

Professional Letter Guide

Northland College Career Education Center

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Professional Letter Guide

Cover/Application Letter

This type of letter is used to apply for specific openings and accompanies your resume.

It gives you an opportunity to introduce yourself to the organization and provides a link between the position, your skills, strengths, and experience. Remember that your cover letter, like your resume, plays a vital role in forming that important first impression.


- Inform the hiring official why he or she is receiving the resume (referral). 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.
- Provide relevant information about your qualifications without repeating your resume verbatim. Instead, highlight the value of your experiences, education, or professional strengths.
- Relate specific skills you possess that are directly applicable to the open position.
- **Emphasize what you can do for the employer and how you can provide an immediate impact to the organization; rather, than how you will personally benefit from being hired for the 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.



For more information:

my.northland.edu/careers

 Northland College Career Education Center

 Northland College Alumni and Student Network

Basic Cover/Application Letter Principles

- Never send a resume without a cover letter.
- Remain focused; limit yourself to three or four paragraphs never exceeding one page.
- Identify at least one aspect about yourself that makes you a standout candidate and a strong match.
- Be confident/use confident phrases.
- Have one or more excellent proofreaders review your letter to make sure it reads smoothly and is free of errors.
- Use spell check and see the Career Education Center, or a writing tutor for help.
- Always type your letters using a professional-looking font that is consistent with your resume.
- Use a business letter format: include today’s date and then triple space with the name/address of contact and organization; double space and include a formal salutation such as “Dear Dr. Green;” double space and begin paragraph one. Single space within paragraphs with NO indentions, and double space between paragraphs (see Cover Letter Structure below).
- Always use a formal salutation (eg: Ms. Greene) and in the absence of a specific name, utilize “Dear Human Resource Director” or “Dear Search Committee members;” never use a salutation of “To Whom it May Concern.”
- Print your letter on quality paper that matches your resume. If required to submit electronically be sure to label the file with “your name-Cover Letter”
- Place a greater emphasis on the word “you” when possible, instead of beginning all sentences with the word “I”.
- Divide text into several paragraphs when necessary to keep paragraphs short; however, keep your cover letter to one page in length.
- Provide specific examples to illustrate how your qualifications meet the needs of the organization.

Cover Letter Structure

Paragraph 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State why you are writing. Come right to the point in the first sentence and include the name of the position for which you are applying. • Mention how you learned about the position (name of person who referred you or website you found the job posted). • Express your enthusiasm for the position or organization, in no more than one sentence.
Paragraph 2 (or 2 & 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefly discuss your qualifications, experience, education and strengths that make you a great candidate for this position. • Provide specific example(s) of why you are the best candidate for the job and how you can help the organization to flourish. Provide specific experiences you have had will help you in this position. If possible, try to cover all of the general requirements that the organization is seeking.
Paragraph 3 (or 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request the next step: mention that you look forward to an interview, inform the employer that you will be calling within a specific timeframe to follow up. • Thank the employer for considering your application.
Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skip a space, then type “Sincerely” (or similar closing); skip four spaces, then type your name. • Sign the letter above your typed name using blue or black ink. • Double space and include the word enclosures below you. This will reference the reader to your enclosed resume and references.

Thank You Note & Letter

A thank you note or letter sent following an interview or informational interview is not only good manners, it is essential. Letters serve as a reminder, and can also be considered marketing tools.

A thank you letter is a perfect opportunity to expand upon related skills/experience that you may have forgotten to highlight during the interview, and leaves the interviewers with a favorable impression. Emails are acceptable, but a personalized thank you note is ALWAYS preferable.

- Make sure it is sent within 48 hours of your interview and keep it to two or three short paragraphs.
- A short statement about your qualifications and continued interest in the position should be added.
- In case of a panel interview, be sure to get the correct spelling of the individual(s) who conducted the interview and send a personalized thank you letter to each of them.
- Handwritten thank you notes are acceptable as long as it is on professional card stock.
- Submit a typed letter on resume paper if you have handwriting that is difficult to read or if that is your preference.



Letter of Interest/Inquiry

Letters of interest are sent to organizations to investigate possible vacancies and informational interview contacts. State your reason for the inquiry in your letter. How did you learn 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 a cover/application letter. Provide examples of your qualifications to persuade the internship supervisor/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 open 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 5-7 business days before you contact them.



Professional Email Etiquette

Professional email is very different from casual email or instant messenger. As email becomes increasingly popular in the job application process, you need to take time to think through the content of your email and the message you might be sending to prospective employers. Here are some considerations:

Mind Your Manners: Think of the basic rules you have learned, like saying please and thank you. Address people you do not know as Mr., Ms., or Dr., only address someone by first name if they imply it is okay to do so.

- In the subject line, make it obvious why you are writing: "Application for XYZ position."
- Make sure you change the contact name and content according to the individual/organization to whom you are sending the message.
- If you are responding to an email, include the original message in the reply, so the receiver can place your email into the correct context. Also, respond within two business days.
- Scan your resume for viruses before you attach it to your email.
- Name your document "your name, resume." Employers receive hundreds of resumes via email. If you follow-up by asking recruiters if they received your email, they will not have to look through 300 attachments called "resume."

Watch Your Tone: It is very difficult to express tone in writing. You want to come across as respectful, friendly, and professional. You do not want to sound curt or demanding.

- Never use all capital letters. Employers may think that you are screaming, it can also be difficult to read.
- Do not assume that if an employer is informal that you should be.

Be Concise: Get to the point of your email as quickly as possible, but do not leave out important details that will help your recipient answer your query.

Be Professional: This means, stay away from abbreviations and do not use emoticons (smiley faces). Also, make sure the email address you use for business communication is *professional*. You can utilize your Northland email account for this purpose.

Use Correct Spelling and Proper Grammar: Do not just use spell check, as it will not catch words that are spelled correctly but are misused within the context of the sentence. Have someone else proofread your message before you send it. It may be easier to find errors if you print and review your e-mail.

Wait to Fill in the "TO" Email Address: This will keep you from accidentally sending an email prematurely. It is easy to accidentally click the send icon, when you really meant to click on the attachment icon.

