

# CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

RESUME REVIEW

INDIVIDUAL ADVISING

INTERVIEW ADVICE

EXPLORE CAREER DIRECTIONS



## Cover Letter and Career Correspondence Guide

### Types of career correspondence in this guide:

- Cover letter
- Thank you letter
- Prospecting letter
- Messages for acceptance, withdrawal, negotiating, and declining a job
- Networking correspondence
- ePortfolio

### Why are these important?

- While your resume is your primary marketing tool, **these documents are key supporting materials** and help illustrate your professional identity.
- They convey a more personal sense of your **professional identity**, as well as your **passion** for the position you are applying for.
- They allow you to effectively gather information, **make connections** within your field or area of interest, increase the likelihood of being called for an interview, and navigate the hiring process.

### What are some basic rules for career correspondence?

- Whether in traditional letter form or transmitted via e-mail, **all correspondence should be professional in language and tone**, using traditional business letter formatting.
- Use the same font as on your resume in a size large enough to be easily read – at least 10 pt.
- **Letters should be individually written**, not “form” letters with new contact info pasted in.

### What is the function of a cover letter?

- Perhaps the **first impression** that you will make on a potential employer.
- An **introductory guide** to your resume – it contextualizes your experience in terms of the opportunity for which you are applying.
- A well-written, purposeful cover letter **entices the reader to look at your resume**. A poorly-written (or non-existent) cover letter may hinder consideration of your resume.

### What is in this guide?

*Best practices for designing and authoring your cover letter (pp. 2-4)*

*Suggestions for proofreading and customizing your cover letter for each opportunity (pp. 4)*

*Sample cover letters (pp. 5-7)*

*Guidelines and examples of other important types of career correspondence. (pp. 9-11)*

### In a nutshell:

*A cover letter provides the reader with a filter or interpretive framework for reading your resume. It says, “In a minute you are going to read my resume – here are the most important aspects of my experience, and how they apply to this opportunity.”*

## What makes a cover letter particularly effective?

- It has been **tailored** specifically to the job or internship.
- It is free of grammatical errors and typos.
- It is **not a restatement of information from the resume**. Rather, it demonstrates how your experiences are relevant to the job or internship you are applying for.
- It is written clearly and concisely in an active voice: the cover letter should entice the reader to consider your resume and **set expectations** about what they will find there – not bore them or test their patience.
- It is the result of **background research and networking**, as well as a thoughtful writing process.
- Literary excess, irrelevant information about yourself, and obvious flattery will not help readers remember your letter –at least not in a good way.

## What about “Standing Out”?

*You may have been told that it is important to use your application to differentiate yourself from other applicants.*

*Remember – the person reading your resume is probably reading many of them –they want to evaluate candidates as easily as they can.*

*Therefore, **the most effective way to “stand out” is to communicate efficiently and effectively the elements of your experience that a particular reader would consider important and compelling.***

## Layout, Formatting, and Basic Guidelines

- The CDC typically recommends a three-paragraph cover letter. Simplicity is a virtue – you don’t want the reader to feel visually overwhelmed (or immediately bored) by several dense paragraphs of material. [a more detailed explanation follows on the next few pages]
  - **Introduction:** Who you are, what position you are interested in, where you heard about it, and why you are interested.
  - **Middle:** A series of connections between your experiences and the demands of the position you are interested in. It may be useful to try to synthesize the information into 2 or 3 useful themes that the employer has stated they are looking for in an applicant.
  - **Wrap-up/Thank-you:** Summarize your qualifications, offer contact information, and thank the reader for their time/consideration.
- **Aim for the body of the letter to be less than 2/3 of a page.** Again, you don’t want the reader to groan upon seeing that they have full page of text to slog through. The goal is to send a clear message as directly as possible.
- **Use standard, business letter formatting.** If you are pasting the letter into an online portal, you don’t need the address blocks, but include them when you are uploading as a Word document. Use a font size and style that matches your resume, and try to balance the vertical orientation of the letter on the page.
- **Try to get the appropriate addressee’s name.** It is worth going the extra mile to track down the hiring/department/HR manager’s name. If you cannot locate this information reliably, use “Dear hiring manager” or “hiring committee” (if appropriate). Avoid addressing your cover letter “To whom it may concern”.
- **Vary your vocabulary.** Avoid starting every sentence with “I”, and be sure to incorporate field - relevant words, as well as terminology from the job description if one is available.
- **Show –don’t tell.** Demonstrate your capabilities by referring to your experience. Avoid generic statements like “I am highly organized” or “I am a leader” without connecting those capabilities to your experiences.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Paragraph: The Introduction

- In this paragraph, you will **convey who you are what position you are interested in, and where you heard about it.**
- Be sure to **specify the position** (or at least the role) that you are interested in – use the organization’s own job title.
- **Explain how you have come to know about the opportunity** – if you were referred by an employee or other person significantly related to the organization or field – this is the place to mention it.
- **Express your interest and enthusiasm** in the position and organization, but **be genuine** – explain why you feel that way. It is easy to come across as “fake.” If you don’t have something specific to reference here, just stick with an opening comment about having interest in the job.

### Tips and Examples

*“Who you are” in this letter is not your name, but your current career identity or status – e.g.: “recent graduate”, or “marketing intern”, etc.*

*“I was excited to learn of the copywriting internship from your organization’s attorney, Bob Loblaw.”*

*Use **information from research and networking** to demonstrate your interest.*

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Paragraph: What Makes You So Special?!

- The key in the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph is to **draw parallels between your experiences and the needs of the organization** you are applying to.
- Demonstrate how your experiences (or groups of experiences) relate to the position – **help the reader understand why you are a good fit for this position specifically.**
- You don’t have to respond to every bullet point in a job post.
- **You don’t have to discuss every experience on your resume** – you are highlighting what is pertinent to this opportunity specifically.
- You don’t have to address your experiences in chronological order – try to **highlight the most relevant aspects** of your experience first. However, if your most relevant experiences are in the distant past, you should address how more recent experiences are useful as well.
- **Avoid negative characterizations** of past experiences or employers – focus on positive aspects.\*

### Tips and Examples

*Determine these needs from a job/internship posting, informational interviews and networking, or from internet research regarding the organization, field, and job title – **see the next page for details.***

*Ideally, you will address a majority of key qualifications from the job description – **emphasize the most pertinent areas** – don’t spend several lines demonstrating your typing ability.*

*\*For example – achieving goals in a “constantly evolving” workplace is preferable to talking about “heavy turnover.”*

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Paragraph: Mapping it Out

- Your second paragraph should be tailored to the specific needs of the audience you are addressing. If you are working from a posted job or internship description, **scan the description for key requirements, desired qualifications, and other phrases that are used repeatedly** – these are your primary clues for tailoring your cover letter.
- You might also gain insight into the needs of an employer from informational interviews and networking, or from internet research regarding the organization, field, and job title.
- Group an employer’s needs into categories – they might be **specific technical skills/qualifications, or key transferrable skills**, such as: communication, organization, time management, leadership, and analytical skills.

- **Consider how your experiences connect with these categories.** Imagine the perspective of the reader – what is the most easily understandable way to bring your experiences and skills together? **Some examples:**
  - “My internship experiences with \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ allowed me to develop leadership and project planning skills.”
  - “In my work with \_\_\_\_\_, I collaborated constantly with other team members to ensure.”
  - “Beyond my \_\_\_\_ coursework, my experience with \_\_\_\_ allowed me to further develop my capabilities in \_\_\_\_\_.”
- As you can see from the examples above, you don’t have to move through your experiences one-by-one (**don’t just repeat what is on your resume**). Try to create a coherent, conversational description of the ways in which you have been prepared to match the demands of this specific job.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Paragraph: The Conclusion

- Restate your interest in the organization and/or job, and summarize what you have to offer.
- Provide your contact information (in the text of the final paragraph) and indicate any next steps you wish to pursue. For example, you may indicate plans to follow up with a phone call at a certain time, or you may request a meeting to discuss the position in detail.
- Finally, thank the reader for their time and consideration.

### Final Cover Letter Check

- There are no spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors.
- The letter is clear and concise – it makes a positive impression quickly and easily.
- The letter makes specific connections between your experiences and the needs of the organization.
- The letter is properly formatted, and matches the font style and size of your resume.
- Have friends, family members, or mentors proof read your cover letter.
- Read your cover letter out loud – you will be surprised at the typos and awkward grammar that this practice will uncover.

### Thank You Letter

Always send a thank you letter to individuals who have given you their time and attention. A thank you letter can be handwritten (if your handwriting is legible and neat – and immediacy is not an issue) or emailed. If emailing a thank you letter, format the email just as you would a typed letter with initial caps, proper grammar, and appropriate salutation and signature line, but you can disregard the address blocks. Regardless, **this letter should be sent within 24 hours of your contact with the individual** –the sooner, the better!

A thank you letter should include the following:

- Keep it brief but warm and personal. Express your sincere appreciation for the interview or other assistance provided.
- Reemphasize your strongest qualifications. Draw attention to the good match between your qualifications and the job requirements.
- Reiterate your interest in the position. Use the opportunity to provide or offer supplemental information not previously given.
- Restate your appreciation for the interviewer’s time and consideration.

## Sample Cover Letter - Internship Position

Elena Gilbert  
1300 W. Loyola Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60660

June 23, 2015

Mr. Damon Salvatore  
Human Resources  
Evanston Northwestern Healthcare  
9200 Ridge Road  
Evanston, IL 60201

Dear Mr. Salvatore:

I was excited to learn about the communications intern position advertised on your website and have enclosed my resume for your consideration. I am a junior at Loyola University Chicago majoring in health systems management and currently seeking an internship with a healthcare organization that uses an integrated network of resources to provide the highest level of care to its patients. I believe my excellent interpersonal and organizational skills, as well as my recent efforts developing the online presence for my university's career development center make me a strong candidate for the position.

As a cheerful, hard - working individual with more than three years of customer service experience, I believe my qualifications match your requirements. My experience in successfully resolving conflicts as a member of Loyola's Student Judicial Board has prepared me to handle delicate situations both confidently and confidentially. As a student worker at the Career Development Center, continue to hone my communication skills in answering student questions in a friendly and professional manner. At the same time, this job requires me to exhibit attention to detail and accuracy in entering employer information into the office's computer system. This past semester, I demonstrated initiative in seeking to expand the office's online presence through the use of social media platforms. My bi-weekly posts to the center's blog and my contributions to the center's Facebook page have increased its visibility with current students and alumni considerably. I was also recognized by my supervisors for my creative contributions to the center's recent marketing contests.

I know that ENHC enjoys an excellent reputation among health care providers and patients, and I believe that I would be a valuable asset to your organization. I can be contacted at [egilb2@luc.edu](mailto:egilb2@luc.edu) or (773) 555-1212 to further discuss my application.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Elena Gilbert

## Sample Cover Letter – Full Time Position

Clarence Darrow  
6300 N. Winthrop Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60626

May 7, 2015

Ms. Tami Taylor  
Human Resources Manager  
McDermott Will & Emery LLP  
227 W. Monroe  
Chicago, IL 60606

Dear Ms. Taylor:

I am writing to apply for the Practice Development assistant position you recently advertised on Loyola University Chicago's RamblerLink website. I will be graduating this May with degrees in political science and international studies, and have a strong interest in attending law school in the future. Through my internship with your firm's Rome office, I learned firsthand about McDermott's commitment to excellence and, in particular, its focus on building a strong firm culture across its practice groups.

My past work experiences would serve me well in a position that requires someone with knowledge of the legal field and solid organizational and administrative skills. During the fall of 2014, I completed a semester-long internship at McDermott's Rome office while also enrolled at Loyola's John Felice Rome Center. There I used my language skills to translate documents from Italian into English and draft correspondence for members of one of the firm's trial teams, integrating myself quickly and smoothly with the firm's support staff. Since returning from Rome I have continued to pursue my interest in the law with two internships through the Circuit Court of Cook County. At these positions, I have demonstrated my attention to detail and my thoroughness while preparing trial packets and transcribing subject interviews for a wide variety of cases. Further, my supervisors have commended me on my ability to prioritize tasks effectively, a skill I believe would be invaluable to your Practice Development team.

I would be proud to again be associated with your firm, and would appreciate the opportunity to discuss my qualifications with you at your convenience. Enclosed is my resume for your review. Please feel to contact me at [cdarrow@luc.edu](mailto:cdarrow@luc.edu) or (773) 555-1212 if you have any further questions. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Clarence Darrow

## Sample Cover Letter – Experienced Alumni

Lilly Ledbetter  
123 Main Street  
Chicago, IL 60660

May 29, 2015

Ms. Ann Hopkins  
Executive Director, Greater Employment Opportunities  
123 Michigan Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60603

Dear Ms. Hopkins:

Following up on our recent conversation, I am submitting my resume to formally apply for the position of Policy Director. I look forward to contributing to the important work you do, specifically to promote women's access to and success in post-secondary education and training.

The focus of my career as a union organizer has been to improve the lives of low-wage workers. In my union, Serenity Now, the workforce has been predominantly women working in the service industry. I have firsthand knowledge of what a difference it makes not only for an individual woman, but also for her family, when she has economic security and control over her working life.

My ten years in the labor movement have provided me the opportunity to work in a variety of roles. Beginning as a field organizer, visiting workers in their homes and running union meetings developed my strong interpersonal and relationship - building skills. After working on multiple successful campaigns, I was recruited to work in the education department of our international union to promote its Human Fund. The learning curve was steep —shifting the focus of my work to research and strategy while continuing to rely on my solid communication skills. Instead of meeting with workers at their kitchen tables, I learned to read company financial reports and prepare presentations for shareholders. After successfully mounting a campaign at one of the state's largest clothing manufacturers, I was promoted to the position of organizing director. In this role, my responsibilities have included recruiting and developing a team of organizers, running multiple internship programs, designing campaign structure and making final strategy decisions.

I recognize that the work of this position may be new to me. But my entire career with the union has been a series of challenges that have required me to adapt to new environments and acquire new skills. I have succeeded each time because I am a quick learner, a good listener, and an activist with the ability to see broadly, think strategically and act decisively. I am confident that if I become Policy Director that I can motivate your staff to work hard toward creating fundamental policy change in support of GEO's mission. Thank you for considering me for the position. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,  
Lilly Ledbetter

## Sample Thank You Letter

6525 N. Sheridan Road  
Chicago, IL 60626

May 29, 2015

Dr. Diane Johnson  
Office of Student Life  
Northington Junior College  
111 College Road  
Northington, Illinois 66111

Dear Dr. Johnson:

Thank you for interviewing me yesterday for the Assistant Program Director position. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about Northington's student programs.

Even before my interview began, I was very impressed with the welcoming atmosphere at Northington. That experience, along with what I learned in my interview, has strengthened my interest in your position. I feel that my academic and internship experiences have given me unique qualifications that are a perfect match for both Northington and the position of Assistant Program Director. My experiences as an intern in the Office of Student Activities have honed my programming, conflict resolution and organizational capabilities that match the job description perfectly. My experiences as a very active member of various student organizations have made me very enthusiastic for the responsibilities you described. And the very warm, positive atmosphere on Northington's campus matches my reputation as a friendly, positive team player.

I am very interested in your position and in working for the Office of Student Life at Northington University. Please feel free to call me at (312) 555-1212 if I can provide you with any additional information.

Once again, thank you for the interview and your consideration.

Sincerely,  
James Joyce



## Acceptance, Withdrawal, and Rejection Correspondence

These types of correspondence share in common the fact that they are written after you have procured an offer of employment. It is acceptable to send such correspondence via e-mail, but be sure to retain a professional tone in all communication.

### Acceptance Message

- Confirm, accept, and reaffirm your employment decision.
- Confirm logistics — starting date and time; forms, tests and other correspondence to be completed; salary information.
- Express your appreciation and enthusiasm for the opportunity.

### Withdrawal Message

- State your decision, and provide rationale for the choice.
- Express appreciation for the employer's consideration and courtesy. Ask them to keep you in mind for future employment opportunities.

### Salary Negotiation Message

- State your appreciation and enthusiasm for the opportunity.
- Provide a **range or approximation** of your desired salary
  - Desired salary should be based on your **reasonable** assessment of job market research, contextual factors regarding the particular organization and job requirements, and your own salary needs.
  - For Example: "Given my qualifications and the scope of this position, I was hoping to begin with a salary in the mid-\$40K range. Please let me know if there is any flexibility in this area."
- Thank the reader for their time and consideration.

### Message to Decline a Job Offer

- Acknowledge and show thoughtful consideration of the offer.
- State your decision and provide rationale for your choice.
- Express appreciation for the employer's consideration and courtesy. Keep in mind that in the future you might want to seek employment with this employer, or may even encounter the reader at a different organization. Be professional and leave them with a good impression.

## Networking Correspondence

A majority of professional positions are filled through some series of relationships – or “networking.” Therefore, adding networking to your repertoire can have a huge impact on your job search. If you want to ask a stranger or a distant acquaintance for networking or to request an informational interview, a good first step is writing an effective email. Compose an email that is quick and easy to read, and doesn’t demand too much. Here are some guidelines

- **Explain who you are and how you came to contact the person.** Don't give your whole life story — a couple of sentences are all you need – focus on your background, career interests, and goals (see the description of a “Profile Statement” in the CDC Resume Guide), as well as how you became aware of them.
- **Let them know a bit about your goals.** Are you looking for informational interviews, or an internship? What are your career goals? Don't make them guess –you don't want them to feel as though you are making them jump through hoops for you. Nor do you want to give the impression that you haven't previously considered what your interests and goals are.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** You've told them about your background, interests, and goals – now let them help you in whatever way they can. Ask for information that might be helpful, not for a favor or a job. Don't burden them by requesting that they “keep an eye out” – see if they have other contacts you should speak with.
- **Why them?** Give enough context that the person can understand why you think they have something that will be helpful to you.
- **Be concise and make it easy.** Get to the point quickly and offer flexibility in how you connect. An in-person meeting is preferable, but give the option of a quick coffee or phone call as well. You want to make it as easy as possible for them to say yes. An email exchange is the medium of last resort.
- **Say thank you.** Most people like to help other people out, but they like to be appreciated for their time and effort. Thank them for their time in your initial contact, and be sure to follow a meeting with another thank-you note highlighting what you took away from the conversation.

## Sample Networking E-mail

[Subject Line]: Introduction - Susan Sharp

Dear Ms. Rowe,

I am a friend of Emily Little and she encouraged me to forward my resume to you. I know Emily through a local children's theater, for which I was a lighting assistant this semester. I also see her at college music performances, as I am in the orchestra.

Attached is my resume. Most of my theatrical experience is in lighting and TD; however, I have done everything, from props to state management. I'm interested in getting a job or paid internship, as well as a place to stay in the Boston area for the summer. I would appreciate any input you may have toward reaching these goals.

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

Best Regards,  
Susan Sharp

## E-mail Etiquette Guidelines

- In the subject line, make the reason for your e-mail clear: "Application for Analyst Position."
- Reply to any e-mails from employers within two business days. If you are replying to an e-mail, keep the same subject line as the original e-mail and include the original message in the reply.
- Address your e-mail to a person, if possible, using a proper salutation such as, "Dear Mr. Jones."
- Introduce yourself the same way that you would in a cover letter; for example, "I am writing with regard to your marketing internship...."
- Proofread! Don't rely on autocorrect. Read your e-mails before sending them for tone and grammar (try reading out loud!).
- Don't use emoticons, phonetic spellings such as "ur" for "you're" or other common e-mail or text messaging expressions.
- Remember that your e-mail address should also convey a professional tone: "bigpimpin@gmail.com" or "diva93@yahoo.com" are unlikely to impress.
- Include your own name in the name of files that you attach to an e-mail. For example, JoeJonesResume.doc, JaneDoeCoverLetter.doc.
- Remember that e-mails can easily be lost or blocked by anti-spam measures. Always follow up with a phone call or regular e-mail, unless the employer specifically requests no phone calls.

## ePortfolios

A professional ePortfolio (electronic portfolio) is a digital collection of work that showcases your experiences, accomplishments, and capabilities. An ePortfolio may include a variety of relevant documents, embedded media, and info – graphics that provide a holistic representation of who your academic and professional identities, as well as providing some sense of your individuality and personal characteristics.

While the prevalence of ePortfolios in creative fields is more established, they are still considered novel in many areas of the job market. Employers have suggested that the availability of an ePortfolio can be an important differentiator in weighing top applicants. Therefore, a professional ePortfolio is an opportunity to supplement your other application materials in a more interactive, personal way.

While ePortfolios provide a way to convey your unique qualities, it is important to keep a professional tone and appearance when using an ePortfolio for career development. For more information on how to create a compelling ePortfolio, visit: [www.luc.edu/experiential/eportfolio/Guides\\_Resources.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/experiential/eportfolio/Guides_Resources.shtml).

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Career Development Center

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*Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives*