

# Correspondence

dear Mr. Famous Company,

I am a third year student at the Rochester Institute of Technology. The reason I am writing is because I have seen your organization's work in the *New York Times* often and I very much enjoy you're work. I would like to inquire as to wether I could possibly shadow you, as I will be in New York City during the week of September 17. You may contact me at the information shown below..

Eager Student

A student wrote the above email to a well-known employer t in New York City. Anxious to hear back, he was delighted to see a reply in his inbox in just one hour. His face fell when he read it, though:

Dear Mr. Student:

Okay.

Please proofread your writing before you send me any further correspondence. I will not look at anything of yours again if it contains errors.

Sincerely,

Famous Employer

## Professionalism in Writing

This student was both delighted at the accepted request and aggravated at the employer. "What does it matter?" he asked me in frustration. "I am not a writer!"

No, we're not writers. But we *are* professionals.

Writer or not, every single job seeker must write to potential employers at some point during the job search. You may find yourself composing cover letters, thank you letters, networking, acceptance letters, withdrawal letters, rejection letters, or providing professional references.

When you do write, everything must be perfectly composed and meticulously structured. Your writing represents you, just like everything else about the job search. Think of it this way: what if you walked into an interview with splotches of greasy food all over the front of your shirt and all around your mouth? Errors in writing are kind of the same way. Each one distracts from the personality and skill set you are trying to sell, and is likely to decrease your chance of a great first impression. This handout helps you to approach the different kinds of writing you may have to face during the search in the most professional manner possible.

## Purpose of a Cover Letter

**Highlight experience** — the cover letter is the most common kind of writing during the job search. A cover letter accompanies a resume being sent to an organization for a specific position or area of interest. The well-written cover letter highlights selective aspects of your background which best suit the employer's needs. In other words, the cover letter bridges the gap between your skills and experience and the qualifications of the position or area of interest.

**Capture attention** — A well-written cover letter commands the reader's attention.

**Stimulate interest** — it stimulates interest in you and your resume as well as reflects your interest in the job and/or the organization.

**Specify the follow up** — Will you call the employer (and when) or vice versa?

Ask for an interview — the opportunity to interview is the ultimate goal of your cover letter and resume.

## Cover Letter Guidelines

A cover letter usually includes three to four paragraphs. Each paragraph has a different goal.

**First Paragraph** — tells who you are and why you are writing (without saying, “My name is...and I want a job.”) Suggest the kind of activity you would like to be involved in (co-op or full-time). Give a bit of background on yourself and why you are pursuing a position in this field or discuss briefly what you are currently doing. If you were referred to this person by another, state that “I am writing at the suggestion of ...”.

**Second Paragraph** — this is your ‘SELL’ paragraph. It is your time to outline for the employer what you can do for THEM. Do not give a blow-by-blow account of your resume. Instead, highlight the experiences, skills, and abilities that are the most relevant to THIS employer. Do not just state a skill, i.e., “I am able to handle multiple tasks.” Instead PROVE that you have the skill, i.e., “I developed the ability to handle multiple tasks by juggling a full course load, a paid internship and serving as treasurer for the sophomore class.” Draw from your academic experiences, jobs, and activities – wherever your strengths lie. This paragraph is your chance to describe to the employer exactly why YOU are the person for the job.

**Closing Paragraph** — finally, sign off. Indicate how interested you would be in meeting in person to talk more about the possibility of working with them. Be sure to state that YOU WILL CALL THEM to see when such a meeting might be arranged. Do not worry about sounding too aggressive – this is the protocol employers expect you to follow. Remember, if you do not follow up, someone else will.

Two short paragraphs are better than one long one and have a better chance of being read. Always try to focus on your accomplishments and how your skills can assist the employer. Focus on their needs, not yours.

### Essentials for Success

- Communicate your ambition and enthusiasm
- Stress accomplishments by explaining how you have met or exceeded specific employer needs
- Show how previous experiences/accomplishments relate to the position for which you are applying
- Also, the reader may be judging you on how well you write so do your best to make the words come alive!
- Do not overuse the word “I”. Rather than starting with “I”, turn some of your sentences around. It is better to give examples of how you did something than to say, “I did this or that...”
- Use active, not passive, verbs. For example use arranged instead of “I was responsible for arranging” (*See Resume Writing handout for a list of action verbs.*)
- Research the organization before you write the cover letter. Ideally, every cover letter is unique and targeted to a specific position or type of work. Use the information obtained through research to demonstrate that you know something about the company.
- Address the letter to a specific person within an organization. If you do not know the person’s name, title, or gender call the organization and ask for the correct information. If you are unable to get a specific name, acceptable alternatives are “Dear Sir/Madam” or “Dear Human Resources Representative”. When responding to a “blind ad” (a P.O. Box number in a newspaper ad) with no opportunity to address your letter to an individual or the follow-up person, you can only ask the employer to write or call you.
- Be sure to use an acceptable business letter format (*see samples on page 4*). Keep a copy of each letter for your records.
- Make it perfect. Check to make sure your cover letter is free of typos and is grammatically correct.

## Thank You Letter

This is one of the most important, yet least used, tools in a job search. Fewer than 20 percent of candidates bother to extend this basic courtesy. As an interviewee, not only does the thank you letter show your appreciation of time, but also if well constructed, it is an excellent opportunity to again market your skills and interest in the position.

- Thank you letters should be sent as soon as possible after the interview, preferably within 24 hours.
- Sending thank you notes by fax or e-mail is acceptable.

- If you are interviewed by a committee, you may opt to send each committee member a thank you letter, or one letter to the committee chairperson asking that they share it with the other members.
- State that you remain interested in the job, or at least that you are interested in taking the next steps.

### **Networking/Informational Interview Letter**

This letter is designed to generate informational interviews, not job interviews, which allow you to meet individuals who can give specific information about a career, an industry of interest, or their position and company.

### **Acceptance Letter**

Use this letter to accept a job offer and to confirm the terms of your employment (salary, starting date, medical examinations, etc.). An acceptance letter often follows a telephone conversation during which the details of the offer and the terms of employment are discussed. The letter confirms your acceptance of the offer, expresses your appreciation for the opportunity, and positively reinforces the employer's decision to hire you.

### **Withdrawal Letter**

Once you accept a position, you have an *obligation* to inform all other employers with whom you have had an interview (or have one pending) of your decision and to *withdraw your employment application from consideration*. This should be done by e-mail because of the immediacy of the job offer process. In either case, you should express appreciation for the employer's consideration and courtesy. It may be appropriate to state that your decision to go with another organization was based on having better job fit for this stage in your career. Do not say you obtained a better job.

### **Rejection Letter**

Employers are not the only ones to send rejection letters. Candidates may have to decline employment offers verbally (ideal) or in writing that do not fit their career objectives and interests. Rejecting an employment offer should be done thoughtfully. Indicate that you have carefully considered the offer and have decided not to accept it. Also, be sure to thank the employer for the offer and for consideration of you as a candidate. This will improve your chances should you later reapply to the employer.

### **E-Mailing Job Search Correspondence**

It may be easy to treat e-mail as a casual, off-the-cuff kind of writing. Most of the same rules as with traditional writing, however, still apply. When using e-mail, keep the following in mind:

Be Brief when writing e-mails. Conciseness counts and anything more than a screen long may put people off. It is okay to write a short reply to a long email if you are acknowledging or confirming something. Example: "Thanks for that comprehensive update. I will do X, Y, or Z."

Identify yourself with a standard signoff automatically inserted at the bottom of each business e-mail. Not everyone will remember or know right away who you are and why you are writing. The signature should include your full name, position, and pertinent contact information. You should also always fill in the subject line with the relevant subject.

Style Counts. Do not ever write in ALL CAPS. Use asterisks to emphasize instead. Likewise, never write in all lowercase, as it can be hard to read. You should also spell-check *everything*.

Keep Separate Accounts for personal and work correspondence. It is surprisingly easy to goof and end up sending something embarrassing to a potential employer. Furthermore, your business email should be something professional sounding, like johnbrown@gmail.com. No matter how laid back your potential workplace is, doggydoo@hotmail.com is not acceptable for a business email!

Job seekers may fax or e-mail resumes, cover letters and thank you notes to employers.

- Treat the e-mail message (or fax cover sheet) you send along with your resume as if it were a formal cover letter.
- To insure the employer will get your resume, place a text version of your resume in the body of your message and attach a formatted version as an attachment.

## Guidelines for Your References

You should plan to have 3-4 (or more) professional references. They can be professors, advisors, previous supervisors, managers, etc. It should be someone that can speak to a potential employer about your performance as an employee or student. Make sure that you ask the person if they are willing to be your reference, before putting them on your reference list.

### Sample References

**John Smith**  
Jxs1234@rit.edu  
12 East Avenue  
Rochester, NY 14607  
(585) 555-1111

Ms. Sue Miller  
Engineering Manager  
XYZ Company  
Rochester, NY 14618  
Work Phone: (585) 555-5555  
e-mail: smiller@xyzco.com

- Supervisor at previous co-op. Reviewed my performance and provided an evaluation at the end of a 6 month assignment

Dr. Steve Johnson  
Advisor  
Rochester Institute of Technology  
Rochester, NY 14623  
Work Phone: (585) 555-1234  
e-mail: sjohnson@rit.edu

- Academic advisor for the last 8 months

Mr. Pat O'Brien  
Manager  
Jiffy Lube  
White Plains, NY 16554  
Work Phone: (914) 555-1234  
e-mail: pobrien@jiffylube.com

- Supervisor at part time position. Directly oversaw my performance for over 2 years.

## Additional Information on Correspondence to Employers

- See your program coordinator; he/she will be happy to critique your letters
- The Office of Cooperative Education and Career Services web site at [www.rit.edu/co-op/careers](http://www.rit.edu/co-op/careers) provides links on the topic of job search correspondence
- Wallace Library has additional resources for your review
- Resources are available in the Office of Cooperative Education and Career Services Resource Library

# R·I·T

Office of Cooperative Education and Career Services  
57 Lomb Memorial Drive · Rochester, NY 14623 · (585) 475-2301 · (585) 475-6905 TTY · (585) 475-5476 fax  
[www.rit.edu/co-op/careers](http://www.rit.edu/co-op/careers)

## Application Letter

1225 Hampton Boulevard  
Rochester, NY 14612  
[Date]

Ms. Dianne C. Strand  
Manager of Human Resources  
Atlantic Coast Industries, Inc.  
2900 Virginia Beach Boulevard  
Virginia Beach, VA 23464

Dear Ms. Strand:

I am applying for the systems analyst co-op position, which was advertised on March 11 with the Office of Co-op and Career Services at Rochester Institute of Technology. The position seems to fit 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 management information systems, 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 lab assistant for system users gave me valuable exposure to complex computer operations. Additionally, I worked in computing operations for Citibank where I gained knowledge of financial systems. My enclosed resume provides more details on my qualifications.

Please consider my request for a personal interview to discuss further my qualifications and to learn more about this opportunity. I will call you next week to see if a meeting can be arranged. If you need to reach me, please call me at 716-683-4388.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely yours,

*(Written signature)*  
Lisa Watson  
Enclosure

## Letter of Inquiry

125 Colony Manor  
Rochester, NY 14623  
[Date]

Mr. Timothy T. Mellon  
Director of College Recruiting  
Midwest Mercantile Company  
4500 Randolph Drive  
Chicago, IL 60601

Dear Mr. Mellon:

I read your company's description in Job Choices in Business and would like to inquire about employment opportunities in your internship program. I am interested in retail management and would like to relocate to the Chicago area after graduation.

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. Through research of the top retailers in Chicago, Midwest Mercantile emerged as having a strong market position, an excellent training program, and a reputation for excellent customer service. In short, you provide the kind of professional retail environment I seek.

My resume is enclosed for your consideration. My education and experience match the qualifications you seek in your interns, but they do not tell the whole story. I know from customer and supervisor feedback that I have the interpersonal skills and motivation needed to build a successful career in retail management.

I know how busy you must be during this time of year, but I would appreciate a few minutes of your time. I will call you during the week of January 24 to discuss employment possibilities. In the meantime, if you need to contact me, my number is 804/683-8843. Thank you very much for considering my request. I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely

*(Written signature)*  
Craig S. Watson  
Enclosure

## Thank You Letter

2150 Jefferson Road  
Rochester, NY 14628  
[Date]

Dr. Julia Edmonds, Director  
Technical Design Group  
Atlantic Engineering Systems, Inc.  
1220 Warwick Avenue  
Newport News, VA 23607

Dear Dr. Edmonds:

Thank you very much for interviewing me yesterday for the associate engineer co-op position. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about your research and design work.

My enthusiasm for the position and my interest in working for AES were strengthened as a result of the interview. I think my education and lab experiences fit nicely with the job requirements, and I'm sure that I could make a significant contribution to the firm.

I want to reiterate my strong interest in the position and in working with you and your staff. You provide the kind of opportunity I seek. Please call me at 804/685-5555 if I can provide you with any additional information. Again, thank you for the interview and your consideration.

Sincerely,

*(Written signature)*  
Frederick Bryan

## Networking/Informational Interview Letter

4960 Colony Manor Drive  
Rochester, NY 14623  
[Date]

Mr. Ralph Goldman  
Sales Manager  
United Fruit Company  
Industrial Park  
Rochester, NY 14620

Dear Mr. Goldman:

After reviewing major corporations in the Rochester area, I have learned that your company has a long history of success in selling to a wide variety of wholesale and retail clients. As a sophomore at RIT, I would like to learn more about the operation and management of large organizations. I am writing to ask for an appointment to talk with you about your role as Sales Manager at United Fruit.

Although I will be seeking co-op employment within a few months, I do not intend to ask you for a job. Rather, I want to gather information from you about the process by which you direct the organization. I believe that you can give me valuable insight about preparation for a career in management and perhaps a few principles, which you have learned from your experience with United Fruit. I am asking professionals in several major corporations to help me understand their businesses before I make direct application for employment.

I need only 15-20 minutes of your time to accomplish my objectives because I have prepared the questions I wish to ask you. I will contact you later this week to arrange for an appointment. If you would like to reach me, my phone number is 716-245-1718; my e-mail is jxx@rit.edu. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*(Signature)*  
Jay Brown