

WRITING PROFESSIONAL LETTERS

The need for effective oral and written communication skills is becoming increasingly important in the work force. Therefore, it is critical that as a candidate you are able to write professional letters throughout your job search to effectively market yourself to potential employers.

Structure of Effective Letters

There is an acceptable structure for writing professional letters as noted in the guidelines below:

- Your **return address** and the **current date** needs to be placed at the beginning of the letter - either top left corner, tabbed or flushed right in the upper right-hand corner of the letter. Do not include your name or telephone number in this section.
- The **employer's address** should be placed at the left margin before the salutation. The inside address includes the name, title, department, and complete address of the organization to whom you are writing.
- The **salutation** is the formal greeting of the letter. "Dear Mr." or "Dear Ms." preceding the individual's last name is appropriate. The punctuation following the salutation can be a colon (:) or comma (,). Do not use "Mrs." unless you have seen this title used by the individual in question. Do not use "To whom it may concern" or "Dear Sir/Madam" as it will appear you have written a form letter. If you do not have the name of an individual, you may use "Dear Human Resources".
- The **body of the letter** comes after the salutation. The body can be three to five paragraphs in length depending upon the content and intent of the letter.
- Paragraphs can be indented five spaces or block style can be used. The text within each paragraph is single-spaced with double-spacing between each paragraph.
- The **closing** follows the body of the letter. It is aligned with your return address and current date that opened the letter. A formal closing, such as "Sincerely," is appropriate. Three to four blank lines are inserted and type your formal name as it appears on your resume.
- Above your typed name, **sign your name** in blue or black ink. Other colors of ink and pencils will not photocopy well.
- If information is to be enclosed, (i.e. a resume or transcript) then it is appropriate to place the word "Enclosure:" at the left margin followed by the name(s) of the document(s) enclosed.

Tips for Writing High Impact Letters

- Letters should not exceed one page in length.
- Do not send "form letters". To make a positive, professional impression, you should make the effort to personalize and tailor each letter to a specific employer.
- Be sure to use a high quality, 8 ½" by 11" bond paper. It is best to use the same paper on which your resume was printed.
- **Your cover letters must be error-free.** Be sure to proof-read each letter for typographical, spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. Have others read your letters for clarity and to check for errors.
- All letters should be typed and printed on a laser-jet printer. Hand-written letters or notes are unacceptable. Neatness counts and so does attention to detail.
- If you are concerned about damage to your documents, you may want to use a full size manila envelope for mailing. Remember that a professional appearance is important. Be sure to type the return and mailing address directly onto the envelope or onto a label.
- In some cases you may be sending your documents to employers by e-mail. Be certain that you keep this correspondence professional in manner and follow the same guidelines provided regarding letter content and structure.

The following descriptions represent the types of letters that you might find appropriate at various stages of your job search. A sample of each type of letter is enclosed for your review.

Letter of Inquiry

During your job search, you might encounter times when you are in need of information about an organization, a specific position or geographic location. In this case, you would write a letter of inquiry. In the letter, you request the information needed.

- A letter of inquiry is sent by itself. Your resume should not be enclosed. This can hurt your candidacy if you should contact the same organization in the future. Remember, this is not an application letter.
- Even though you are requesting information from the organization, it may be appropriate to share information about yourself and your strengths. Remember that it should be provided in the context relevant to the information requested.
- This may be your first contact with a potential employer. Therefore, it is critical that this letter be well-written and targeted to the organization in question.
- Often times organizations cannot immediately respond to various requests. You should close your letter by stating your intended method and time line for follow-up. Then be sure to carry out your actions.
- NOTE: Due to legal issues, many employers will not accept unsolicited resumes and letter. If you are inquiring about job listings or the application process, it is suggested to view the employer website, and if you do not see a "Jobs" or "Career" section of the site, call or e-mail to find out where openings are listed. With on-line applicant systems, individuals may be able to apply for positions without seeing specific positions listed.

Students often ask if they will receive acknowledgment by the employer after sending a letter of inquiry. Be aware that since you will be sending an unsolicited letter, you may or may not receive a response. However, these letters do demonstrate to an employer that you are taking a planned, organized approach to your job search. This can be impressive and encouraging to employers.

Letter of Application

When you send a resume to an employer it must be accompanied by a letter of application, also known as a cover letter. This letter is essential. The purpose of the cover letter is to highlight the skills, education and experience you possess related to their position. You will express to an employer why you are interested in the position and what contributions you believe you can make to the organization based upon your qualifications. Since the cover letter is the ideal place to focus on the specific skills you want to emphasize for a particular employer, a unique cover letter must accompany each resume you send.

- Be sure to introduce yourself, the position for which you are applying and identify the source that listed or advertised the position opening. If you were referred to the position by a specific individual, make note of that in your letter.
- The letter should be addressed specifically to the person (by name and title) who will be conducting the screening process and/or interviews. You can generally find out this information by calling the human resources department of the organization.
- The objective of this letter is to highlight your skills and experience in relationship to the needs of the employer to whom you are writing. Each letter of application you write will be different based upon the position requirements and functions, focusing on the skills that are important to that particular employer.
- Be sure to indicate your willingness to discuss the position further and to be available for an interview.
- If you have been asked to provide salary requirements, you may note this in the last paragraph of your letter. An example: *"With regards to salary expectations, I would hope to be compensated in the range of \$XX,000 to \$XX,000 based upon my education and experience."* Be certain to research what salaries are typical for your career field!
- If you are applying for a position through an on-line application system, there may be a section in which you can copy & paste or upload a cover letter. If there is not a designated space, you may include your cover letter information in the "Additional Information" section if one is provided.

Pre-Interview and Pre-Screening Letter

An opportunity might arise where it is necessary to write a letter to an on-campus recruiter or job fair employer in order to secure an interview. Similar to a letter of application, the purpose of the letter is to highlight your qualifications and career interests to the employer.

- Explain your purpose is to request an interview with the organization.
- Consider the organization's employment needs and demonstrate how your career goals and qualifications match their needs.
- Enclose a resume for the purpose of screening. This is appropriate considering that you are referring to a specific position.
- Close the letter firmly by requesting the future interview or meeting.

Interview Confirmation Letter

Once your application has been screened by an employer, you may be granted an opportunity to interview with the organization. This interview could be a site visit, a telephone interview, or on-campus interview. If time permits, you may wish to confirm the arrangements made for the interview. This demonstrates to a prospective employer that you are organized, responsible, and concerned about the details of the interview.

- Review the arrangements made for the interview. Be sure to include the time, date and location of the interview.
- Refer to important information that you were asked to bring to the interview or complete in advance such as a pre-employment exam, employment application, or official transcripts.
- Restate your appreciation for the employer's consideration of your qualifications and the opportunity to interview.

Post Interview Thank You Letter

It is **strongly** recommended to send a thank you letter **promptly** after each interview. This can reinforce or leave a favorable impression on an employer, especially because so few candidates take the time to send them. Given that some employers may be making interview or hiring decisions in a relatively short time-frame, you may wish to e-mail your thank you letter, which is acceptable. A point to keep in mind is that the longer you wait to send a thank you letter, the less impact your letter will have on the employer.

- One purpose of the thank you letter is to remind the employer of your qualifications and the strength of your candidacy.
- This is a perfect opportunity to restate your interest and enthusiasm in working for the employer and the job opportunity.
- This letter will demonstrate to the employer your professionalism, courtesy, and your ability to follow through on details.
- It is not necessary for thank you letters to be lengthy. Keep the content concise and to the point. Highlight specifics of the interview or the overall visit.
- Thank you letters should not be general form letters. They need to be tailored to the specific position and organization at which you interviewed.

Thank you letters should also be sent after informational interviews, network meetings, receiving information from employers, having an instructor/adviser write a letter of recommendation or any time that an individual has significantly impacted your job search.

Job Offer Clarification or Acknowledgment Letter

Employers will differ in how they extend an offer of employment to a candidate. Job offers may be extended over the phone or by letter. In either case, it may be necessary to clarify aspects of the offer prior to your final decision.

- Even if you are hesitant about accepting a job offer, it is best to show your enthusiasm and appreciation for receiving an offer. The last thing that you want to do is to appear unprofessional if you do not accept a position at the present time with the organization.
- Be specific about the conditions of the offer. State the salary, start date, benefits, or other relevant information you have been provided.
- If you are unable to make a decision with your current information, request additional information that may assist you with your decision.

Job Offer Acceptance Letter

Accepting a job offer will be one of the more enjoyable points of your job search. Most organizations will ask that you call and give a verbal commitment. This enables the organization to act quickly to close the search and to prepare any necessary paperwork for you to complete. If writing an acceptance letter, keep the following in mind:

- Even though a verbal acceptance has been given, it is an excellent idea to confirm this acceptance in writing. Restate the terms of the appointment, job title, starting date, or other relevant information.
- It is an excellent idea to mention your enthusiasm for beginning the position with the organization.

Job Offer Declination Letter

Even if you decline a job offer during a telephone conversation, it is a professional courtesy to decline the offer in writing. Remember that it is not professional to send a letter of declination prior to contacting the organization by telephone. By being tactful and appreciative in your letter, it will help you avoid hurting your chances of being considered for future job opportunities with that organization.

- Always be appreciative of the experience and opportunity to have interviewed for the position.
- Be concise and to the point.
- If you have accepted another offer, you may inform the organization of this opportunity.
- A declination letter can also be sent to refuse a site visit or second interview. Once again this is a professional courtesy.

Networking or Informational Interview Letter

Many times you may want to speak with a professional in the workforce to obtain information about a career field, an organization, or advice on preparing for a specific career. Informational interviews can be a very effective way to research these questions. When contacting alumni or professionals regarding an informational interview, it is best to do so in writing so the interviewee will know what is expected of him or her.

- Introduce yourself and how you found their name and contact information.
- Specify exactly what type of information you want to obtain.
- Let the interviewee know whether you would like a face-to-face meeting, a telephone interview, or even email correspondence. Note that you would appreciate this information at their convenience since you are asking for their assistance.

Conclusion

The purpose of any job search correspondence is to highlight your qualifications and to distinguish yourself from your competition. Quality, well-written correspondence can be extremely powerful and highlight your written communication skills. If you send several letters to the same organization, it is best to keep them organized in case you need to make reference to any of the letters during your job search. If you are ever in question as to whether to send a letter or not, it is best to send written correspondence.

Cover Letter Samples

Samples of each type of letter discussed in this guidebook are provided to assist you in writing your own letters. Keep in mind that each individual has a different writing style. These samples are not to be used as templates or forms to simply insert your information.

For assistance in writing your letters, use these guidelines to write a draft of the letter, then make an appointment to visit with a staff member in Career Services. The staff will be able to review your draft and provide input how to best convey your thoughts in a clear, concise and professional manner.

LETTER OF INQUIRY

2345 Walter Way
Green Bay, WI 54311
October XX, 20XX

Ms. Susan Lowery
Internship Coordinator
Associated Bank
123 Adams Street
Green Bay, WI 54303

Dear Ms. Lowery:

During the Fall Job and Internship Fair at the University of Wisconsin – Green Bay, I had the opportunity to visit with Stella Burke, your College Recruiting Manager. She suggested that I contact you directly to receive more information about your summer internship program.

Through a course on financial institutions, I was exposed to many aspects of commercial banking. This represents a career opportunity that would allow me to combine my interest in finance and my strong interpersonal skills which I have developed through my various work experiences and campus activities. To compliment my academics and present work experience, I would hope to participate in an internship during the summer of 20XX.

I would appreciate any information that you could forward to me about your summer internship program. If you have any questions, I can be reached at (920) 883-XXXX. I look forward to receiving the information and speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Janet L. Smith

Janet Smith

LETTER OF APPLICATION

2340 University Avenue
Green Bay, WI 54311

September 22, 200X

Jacqueline C. James
Program Director
Fox Valley Autism Center
309 De Witt Street
Appleton, WI 54911

Dear Ms. James:

After reading the Family Advocate position listing available with Fox Valley Autism Center on Wisconsin JobNet, I have become quite interested in this position. A senior at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, I will complete my Bachelor's Degree in Human Development in May 20XX. The prospect of joining your staff in this role would be a welcome and exciting challenge.

Over the past semester, I have had the opportunity to participate in an internship with the Wisconsin Early Autism Project. This involved working one-on-one with autistic children on cognitive and behavioral issues, and participating in staff meetings to review therapy plans. Through this experience, I have demonstrated the ability to work independently as well as become a valued team member. In addition to my internship, my communication and leadership skills have been cultivated through my extracurricular involvement and conducting class group projects and presentations. Through this combination of skills and experience, I am confident that I could be an asset to your staff in the Family Advocate position.

My resume is enclosed for your review. If you have questions or wish to arrange an interview, I may be reached at (920) 689-XXX. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa J. Hall

Lisa J. Hall

Enclosure: Resume

POST INTERVIEW THANK YOU LETTER

3225 Walter Way
Green Bay, WI 54311
February XX, 20XX

Ms. Jill Verges
College Recruiting Manager
Marshall & Ilsley Corporation
770 North Water
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Ms. Verges:

Thank you for the opportunity to interview on-site at the Marshall & Ilsley office in Milwaukee. I found my observation hour in the Loan Department very interesting and was impressed with the total number of customers and accounts that are being reviewed on a daily basis. In addition, the collegial, professional environment to which you made reference was very apparent during my interviews.

I especially wanted to express my appreciation for your assistance and insightful suggestions throughout my application process with the Marshall & Ilsley Corporation. Through my previous experience and academic preparation, I have developed and utilized strong analytical, interpersonal and organizational skills. I am confident after my interview that my background and qualifications would contribute to the Management Associate Program.

The Management Associate Program represents an excellent and exciting opportunity. If additional information in support of my candidacy is required, I would be willing to provide it at your request. I can be reached at (920) 883-XXXX. As you indicated, I can expect to hear from you by April XX. If I have not received correspondence from you at that point, I will call to inquire about the status of my candidacy. Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Andrew L. Connors

Andrew L. Connors

PRE-INTERVIEW and PRE-SCREENING LETTER

3322 Manitowoc Road
Green Bay, WI 54311
January XX, 20XX

Ms. Nicole Hoida
Quad/Graphics, Human Resources
N63 W23075 Hwy 74
Sussex, WI 53089-2827

Dear Ms. Hoida:

Through Career Services, I learned that Quad/Graphics will be interviewing at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay on Thursday, February XX, 20XX. I am writing to express my interest in your training program and would like an opportunity to meet with you during your visit.

The career opportunity offered with your organization is a strong match for my well-rounded background. As a Communication and the Arts major with a Graphic Communications emphasis, I have worked on several team-designed projects ranging from logo design to creating promotional materials for an area business. My classroom experiences combined with my expertise using QuarkXpress, Adobe Illustrator and PhotoShop will allow me to be a successful member of your design team.

As you will note on the enclosed resume, I have been an intern for two years with the March of Dimes. In that position, I worked with several staff members to design and create advertising and brochures for fundraising events. Through this interaction, I have realized the value of communication in translating a client's ideas into a visual product. I would welcome the chance to apply the skills and knowledge I have gained to a position at Quad/Graphics.

I am eager to have an opportunity to interview with you during your visit to the UW-Green Bay campus. If scheduling an interview is not possible, I would be willing to travel to your office for a meeting. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (920) 983-XXXX. Thank you for considering my candidacy for this position.

Sincerely,

Paul A. Sikes

Paul A. Sikes

Enclosure: Resume

INTERVIEW CONFIRMATION LETTER

3225 Walter Way
Green Bay, WI 54311
February XX, 20XX

Ms. Rebecca Stanonik
Human Resources Generalist
Schenck Business Solutions
200 East Washington Street
Appleton, WI 54911

Dear Ms. Stanonik:

Thank you for extending the offer for an interview. I am enthusiastic about the opportunity to meet with you and further discuss the Staff Accountant career opportunity. Given your organization's emphasis on teamwork, quality customer service and well-developed communication skills, my career goals are a match with your organization's needs.

As discussed, I will arrive at your Appleton office by 2:00 p.m. on Monday, October XX for an orientation meeting and discussion of my interview schedule. I will bring my completed application for employment at this time. At your request, I will keep track of my travel and accommodation expenses. These expenses and receipts will be submitted to you at the completion of my visit for reimbursement.

Thank you again for the opportunity to interview with Schenck Business Solutions and for the thoughtful consideration of my qualifications. If you have additional questions, please contact me at (920) 465-XXXX. I look forward to meeting you next week.

Sincerely,

Andrew L. Connors

Andrew L. Connors

JOB OFFER CLARIFICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

2421 Ridgeway Drive
Green Bay, WI 54306
April XX, 20XX

Ms. Vera Argo
Recruitment Coordinator
Cargill, Inc.
1 Cargill Drive
Cedar Rapids, IA 52513

Dear Ms. Argo:

Thank you for the prompt telephone call concerning the status of my candidacy. I am very pleased to receive an employment offer for the Quality Assurance Chemist position beginning at the end of May 20XX.

Before making a decision regarding this opportunity, I would like to receive additional information about the position as well as the orientation program for the laboratory science personnel. During my on-site interview, Mr. Dennis Givens mentioned a new guidebook that details the orientation program in addition to the products and customers of Cargill. If possible, I would like to receive a copy of this for review. I understand that the orientation program will last for three months during which time I will travel to Minneapolis, Minnesota to receive training at Cargill's corporate headquarters. After this orientation period, I will be assigned to the Corn Milling division in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

I am very pleased to have been given an opportunity to begin my professional career with Cargill, Inc. As you requested, I will make my decision before May X, 20XX. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (920) 465-XXXX. I look forward to speaking with you in the near future.

Sincerely,

E. James Dominguez

E. James Dominguez

JOB OFFER ACCEPTANCE LETTER

2345 Walter Way
Green Bay, WI 54311
May XX, 20XX

Mr. Tim Yandila
Program Director
Boys and Girls Club of Green Bay
1451 University Avenue
Green Bay, WI 54302

Dear Mr. Yandila:

It is with great enthusiasm that I accept a position with the Boys and Girls Club of Green Bay. I thoroughly reviewed the details of the position in the letter of employment I received. This program provides an opportunity to work with young adults in a variety of settings as well as put my administrative skills into practice. I look forward to beginning the position.

As we discussed, my starting salary will be \$28,500 with the full range of benefits granted to professionals. I understand that the training program begins on July XX. As requested, I will complete the advance employment and benefits forms as I receive them and promptly return them to you at the address listed above.

I will await further correspondence from your office and the employment contract. In the meantime, if you need any additional information, please contact me at (920) 465-XXXX. I look forward to beginning the program and meeting my fellow new professionals.

Sincerely,

Janet C. Smith

Janet C. Smith

JOB OFFER DECLINATION LETTER

1322 Manitowoc Road
Green Bay, WI 54311
May XX, 20XX

Mr. Steve Rogers
Director
Point Beach Nuclear Plant
123 Energy Road
Manitowoc, WI 54220

Dear Mr. Rogers:

As I have expressed to you previously, I have been consistently impressed by the quality of the application process at Point Beach Nuclear Plant. I was pleased to speak with you on Monday and hear that I have been offered a position with your team.

As I mentioned to you Monday during our interview, I had received two other offers, both of which are located in Madison, WI. After careful consideration, I have decided that these offers would present me with an option to return to an area closer to my family. Therefore, I must decline your offer at this time.

I thank you for the thoughtful consideration and the offer I received. I look forward to possibly seeing you in the near future, and I wish you the best of luck in your search for an appropriate candidate.

Sincerely,

Paul A. Sikes

Paul A. Sikes

NETWORKING or INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW LETTER

123 Main Street
Marinette, WI 54143
April XX, 20XX

Joe Phoenix
Owner/Entrepreneur
Phoenix Photography
123 University Avenue
Green Bay, WI 54311

Dear Mr. Phoenix:

While reviewing the Phoenix Network through Career Services at the University of Wisconsin – Green Bay, I found your name as someone who has volunteered to provide career-related advice to students. As a student in the Communication program at the university, I am developing a strong interest in photography as a career. I would be very interested in speaking with you about your experiences as a professional photographer.

My background includes several part-time jobs, including a position I have recently started at the Camera Corner, a local photography studio and retail store. I have always had an interest in photography, which prompted me to register for the Introduction to Photography course offered next fall. I am interested in hearing what you feel are the positives and negatives in the field, what advantages or disadvantages different college majors offer, and what types of experiences you would recommend I pursue.

I would greatly appreciate an opportunity to discuss your thoughts on the field of photography, either in person or over the phone. Please contact me at (715) 732-XXXX or at janestudent@yahoo.com to find a mutually convenient meeting time. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jane B. Student

Jane Student