
Manager of Human Resources
XYZ Industries, Inc.
2900 Beach Boulevard
Virginia Beach, VA 23456

Dear Ms. Mainframe:

I am applying for the position of systems analyst which was advertised on March 13th with the office of Career Services at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. The position seems to fit very well 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 application and information systems, I have training on mainframe minicomputers and microcomputers as well as a variety of software programs and applications. My practical experience in the university's Center for Computing Services as a student assistant for system users gave me valuable exposure to complex computer operations. In addition, I worked as an intern in computing operations for a large bank where I gained knowledge of financial systems. My enclosed resume provides more details on my qualifications.

My background and career goals seem to match your job requirements well. I am confident that I can perform the job effectively. Furthermore, I am genuinely interested in the position and in working for XYZ Industries. Your firm has an excellent reputation and comes highly recommended to me.

The attached resume summarizes my education and experiences. Please consider my request for a personal interview so we can discuss my qualifications as they relate to this opportunity. I will call you next week to see if a meeting can be arranged. If you need to reach me before then, please call me at (814) 226-1234. If I am not in, leave a message on my answering machine and I will return your call.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

Lisa Smith

Lisa Smith



Sample Application Letter (block format)

318 Givan Hall
Clarion University
Clarion, PA 16214
September 13, 2006

Mr. John D. Labb, Employment Administrator
Consumer Products Company
1234 Hill Road
Fort Washington, PA 19034

Dear Mr. Labb:

I am applying for the analytical chemist position which was advertised in the August issue of the American Chemical Society newsletter. I want to work in research and development and would like to relocate to the Philadelphia area.

Currently I am attending Clarion University of Pennsylvania and will graduate in May with a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry. My strong academic background in chemistry, including an independent research project, has familiarized me with the wide variety of analytical instruments listed on my enclosed resume.

During the summer after my junior year, I had the opportunity to work as a technician in an analytical chemistry laboratory at T.J. Lipton, Inc. I also gained experience in quality control and research and development. My responsibilities included analyzing a variety of Lipton products, more specifically:

- Obtaining samples
- Preparing the samples for analysis
- Performing the analyses using such instrumentation as high performance liquid chromatography, gas chromatography, and infrared spectroscopy

I would appreciate your time in reviewing my enclosed resume and would welcome and opportunity to meet with you for a personal interview. I will contact your office in the next few weeks to arrange a convenient date to discuss my qualifications.

Sincerely,

Sarah A. Smith

Sarah A. Smith

Enclosure

Sample Application Letter (full block format)

100 Nair Hall
Clarion University
Clarion, PA 16214
September 13, 2006

Mr. Lawrence Jones
Director of Personnel
Baltimore City Schools
123 Harbor Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Mr. Jones:

I am applying for the elementary teaching position in grade five which was recently announced on the Jobline at Clarion University's Career Services office. The position seems to fit very well with my education, experience and career interests.

According to your announcement, the position requires an individual with elementary certification, interest in working in an urban setting, and football coaching experience. I would like to be considered for the position and feel qualified for several reasons. These highlights may interest you:

- Completed a student teaching experience with grade four at Northview Heights Elementary School of Pittsburgh Public Schools
- Volunteered as a "Big Brother" to two African American children, ages 8 and 10, for two summers
- Participated in a one-week field visit to urban schools as part of a Multicultural Education course
- Played varsity football for four years at Clarion University, serving as team captain my senior year
- Completed an Athletic Coaching Program (15 credits)

The enclosed application materials summarize my education and experiences. I would welcome a personal interview so we could discuss my qualifications as they relate to the position. If you need to reach me, please call my at (814) 226-1234. If I am not in, leave a message on my answering machine and I will return your call.

Thank you for your interest in my candidacy. I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Smith

Robert B. Smith

Enclosures



Sample Prospecting Letter (full block format)

333 Main Street
Clarion, PA 16214
September 13, 2006

Mr. Roberta Smith
Director of Public Relations
XYZ Medical Products
501 Grant Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Dear Ms. Smith:

In the Pittsburgh Business Times, I have read articles announcing several new products that have contributed to the expansion of your facilities. My research indicates that your company is expanding rapidly because XYZ Medical Products produces outstanding products and supplies excellent services to your customers. I want to work in sales and would like to be a part of your exciting organization.

These highlights of my qualifications may interest you:

- Maintained a 3.8 overall QPA while completing degrees in both Marketing and Biology
- Completed a summer internship in the Public Relations Department of Allegheny General Hospital
- Worked as a salesperson at The Gap for three summers and holiday breaks; was named top salesperson for the Clarion Call (campus newspaper) for two semesters
- Developed excellent interpersonal and communication skills while serving as chairperson of the Programming Committee of the American Marketing Association (Clarion University chapter)

Enclosed is my resume for your review. I would like to talk with you about a sales career with XYZ Medical Products and will be in Pittsburgh during the week of November 20th. Please call me at (814) 226-1234 and let me know what day would be most convenient for you.

Thank you very much for considering my request. I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

John C. Doe

John C. Doe

Enclosure

**Sample Letter Requesting Information/Application
(modified block format)**

317 North Fifth Street
Clarion, PA 16214
September 13, 2006

Dr. Sandra Blend, Superintendent
Richmond Valley School District
P.O. Box 1234
Richmond, VA 23001

Dear Dr. Blend:

I noticed your school's listing in the AAEE Directory of Public School Systems. I am interested in moving to the Richmond Area, and I am seeking employment with school systems there. I hope you can assist me.

I am especially interested in pursuing special education teaching opportunities with your school district. If no positions are available at this time, I would like to be considered for future openings. Please send me an application packet so I can be properly registered with your office in case a vacancy occurs.

In May I will graduate with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education and certification in both special education and elementary education. I am currently completing my student teaching at Clarion Area School District where I have the opportunity to work with a primary SED classroom and a secondary EMR/LD classroom.

My educational and Experiential background has made me acutely aware of the characteristics and special needs of exceptional students. In addition to my college activities, I have had a number of interesting part-time and summer jobs which demonstrate my early interest in the field.

My resume is enclosed for your review. Additional information about my teaching qualifications can be obtained from my credentials. I will enclose a copy of them when I return the application. After you have had a chance to review my materials, I will call to discuss employment possibilities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jane M. Smith

Jane M. Smith

Enclosure

Networking Letter (full block format)

123 Wood Street
Clarion, PA 16214
March 15, 2006

Ms. Cynthia S. Kennedy, Manager
Jones, Smith and Doe
Certified Public Accountants
One Oxford Center
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Dear Ms. Kennedy

Dr. Charles Pineno, a professor in the Department of Accountancy at Clarion University, suggested that I contact you. He thought you would be in an excellent position as an alumna to assist me with a career decision.

As an accounting student, I am exploring which career path to pursue. Public accounting, management accounting, and IRS work all sound interesting to me at this point, but I want to go into my campus interviews next fall with a clear sense of direction. I would like to get your advice on the long-term career implications of each path as well as a better handle on the day-to-day activities of a CPA.

I will call you next week to see if we can arrange a brief meeting at your convenience. Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely

Shelly K. Number

Shelly K. Number

15 Becht Hall
Clarion University
Clarion, PA 16214
Sept 13, 2006

Ms. Janet Smith
Director of Social Services
Children's Hospital
125 DeSoto Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Dear Ms. Smith

I am writing to inform you that I am withdrawing my application for the play therapist position with Children's Hospital. As I indicated in my interview with you, I have been exploring several employment possibilities. This week I was offered a counseling position with a local community agency, and after careful consideration, I decided to accept it. The position provides a very good match for my interests at this point in my career.

I want to thank you for interviewing and considering me for your position. I enjoyed meeting you and learning about the innovative programs you are planning. You have a fine department, and I wish your staff well.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Brown

Mary Ann Brown

Sample Withdrawal Letter (full block format)

Sample Rejection Letter (full block format)

15 Becht Hall
Clarion University
Clarion, PA 16214
September 16, 2006

Ms. Janet Smith
Director of Social Services
Children's Hospital
125 DeSoto Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Dear Ms. Smith:

Thank you for offering me the position in the play therapy program at Children's Hospital. I appreciate your discussing the details of the position with me and giving me time to consider your offer.

You have a fine organization and there are many aspects of the position which are very appealing to me. However, I believe it is in our mutual best interest that I decline your kind offer. This has been a difficult decision for me, but I believe it is the appropriate one for my career at this time.

Thank you for the consideration and courtesy given to me. It was a pleasure meeting you and your staff.

Sincerely

Mary Ann Brown

Mary Ann Brown

15 Becht Hall
Clarion University
Clarion, PA 16214
Sept 13, 2006

Ms. Janet Smith
Director of Social Services
Children's Hospital
125 DeSoto Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Dear Ms. Smith

I enjoyed meeting with you yesterday to discuss the exciting opportunity in the play therapy program. Children's Hospital has certainly taken the lead in this important area, and I would be pleased to be associated with the program.

Our conversation further convinced me that a good match exists between my background and your expectations for the job. In addition to my degrees in psychology and sociology, I would like to emphasize my experience with the Clarion County Children and Youth Services. It provided me with insight into using art as an effective mode of expression with certain groups of children—a concept I would like to develop further in the program at Children's Hospital.

I want to reiterate my strong interest in the position and in working with you and your staff. You provide the kind of opportunity I seek. Please feel free to call me at (814) 226-1234 if I can provide you with any additional information.

Again, thank you for the interview and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Brown

Mary Ann Brown

Sample Thank-You Letter (full block format)

Sample Acceptance Letter (full block format)

15 Becht Hall
Clarion University
Clarion, PA 16214
September 16, 2006

Ms. Janet Smith
Director of Social Services
Children's Hospital
125 DeSoto Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am writing to confirm my acceptance of your employment offer of April 16th and to tell you how delighted I am to be joining Children's Hospital. I feel confident that I can make a significant contribution to the program, and I am grateful for the opportunities you have given me.

As we discussed, I will report to work at 8 a.m. on September 19th and will have completed the medical examination and drug testing by the start date. Additionally, I will complete all employment and insurance forms for the new employee orientation on September 22nd.

I look forward to meeting the challenges of the position. I appreciate your confidence in me and am very happy to be joining your staff.

Sincerely

Mary Ann Brown

Mary Ann Brown