

# **COVER LETTERS & OTHER JOB-SEARCH CORRESPONDENCE GUIDE**



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Throughout the course of your job search, you will be in constant contact with prospective employers. You will be evaluated on your ability to present yourself as a good communicator who is capable of contributing your skills to an employing organization.

Presenting yourself effectively “on paper” is an important and ongoing process during the job search. While this is accomplished in part with a well-written resume, a variety of correspondence is also necessary in virtually all job-search campaigns. Whether you are asking for an interview or accepting a job offer, appropriate and effective correspondence will significantly enhance your likelihood of success.

Cover letters are similar in purpose to resumes: they are designed to generate interviews and, ultimately, job offers. Your letters must command the favorable attention and positive response of prospective employers. With this in mind, it is important from the outset to understand the importance of preparing original correspondence for each prospective employer. Mass-produced letters are simply unacceptable. True, individually-typed correspondence is more time-consuming, but it is well worth the effort. Personalize your correspondence as much as possible, and **avoid sending photocopied form letters**. In some cases, a telephone call or personal visit may be made in addition to correspondence. While these methods may be effective, they do not, and should not, take the place of writing individual letters. The time and effort you take to personalize your correspondence will pay substantial dividends.

## **STRUCTURE OF CORRESPONDENCE**

Your letter-writing should follow the principles of proper English usage and effective business correspondence. Generally, it is best to use simple and straightforward language in communicating your message. Be direct and concise.

Job-search correspondence typically includes the following components:

- Writer’s return address
- Date
- Employer’s name and address (If name is unknown, use “Dear Hiring Manager”)
- Salutation
- Body (usually 3-4 paragraphs)
- Complimentary closing
- Writer’s name and signature\* (\*Sign above your name when mailing through regular postal service. If sending through email, a handwritten signature is not necessary.)
- Enclosure notation (when appropriate)

Consult the samples of job-search correspondence at the conclusion of this guide for additional assistance when preparing your letters.

As when preparing your resume, there are several guidelines to consider when typing job-search correspondence:

- **Always type correspondence; handwritten letters are unacceptable.** (The only exception is thank-you letters, which may be typed or handwritten depending on the situation.) Use a high-quality printer. Neatness counts—a lot!

- Be sure to proofread and correct all spelling and grammatical mistakes. Your correspondence must be error-free. Do not rely on software spell-checks; have your correspondence professionally reviewed by Career Services staff or someone you trust.
- When submitting your cover letter by email, you have the option of either attaching the cover letter as a separate document, or including the body of your cover letter in the body of the email. Take direction from the job posting to determine which method may be best, or consult a career advisor.
- If mailing your resume and cover letter, use standard 8 1/2 x 11-inch paper and good quality bond paper, preferably the same as your resume. Always type the return address and mailing address on a legal-sized or flat envelope. Use mailing labels if available.

## **TYPES OF CORRESPONDENCE**

In view of the importance of job-search correspondence, an explanation of the major types of letters you will be writing during the course of your job hunt follows. Specifically, we will discuss the cover letter, prospecting letter, interview confirmation letter, post-interview thank you, job offer clarification, letter of acceptance, and letter of declination. Additional information on these and other types of job-search correspondence may be obtained in our Career Library located within Career Services and in most libraries.

### **The Cover Letter**

Also known as a letter of application, the cover letter does precisely what it is intended to do—provide cover for an enclosure (your resume). A well-written cover letter may mean the difference between getting and not getting the job you want.

Cover letters must have impact. They must be an effective advertisement to introduce the qualities you are promoting in your resume. They should capture the reader's attention, stress your potential value and benefit, and invite an in-depth reading of your resume.

In general, the basic cover letter has three sections (i.e., paragraphs), each with a specific purpose:

- Paragraph 1 should identify your interest in applying for a specific type of job and, if appropriate, how you heard about the job.
- Paragraph 2 generates reader interest in you by referring to your resume and including additional information on your qualifications as they apply to the desired position.
- Paragraph 3 makes a request to the employer for an interview (which you will normally need to schedule with a follow-up telephone call). This paragraph should be short, positive, and ask for action without being overly aggressive or “pushy” in tone.

Although cover letters are not ordinarily needed for resumes submitted during an on-campus interview, when possible, they should be used when sending resumes or returning employment applications to hiring officials.

## **Prospecting Letter**

The purposes of this letter are to inquire about possible vacancies, to get your resume read, and to generate interviews. Prospecting letters are used extensively for long-distance searches. If possible, target specific individuals in specific organizations. As with all job-search correspondence, it is best to avoid generic “Dear Sir/Madam” letters. Structure this letter as you would the basic cover (application) letter, and focus on how your qualifications match the organization’s needs.

## **Interview Confirmation**

Once an interview appointment has been made between you and a prospective employer over the telephone, it is best to follow up that conversation with a confirmation letter indicating the following:

- Restatement of the date and time of the interview appointment.
- Other pertinent details discussed on the phone, such as completing appropriate employment forms prior to the interview, etc.
- Your appreciation of the employer’s further consideration of your qualifications.

Interview confirmation letters provide evidence to employers of the attention you give to detail and your ability to follow through in a work setting. Even though you’ve cleared this first hurdle in your job search, you need to continue to impress the prospective employer throughout the interviewing process itself.

## **Post-Interview Thank You**

Thank-you letters should be sent within 24-hours after each of your interviews. A well-written thank-you letter will:

- Remind the employer who you are.
- Impress him or her with your courtesy and follow-through.
- Remind the employer of your background and qualifications.
- Show your enthusiasm and continued interest in the field or specific position discussed.
- Convey to the employer your sincere appreciation for his or her time and consideration.

Thank-you letters do not need to be lengthy or elaborate, but they are essential. Should you send an email or a handwritten mailed letter? When deciding which format to use, consider the personality of the organization and the amount of time between your interview and the hiring decision. For example, an Internet company would likely prefer the email, while a nonprofit organization would likely prefer the handwritten letter. However, if time is short, send an email using a business-letter format. Either way, you are making a positive gesture that can really make a difference between you and other candidates.

## **Job Offer Clarification**

This letter is sent in response to an oral or written job offer, which does not provide all of the pertinent information you need to make an informed decision. A letter to an employer requesting specific information is most appropriate. Your letter should:

- Indicate your interest in the employer and the offer.
- Ask specifically for the information you need.
- Express appreciation for the cooperation you receive.

Of course, this information may be requested over the telephone, but be certain to confirm all details in writing with the employer to avoid any future misunderstandings.

### **Letter of Acceptance**

While this may be the most enthusiastic letter you will write to an employer, your letter of acceptance must also clarify some important information:

- Refer to the offer made by the employer.
- Restate terms of employment.
- Confirm pre-employment details, starting date, etc.

Close the letter by expressing your appreciation and pleasure at joining the organization.

### **Letter of Declination**

As a courtesy, a formal letter of declination should be sent to each employer who extended you an offer after you have made a decision to accept an offer from another organization. Always be tactful and appreciative in declining an offer—in other words, don't burn any bridges behind you, since you may want to work for these employers in the future. In any case, be certain to inform them of your acceptance of another employer's offer.

## **RECORD KEEPING**

It will be to your advantage to keep an organized file of your correspondence to and from each employer. Maintain an organized paper or electronic file of letters you send and receive. As with other aspects of your job search, a centralized record of all action you have taken will lessen the "guesswork" in following up on job prospects, interviews, and offers.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

When preparing job-search correspondence, always strive to stand out favorably from the crowd. The impression created by your correspondence will be a lasting one. The sample letters that follow are designed to assist you in your correspondence preparation by providing general examples, but should not be used verbatim. You are encouraged to visit Career Services during walk-in hours to meet with a career advisor and review any or all of your correspondence, or to receive additional tips on how to express your thoughts more effectively in writing.

Don't underestimate the importance of correspondence in your job search—its quality is crucial to your success. Through appropriate and effective correspondence, you're bound to establish a competitive advantage for yourself.

## **NEED MORE HELP?**

If you need additional help with correspondence preparation or any other aspect of the job-search or career-planning process, take advantage of the assistance available to you at Career Services. A variety of written resource materials are available in our Career Library. You may also wish to visit our website at <http://careerservices.nku.edu> for further information about our services and hours.

85 Nunn Drive  
Highland Heights, KY 40199  
January 21, 201X

Mr. J. B. Price  
Personnel Manager  
Golden Enterprises, Inc.  
P.O. Box 675  
Columbus, OH 43701

Dear Mr. Price:

I am writing to express my interest in the Sales Trainee position you posted recently in the Northern Kentucky University (NKU) Career Services online employment database. I will be graduating from NKU in a few months, and am actively seeking a position with a manufacturer of consumer goods.

As you will note in my resume, I have had meaningful practical experience in sales with Dillard's in Crestview Hills, Kentucky. In addition, I have completed several courses related to sales while pursuing a major in Psychology at NKU. Also, as a Resident Assistant, I developed strong communication and listening skills working with students in my hall. I believe the combination of my academic background, residence hall experience, and "real world" experience at Dillard's will help me to contribute to the ongoing success of Golden Enterprises, Inc.

I would like to explore the Sales Trainee position with you further. Should you need additional information or wish to set up a time for an interview, please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone at (859) 555-1212 or by e-mail at [norse1@nku.edu](mailto:norse1@nku.edu). In the meantime, thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Erica Norse

**Cover Letter**

485 College Grove Drive  
Florence, KY 41020  
January 5, 201X

Mr. Timothy T. Mellon  
Director of College Recruiting  
XYZ Corporation  
4500 Randolph Drive  
Louisville, KY 41213

Dear Mr. Mellon:

I have been reading about XYZ Corporation in information provided by Northern Kentucky University Career Services and would like to inquire about employment opportunities in marketing research with your company. I want to work in marketing research and would like to relocate to the Louisville area.

I will receive my bachelor degree in marketing this May. My interest in business started in Junior Achievement while in high school and developed further through a variety of sales and retail positions during college. A marketing research class project with a local mall convinced me to pursue a career in marketing research. When I reviewed the top market research firms in Louisville, XYZ emerged as having a strong market position, an excellent training program, and a reputation for excellence in the field. In short, you provide the kind of professional environment I seek.

My resume is enclosed for your consideration. My education and experience match the qualifications required of your entry-level Marketing Research Analyst positions, but they do not tell the whole story. I know from supervisor feedback that I have the analytical skills and motivation needed to build a successful career in marketing research. Also, my practical experience gives me confidence in my career direction and in my ability to perform.

I am very interested in talking with you further about possible employment opportunities with XYZ Corporation. I will plan to call you in the next two weeks to see if we can arrange a meeting time that is convenient to your schedule. Thank you very much for considering my request. I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

Bill Business

Enclosure

**Prospecting Letter**

85 Nunn Drive  
Highland Heights, KY 40199  
January 30, 201X

Mr. J. B. Price  
Personnel Manager  
Golden Enterprises, Inc.  
P.O. Box 675  
Columbus, OH 43701

Dear Mr. Price:

I enjoyed speaking to you on the telephone today, and am delighted to have the opportunity to meet with you and further discuss the Sales Trainee opportunity with Golden Enterprises, Inc.

As we discussed, I will arrive at your office in Columbus at 2 p.m. on Wednesday, February 8. At this time, I will also deliver the application for employment that you indicated I need to complete prior to our meeting.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. I'm looking forward to meeting you next week.

Best,

Erica Norse

**Interview Confirmation**

85 Nunn Drive  
Highland Heights, KY 40199  
February 9, 201X

Mr. J. B. Price  
Personnel Manager  
Golden Enterprises, Inc.  
P.O. Box 675  
Columbus, OH 43701

Dear Mr. Price:

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the Sales Trainee position at Golden Enterprises, Inc. I enjoyed our interview very much.

This opportunity sounds exciting and challenging for someone with my energy level and commitment to sales and marketing. The Sales Trainee position offers an experience ideally suited for someone with my skills and abilities.

I would be happy to provide any additional information you may need regarding my candidacy.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Regards,

Erica Norse

**Post-Interview Thank-You**

85 Nunn Drive  
Highland Heights, KY 40199  
April 23, 201X

Mr. J. B. Price  
Personnel Manager  
Golden Enterprises, Inc.  
P.O. Box 675  
Columbus, OH 43701

Dear Mr. Price:

I want to thank you for extending an offer to work with Golden Enterprises, Inc. Before I can make a decision regarding this position as a Sales Trainee with your company; however, I need some clarification on the following two points.

First, I would appreciate it if you could advise me as to where I will be initially assigned. While I am aware that the majority of your sales trainees begin in the Columbus and Cleveland offices of Golden Enterprises, I am unclear about my potential placement.

A second consideration is that of salary. You indicated an annual salary of \$31,500; however, I would appreciate it if you would advise me as to when I can expect to be converted to a straight commission.

Finally, I must add that this position requires exactly the kind of work I want to do. I trust that clarification of these two points will make your offer all the more attractive. I look forward to hearing from you before May 10th.

Sincerely,

Erica Norse

**Job Offer Clarification**

85 Nunn Drive  
Highland Heights, KY 40199  
May 15, 201X

Mr. J. B. Price  
Personnel Manager  
Golden Enterprises, Inc.  
P.O. Box 675  
Columbus, OH 43701

Dear Mr. Price:

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to work with Golden Enterprises, Inc. I am very pleased to accept the position as a Sales Trainee with your Columbus office. The position requires exactly the kind of work I want to do, and I know I will do a good job for you.

As we discussed, I will begin work on July 1, 201X. In the meantime, I will complete all the necessary employment forms, obtain the required physical examination, and locate housing. I plan to be in Columbus within the next two weeks and would like to deliver the paperwork to you personally. At that time, we can handle any remaining items pertaining to my employment. I'll call next week to schedule an appointment with you.

I enjoyed my interviews with you and look forward to beginning my career with your sales team.

Sincerely,

Erica Norse

**Job Offer Acceptance**

485 College Grove Drive  
Florence, KY 41020  
April 1, 201X

Ms. Alice R. Temple  
Employee Relations Manager  
All Avenues Market Research  
412 Grandview Boulevard  
Louisville, KY 41214

Dear Ms. Temple:

It was indeed a pleasure meeting with you and your market research team last week to discuss your needs for a Product Marketing Analyst I. Your decision to offer me a position as a marketing research analyst earlier this week came as a pleasant surprise. However, at this time I am unable to accept your offer of employment.

As I discussed with you during our meeting, I believe one purpose of the interview is to explore areas of mutual interest and to assess the fit between the individual and the position. After careful consideration, I have realized that your emphasis on international market research would conflict with my family responsibilities. Consequently, our mutual interests would not be served by an international position at this time.

Should a domestic marketing research position within All Avenues Market Research become available, I would be pleased to be among those considered for the opening. You have a fine operation, and I would enjoy being a part of it.

Best wishes in your search.

Sincerely,

Bill Business

**Job Offer Declination**