

# How to: Cover Letters

## Office of Career Services & Professional Development

Kathleen Watson Enrollment Center, Suite 210

Phone: 210-829-3931

Fax: 210-829-6094

Email: [careers@uiwtx.edu](mailto:careers@uiwtx.edu)



# Cover Letters

There are five types of cover letters used during the job search process: **application letters** (serve as an introduction to your resume), **prospecting letters** (an inquiry about possible vacancies or a request for an informational interview), **thank you letters** (a follow-up to an interview), **acceptance letters** (to accept a job offer), or **rejection letters** (used to thank an employer for a job offer, but to reject it). Many job seekers concentrate their efforts on developing a resume, but dedicate little time to writing effective letters. While a resume is important, a letter is an opportunity to further market your qualifications. And both the resume and cover letter provide the employer with a first impression of your communication skills.

## Application Letters

This type of letter is used to apply for specific openings and accompanies your resume. It gives you an opportunity to introduce yourself to an employer and provides a link between the job, your skills, and experience.

- The application letter should inform the reader why he or she is receiving the resume. If you have already spoken to them by phone or in person, note this in your letter (preferably in the first paragraph!) Hiring officials talk to many applicants each day. Do not assume they will remember you.
- Should give detailed information about your qualifications without repeating information from your resume verbatim. Instead, state the value of your experiences, education, or personal qualities. Ask yourself “What have I learned from these experiences?” Then relate this to the skills you can provide to the employer. **Emphasize what you can do for the employer**, not how you will personally benefit from being hired for the job.
- When applying for a specific position, your letter should reflect the qualifications listed in the actual job posting. The closer the match between the employer’s requirements and your background, the more likely you will be contacted for an interview.
- Letters should be professional, yet written creatively enough to attract the attention of the reader.

## Letters of Interest/Prospecting Letters

Letters of interest are sent to organizations to investigate possible job vacancies. State your reason for inquiry in the letter. How did you find out about the organization? What prompted you to send a letter? Did you receive a referral from someone who works at the organization?

- The central paragraphs will be much the same as an application letter. Provide examples of your qualifications to persuade the employer to consider you for a position.
- It is important to follow these letters with a phone call, since you may never receive a response if no positions exist. In your letter mention the time frame in which you will be contacting the person. Then make sure you follow-up as promised. Allow 5-10 business days before you contact them.

## Application Letters

The purpose of this letter is to get your enclosed resume read and to generate interviews. Use this type of letter in response to specific job advertisements and vacancy announcements. Your strategy is to demonstrate that your qualifications fit the requirements of the position. Study the position description carefully and decide on one or more themes – education, experience, interests, responsibility, etc. – that show persuasively how well you fit the position. Link major job dimensions with your related past performance and experience.

**Julie Thomas**  
1298 Sixth Street  
Park Forest, IL 53409

July 18, 2003

Ms. Jill Smith  
Manager of Human Resources  
Great Lakes Industries, Inc.  
2900 Virginia Boulevard  
Chicago, IL 53422

Dear Ms. Smith:

Please accept this letter and enclosed resume as an application for the internship position of Systems Analyst at Great Lakes Industries, Inc. The position fits 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 systems and a minor in business finance, I have training on mainframes, minicomputers, and microcomputers as well as with a variety of software programs and applications. My practical experience in my university's computer center as a programmer and as a student consultant for system users gave me valuable exposure to complex computer operations.

My background and career goals match your job requirements well. I am confident that I can perform the job effectively. I look forward to discussing my qualifications with you further. I may be reached at 308-245-1992.

Sincerely,

*Julie Ann Thomas*

Julie Ann Thomas

### First Paragraph

State why you are writing, identify the position for which you would like to be considered, and indicate how you heard of the position. Be specific.

### Second Paragraph

Your goal here is to show how you can be useful to this particular organization. Describe what strengths you have to offer this employer. You might use one of the following approaches:

- 1.) Illustrate the relationship between your skills and experience and the position for which you are applying.
- 2.) Describe your previous accomplishments as they relate to the position.
- 3.) Identify three reasons for the employer to consider you for the position.

### Third Paragraph

End your letter by clarifying what will happen next and how they can most easily reach you.

**Application Letter Example**

*Toni C. Morrison*

*550 North Alabama Street  
River Falls, WI 54022  
(555) 555-5555*

May 20, 2002

Dr. Douglas Johnson  
Saint Paul Public Schools  
360 Colbourne Street  
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Dr. Johnson:

This letter of application for the position of Secondary Language Arts Teacher expresses a sincere interest in interviewing and working for the public school system of Saint Paul. Enclosed is my application form and resume. A credential file and transcript are being sent to your office.

As an English Teacher, I bring real world experience to this position. Having successfully owned and operated a business, my practical knowledge and survival skills are extensive. My background encompasses rich and varied experiences that have utilized the English language to function in society. Saint Paul's motto of "lifelong learning" has been my experience.

I also have all the qualities for an English Language Arts and Literature Teacher, expressed in my innate appreciation and love of the language. Reading and writing have always been fundamental aspects of my life and, thus, my teaching. As a person, I combine thoughtful intelligence with empathetic concern. As a teacher, I incorporate firm expectations of my students into a flexible approach of addressing students' individual learning styles. My students appreciate the diversity expressed in my classroom. Regarding professional relationships, I have been commended for using tact and diplomacy in dealing with staff, administration, and parents.

Recently, the State of Minnesota imposed guidelines regarding mandates for the year 2000. The challenge of working with students in the Saint Paul School District to ensure that they can meet state mandated evaluations interests me. I will work to implement the "road to change" that Saint Paul advocated throughout the school district.

Please consider my application and resume as well as my credential file and references. If you need any further information please call me at 555.555.5555. I look forward to an interview to discuss how my qualifications are suited to your school district.

Sincerely,

*Toni C. Morrison*

Toni C. Morrison

## Application Letter Example

### Matthew McConaughey

616 Ed TV Street, Hudson, WI 54016  
(715) 333-1111 ~ mattc@yahoo.com

---

March 11, 2003

Ms. Cally Lausted, Human Resources Director  
University of Wisconsin – River Falls  
410 South Third Street  
River Falls, WI 54022

Dear Ms. Lausted:

Please accept this letter and resume as my application for the IS Comprehensive Services Senior position with the University of Wisconsin – River Falls (UWRF) Career Services Office. I currently perform all of the duties listed in the position announcement as a temporary worker, and welcome the opportunity to broaden my contributions to the University.

Please allow me to highlight my qualifications as they relate to the requirements outlined in the position description:

#### **Your Requirements:**

- Experience managing database software
- Experience managing web sites
- Experience as technical support specialist
- Experience in training and public speaking

#### **My Qualifications:**

- Installed and managed Brass Ring database for UWRF Career Services; supported various career, counseling, and outreach databases.
- Managed Career Services, Academic Success Center, non-profit, and for-profit web sites.
- Functioned as technical support specialist for Career Services, resolving hardware and software issues. Deferred appropriate hardware and software problems/requests to UWRF ITS Department.
- Four years experience training corporate and university employees on standard and proprietary software. Two years experience presenting workshops to student groups and classes on technical topics, such as Brass Ring registration, Internet job searching, online portfolios, and designing web sites.

The opportunity to discuss my qualifications with the hiring committee would be greatly appreciated. During work hours, I may be reached at (715) 425-3572. You may reach me at (715) 555-1111 in the evening.

Sincerely,

**Matthew McConaughey**

Matthew McConaughey

## **Cover Letter Critiquing Guide**

### **Layout/Appearance**

- Always type your letters. Because of wider access to computers and printers, employers expect your letter to be printed in a quality, professional-looking font. Adhere to the block style format for business correspondence (double-space between paragraphs; text flush to the left).
- Typos, misspellings and grammatical errors can leave a negative impression with employers and cause your application to be rejected. Have at least two other people proofread to make sure your letter is error-free.
- Have you signed your letter at the bottom of the page in blue or black ink?
- Have you printed your letter on quality paper that matches your resume? (When possible, match the heading of your resume and the heading of your cover letter for a professional look).
- Cover letters should be concise and simple, yet still fully discuss your qualifications. Have you kept your letter to one page?

### **Writing Style**

- Have you avoided beginning all your sentences with the word “I”? (Place a greater emphasis on the word “you” when possible!)
- Avoid the phrase “I am writing” in your opening paragraph, as this is understood in a letter.
- Lengthy paragraphs are overwhelming to read. Have you divided text into several paragraphs when necessary to keep paragraphs short?
- Have you used transition phrases and topic sentences to improve the flow of the letter between paragraphs?
- Have you eliminated statements of doubt? Your cover letter should always convey confidence and a positive attitude. Avoid any statements or words that sound like you are unsure of your abilities or the contributions you have and can make. For instance, statements like, “If you think I am qualified”, or “I hope you find my...” will not assure the reader that you are a confident individual.

### **Overall Impression/Marketing Effectiveness of Content**

- Is your letter addressed to a specific person, and have you spelled the individual’s name correctly? (If the job posting did not indicate a name, you may need to call the organization to obtain this information.)
- Is your letter individually tailored to the position and organization, emphasizing how your specific qualifications match the employer’s needs?
- Have you used factual statements regarding an organization rather than flattery to gain attention of the employer?
- Is the tone of your letter professional, yet show enthusiasm for the job and the organization?
- Have you written your letter in a style that conveys self-confidence in your abilities without being egotistical or overly aggressive?
- Do not oversell yourself or appear too desperate. Phrases such as “I will work for free if you give me the chance,” or “I will take any job you have available” are not effective.
- Did you skirt the salary issue? If you are requested to provide salary requirements explain that you need more information regarding the position and provide a range of what you consider appropriate for the market and your experience. Avoid commented on your salary history as it may or may not be relevant to the position you are applying for.
- Are you prepared to follow through on any action stated in your letter, such as a phone call to the employer?

Example of Cover Letter

Name

---

Address                      City, State Zip                      Phone number                      email address

Date

Name  
Title  
Company  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear                      :

Please accept the enclosed letter and resume as an application for the position of (job title) that was advertised on (where you found out about the job). I am currently a (position) at the (Company name) but plan to relocate to South Carolina in June 2004.

My professional experience as a General Assignment Reporter has prepared me well for a position with (name of company). I possess proven excellent written oral, organizational and interpersonal communication skills. My experience with the San Antonio Express-News Neighbors section allows me to generate interesting story ideas each week focused on community and neighborhood issues. I also contribute stories for the SA Life section, a feature section covering arts and lifestyle events across the city. Contributions include a story on Miss America 2004, Tops in Blue, the Air Force entertainment group and Bantu refugees who were relocated to San Antonio. I will bring the same strong work ethic and passion for reporting to (Name of Company).

My experiences at the Gazette-Enterprise allowed me to write news and feature stories while working on a Master's degree in Mass Communications at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas.

The enclosed resume shows a small part of my abilities. I look forward to providing you further insight into my qualifications for a position at the newspaper. I may be reached at (phone number). Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Name

**SKYLAR CARDINAL**

451 Highland Ave. #45 San Antonio, Texas 78213 (210) 555-5555 [cardinals@uiwtx.edu](mailto:cardinals@uiwtx.edu)

-Date-

Mr. John Crumley  
Finance Manager  
Acme, Inc.  
555 West Avenue  
San Antonio, Texas 78228

Dear Mr. Crumley:

Two of your former interns, Bert Hudgins and Susan Jones, suggested I contact you regarding finance internship opportunities. They are familiar with my background and felt I would be an excellent match for your summer internship program.

Currently a Junior majoring in Finance at the University of the Incarnate Word, I have demonstrated strong academic performance in all finance courses, maintaining a 3.5 GPA in my major. The courses I have completed have given me a solid foundation in the tools, processes and methodologies involved in the successful analysis and management of portfolio-investment strategies. I have a proven ability to quickly learn challenging concepts and have developed competencies in diverse areas, including:

- Industry research/information sourcing
- Comparative analysis
- Quantitative analysis
- Pro forma analysis
- Cash-flow analysis
- Financial modeling and asset valuation
- Portfolio and asset management
- Insurance plans and mutual funds
- Retirement and estate planning
- Tax planning and investment strategies



In addition to my analytical strengths, I bring to the table advanced computer skills (with cross-platform expertise in Windows and Mac), expertise in the MS Office suite of products, and familiarity with programming languages including SQL, HTML, and VB.

Since starting college, I have worked part-time (summers/holidays/evenings) as a Clerk at Wal-Mart. In this position, I have earned a reputation for consistently exceeding company and customer expectations. Wal-Mart's Store Manager has asked me to return this summer, but I yearn to gain corporate finance experience. I am impressed by Acme's innovation and success, and I would very much like to be part of such a winning company.

The enclosed resume provides more details of my skills and achievement track record. If you agree that I would make a valuable addition to your team, please feel free to call me at 210-555-5555, or email me at [cardinals@uiwtx.edu](mailto:cardinals@uiwtx.edu). I know you are busy, so thank you for your time, and I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Skylar Cardinal

Enclosure: Resume

## Prospect Letter Example

**Alan Greenspan**  
2020 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington D.C. 55000  
(555) 555-5555 ~ [alan@finance.gov](mailto:alan@finance.gov)

---

August 4, 2004

Ms. Carmen Croonquist, Director  
Career Services  
University of Wisconsin-River Falls  
24 East Hathorn  
River Falls, WI 54022

Dear Ms. Croonquist:

President George W. Bush suggested that I contact you regarding a possible opening in the position of Peer Advisor. I am looking for an internship in business and feel that this position would be perfect for meeting the internship criteria.

After taking the course, Business and Professional Speaking, I have gained experience in writing and critiquing resumes and cover letters and holding mock interviews. Working in group projects in many of my business courses and interacting with customers as a server at Perkins has dramatically strengthened my interpersonal skills. Having this experience, I feel well qualified to represent Career Services as a Peer Advisor.

Career Services would benefit by hiring me because not only am I qualified, but I thoroughly enjoy working with and helping people. Learning more about the concepts of career planning and job hunting excites me. I already collect and read any available information on occupational research. It is important not only in the business world, but in every job to be knowledgeable about career and occupational strategies.

I will call you at the end of the week to talk further and discuss a chance to meet personally at your convenience. If you prefer, you may reach me at (555) 555-5555.  
Thank you and I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

*Alan J. Greenspan*

Alan J. Greenspan