

Writing Effective Job Search Letters

During your job search, you'll be writing lots of letters:

- Cover letters to potential employers when you send your resume for consideration
- Letters to network contacts and the referrals that arise from those contacts
- Thank-you letters as follow-up to networking meetings and interviews
- E-mail letters that might encompass all of the above purposes but often call for a more direct and concise writing style

Language and Tone

When writing your job-search letters, use a natural tone and simple writing style. Avoid stilted, outdated phrases like “per your request” and “enclosed please find.” Of course, because these are business letters, they should sound more formal than a quick note or e-mail you'd send to a friend, and they must be absolutely correct in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

And keep in mind, employers are interested in people who really want to work at their company. Don't be afraid to show interest and enthusiasm about starting your career. These are among the most positive qualities you bring to the workplace.

The following sections discuss each of the different types of letters in detail.

Cover Letters

Cover letters—letters that accompany or “cover” your resume each time you send it out—are essential partners to your resume. Because they can be customized for each person to whom you write, they give you the opportunity to highlight the information that is most relevant for that particular audience. But hiring managers may not read cover letters thoroughly (or at all), so don't count on your cover letter to communicate essential information that's not in your resume. Instead, think of your cover letter as an opportunity to sell yourself in a different way than your resume does.

It's helpful to think of your cover letter as having three parts:

- A. A beginning
- B. A middle
- C. An end

A: Attention!

Use your opening paragraph to tell readers why you are contacting them. Try to use interesting language to capture attention and make the reader want to know more about you.

Here's an example showing the attention-getting introduction of a letter written to the manager of a retail store where this candidate hopes to become assistant manager:

Mark Strong, Manager
Bethpage Books
255 Seaview Street
Bethpage, NY 11714

Dear Mr. Strong:

If you are looking for a hard-working, dedicated, literate assistant manager, please consider me!

B: Because...

The middle section of your cover letter should answer the question "Why should I hire you?" by communicating your key qualifications for the job you're seeking. You can convey this information in one or two short paragraphs or in three or four bullet-point statements. Be careful not to copy phrases or achievements word-for-word from your resume. Instead, write a summary statement about related achievements or tell a brief story that illustrates your strengths.

Here's the middle section of the letter introduced above:

My education, work history, and personal activities all point to a successful career in retail management—specifically in the book business. I have recently completed my Bachelor of Business Administration (concentration in Marketing) from Hofstra University, and for five years I have worked part-time as a retail sales associate. This experience led to my decision to pursue a career in retail management. I understand retail sales concepts, merchandising, and general business management. Most of all, I am a true book lover and would be able to communicate my knowledge and enthusiasm to your customers.

C: Close

Neatly wrap up your letter with a polite yet assertive closing that asks for an interview; here's an example:

Thank you for your consideration. I am enthusiastic about working at Bethpage Books and will call within a few days to see if we can schedule an appointment to meet.

Sincerely,

When writing your letters, keep in mind the employer's concerns (what you can do for them) and don't overstate your own needs and interests.

Sample Cover Letters

Here is a sample cover letter that demonstrates a good "ABC" format and clearly communicates key selling points.

Written by a student seeking a co-op job, the letter is a follow-up to a phone conversation. Note the three "selling points" in the middle section of the resume:

- A strong academic record.
- Personal attributes shown in prior jobs and volunteer positions.
- A hard-to-quantify but very important interest in children that is essential for people who work with sick children.

Meredith Johnson

School Address

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Boston, MA 02120
(617) 559-9049

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Permanent Address

4520 Hillsview Circle
Cincinnati, OH 45249
(513) 729-8350

August 29, 2002

Peter Andrews, M.D.
Children's Hospital Medical Center
Administrative Director: Research
3333 Burnet Avenue
Cincinnati, OH 45229

Re: **Co-op Position, April-September 2003**

Dear Dr. Andrews:

As you suggested, I am forwarding my resume to you for consideration for a six-month co-op position at Children's Hospital beginning next spring.

I am about to begin my second year at Northeastern University in Boston. My major is Psychology, but my career goal is medicine, and I would welcome any kind of hospital-based position that provides either laboratory experience or patient contact.

My record of school work, employment, and volunteer activities demonstrates attributes that make me a valuable employee:

- **Strong academic skills:** First-year college GPA of 3.96 with a rigorous honors-level courseload emphasizing math and science.
- **Reliability and work ethic:** In all my employment and volunteer positions, I have maintained an excellent record of being on time, prepared, and eager to take on new responsibilities.
- **Deep interest in the care and welfare of children:** In addition to volunteering at Children's for the past two summers, I have extensive experience caring for children, including a full-time summer nanny position. I relate well with children, truly care about their interests, and intend to pursue a career in pediatric medicine.

I will be at home in Cincinnati until September 15 and would be glad to meet with you. After that, I am easily reachable by phone or e-mail and will be home again during the holiday break (December 14-January 3).

Thank you for your consideration. I am enthusiastic about returning to Children's Hospital next year and believe I will be a valuable co-op employee.

Sincerely,

Meredith Johnson

enclosure: resume

A sample cover letter.

The next letter was written as a follow-up to an interview. It recaps key qualifications and expresses enthusiasm about joining the company. Notice how a timetable for response is set up in the last paragraph. If this candidate doesn't hear back by the time stated, he should give Mr. Lin a call.

EDWARD J. NILSSON III

ejIII@tampabay.rr.com

257 West Shell Court, Bradenton, FL 34201

941-459-3890 Home — 941-709-3490 Mobile

July 27, 2002

Rick Lin
Engineering Manager
Suncoast Systems, Inc.
4527 Monument Street
Bradenton, FL 34201

Dear Mr. Lin:

Thank you for taking so much time on Friday to tell me about the engineering opportunities at Suncoast Systems.

I am excited about working on your leading-edge power systems and believe that my engineering education and co-op experiences have prepared me well to be a productive member of your company.

As we discussed during our meeting, I made significant contributions to several key projects at Simco Systems and Apex Environmental. After a brief orientation, I quickly became a contributing member of the design team and enjoyed adding my abilities to the group projects, while continuously learning from the senior engineers.

I am committed to working hard, working smart, and doing my best in every endeavor, and I would like to help Suncoast Systems become even more successful.

You mentioned that you would get back to me next week about the next step in the interviewing process. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Nilsson III



Degree: BS, Civil Engineering.

Job Target: Wastewater civil engineer.

Strategy: Emphasized problems solved in class because he hadn't been able to obtain a summer job or an apprenticeship in engineering.

Charles W. Morgan

861 Lem Morrison Drive ✦ Auburn, Alabama 36830 ✦ ☎ [334] 555-5555

What I bring to the Wastewater Department as an entry-level civil engineer:

- ✦ **Drive** to solve difficult problems— for the fun of doing it.
- ✦ **Discipline** to handle complex challenges well.
- ✦ Natural **aptitude** for advanced mathematics.

Education:

- ✦ B.S., **Civil Engineering**, Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama—02

Worked up to 20 hours a week for six semesters while carrying 15 credit hours. Athlete of the year every year from 98 to 02.

Selected coursework:

- ✦ Pipe and channel flow
- ✦ Soils engineering
- ✦ AutoCAD
- ✦ Waste water treatment
- ✦ Open channel flow
- ✦ Statistics
- ✦ Water treatment
- ✦ Technical and blueprint drawing
- ✦ Environmental design
- ✦ Engineering materials
- ✦ Stormwater drainage design

Selected examples of problems solved in civil-engineering classes:

- ✦ Helped design town's entire drinking and wastewater plant. Contributed to 30-page report. Presented oral report before civil engineer with years of on-the-job experience. Got good grade—even though I hadn't taken a prerequisite course.
- ✦ Did extensive work to find the best site for a county landfill. Factored in major variables from elevation to soil type to climate. My written report well received.
- ✦ Reviewed hundreds of pages of stringent regulations to help design airport. Laid out three runways that met tough operational requirements.
- ✦ Analyzed three major engineering projects, parts of Denver International Airport. Demonstrated understanding of how engineering disciplines are integrated in the most challenging situations.

Basic computer literacy:

- ✦ AutoCAD, MS Excel, MS Word, PowerPoint, Internet search tools, Windows 9x, Windows XP

Relevant work experience:

- ✦ Summer jobs including work as a **construction assistant** for W.K. Charming Construction, Montgomery, Alabama

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Degree: BS, Chemical Engineering.**Job Target:** Entry-level chemical engineering position.**Strategy:** Highlighted numerous technical skills and experiences, including engineering class projects, as well as technical employment and internship. Included relevant keywords in course titles as well as work experiences.**SIMON R. PEREZ**2523 Pioneer Road, Hillsborough, NJ 08844
908-281-5555 Home ■ srperez@juno.com

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- OBJECTIVE** **Entry-level Chemical Engineering** position utilizing my experience and knowledge in process improvement as well as technical support.
- PROFILE**
- ☑ Recent college graduate with proven technical and analytical abilities.
 - ☑ Demonstrated track record of achieving goals in a team environment.
 - ☑ **Computer Skills:** Windows 98, MS Word, MS Excel, MS PowerPoint, RS3Excel, ChemDraw, Hysys, Proll, Visio 2000, Netscape, and IE.
 - ☑ **Technical Equipment and Skills:** Instron tensile tester, Brabender torque rheometer, Brookfield viscometer, and particle size analysis.
- EDUCATION** **Bachelor of Science, Chemical Engineering** (GPA 3.0) May 2002
Rutgers State University, New Brunswick, NJ
Specific coursework topics included: Process Control, Chemical Plant Design, Polymer Processing and Engineering Materials.
- Engineering Class Projects** (one per semester):
- ✓ **Electrodialysis Membrane:** Participated in 3-person team that increased the efficiency of a precious-metals refinery operation (Diamond Corporation) by introducing ionic separation of components to the refinery process.
 - ✓ **Biomedical Research:** Conducted experiments in chemical engineering of the human body, particularly kidney dialysis and IV drug dosage.
 - ✓ **Thermal Crosslinking of Kevlar Fiber:** Team project to perform tensile testing on heated Kevlar fiber and statistical data analysis.
- EMPLOYMENT** **Technical Assistant** November 2001–May 2002
Johnson Chemicals Research, Chemistry Division — Skillman, NJ
- Edited confidential documentation for 60 clinical trial projects in preparation for the development of drug-simulation software by an outside company. Assured accuracy of technical content, and eliminated and/or disguised proprietary information.
 - Contributed to quality control of pharmaceutical research database, increasing the efficiency of data queries by editing data for uniformity. Utilized RS3Excel to extract research data in editing process.
- Chemical Engineering Internship** May 2000–August 2000
Chemical Resins Inc., Technical Service Division — Princeton, NJ
- Tested properties of Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) resin (particle size, heat stability, and viscosity testing) for this specialty chemicals manufacturer.
 - Provided technical support to three staff chemists in participatory team approach to testing and development of new PVC resin types.
- ACTIVITIES** **American Institute of Chemical Engineers, College Chapter** 1998–2002
- ✓ Charter Member and Newsletter Editor (4 years)
 - ✓ Volunteer: Habitat for Humanity, Mountain Park Clean-up, Princeton, NJ
- Willing to re-locate within the tri-state area.
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