Cover Letters and Other Job Search Correspondence

In addition to your resume, two other forms of business correspondence are necessary during your job search: cover letters and thank you notes.

✓ **Cover letters** serve to introduce you to a potential employer. Take this opportunity to state your specific interest in a particular firm or organization and to highlight aspects of your background which make you the best candidate for the job. This is your chance to direct the employer's attention to your specific skills and abilities and to encourage a thorough reading of your resume. A well written cover letter can result in a phone call for a personal interview.

✓ **Thank you notes** are not only a matter of protocol and politeness, but also an opportunity to reiterate your interest in the job. It is a second opportunity to highlight how you could contribute to the firm and specific ways you would be of benefit to them. Send thank you notes within a few days of your interview, via the postal service or email.

Some Basic Guidelines for all of Your Written Correspondence

- **Personalize each letter** as much as possible. Never send out a form letter. It can be easier to prepare a template and then customize from there.
- **Keep the letter brief and to the point**, preferably three paragraphs. Remember that the reader might just want to scan for important points.
- **Address letters to individual people by name** whenever possible (ensuring you have the correct spelling). Take the time to call and find out the full name and title of the appropriate person. Avoid "Dear Hiring Manager" or "To Whom It May Concern". If more than one person has interviewed you, write separate thank you letters to each person. Send thank you letters by postal mail or email.
- **Avoid too many sentences beginning with the word "I".** The focus should be on the firm or organization. What skills and experiences do you have that will be of value?
- **Communicate confidence and professionalism**. Any written correspondence serves as a reflection of you and your writing skills.
- **Keep copies of all your written correspondence** in an organized manner so that you can easily refer to them when an employer calls.

Please see the following examples of cover letters, job acceptance and declining letters to help you get started in drafting your own job search correspondence. Visit the Career Services Library in Gund 422 to review more samples in books such as:

- ***Winning Cover Letters*** by Robin Ryan
- ***Dynamic Cover Letters*** by Katharine and Randall Hansen, PhD
- ***Cover Letters that Knock 'em Dead*** by Martin Yate

➡ Bring your cover letter drafts to Career Services for feedback and fine tuning.
Please call 617-495-4296 or email career@gsd.harvard.edu to make an appointment.
We're glad to help!

Guidelines for a Cover Letter

Date

Company contact
Title
Firm name
Street address
City, State, Zip code

Dear Mr./Ms.:

First paragraph
In your initial paragraph, **state the reason for the letter**, the specific position or type of work for which you are applying and indicate from which resource (GSD Career Services, professor, alumnus/a) you learned of the opening. Refer the reader to the enclosed resume or application that summarizes your qualifications, training, experiences or whatever media you may be utilizing to present yourself.

Second paragraph
Indicate why you are interested in the position, the firm, the services they provide and, above all, **what you can do for the employer**. If you are a recent graduate, explain how your academic background makes you a qualified candidate for the position. If you had some practical work experience, point out the specific achievements or unique qualifications. Try not to repeat the same information the reader will find in the resume. Instead, highlight specific points related to that employer's needs.

Final paragraph
In the closing paragraph, indicate your desire for a personal interview and your flexibility as to the time and place. Repeat your phone number in the cover letter and offer in case your resume is separated. Finally, **close your letter with a statement or question that will encourage a response**. For example, state that you will be in the city where the firm is located on a certain date to set up an interview. You can also ask if they desire additional information or references. Repeat your phone number in the cover letter in case your resume is separated.

Sincerely yours,

Anna P. Student

[*Don't forget to sign the letter and enclose your resume.*]

Sample Cover Letter (1)

These documents are to be used as examples only. It is recommended that you write a resume and cover letter in your own words as fit your specific circumstances.

April 12, 2009

Mr. Recruiter
Director of Design
ABC Architectural Firm
One Boston Street
Boston, MA 02110

Dear Mr. Recruiter:

I will be graduating in June from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design with a Post-Professional Master's Degree in Landscape Architecture. Your firm came to my attention through Architecture Magazine's profile of your most recent award for best low-income housing design. Enclosed please find a copy of my resume for your review.

Professionally, I have been involved as a project assistant for the planning and implementation of large-scale community developments throughout the Denver region. As a project manager I was responsible for several community projects including Green Valley Ranch and Blue Rock Ranch. While in Dubai, UAE, I worked on the design development for El Basra Hotel and Resort Community, as well as for several other resort projects.

Academically, I have focused on large-scale community projects as they relate to the issue of sustainability. Currently, my work is focused on the Stapleton Redevelopment Project with Mark Johnson of Civitas. In the studio, I have focused on how physical design can alter social behavior in differing neighborhood block patterns. I have also explored alternative mixed-use patterns that further advance sustainability on a social and economic level. In my previous semester, I was involved with a project concerning regional issues of the Upper, Galilee, with Professor Carl Steinitz. The environmental, economic, and cultural implications that a range of population and industrial growth trends could cause to the region were the object of study in his studio class.

During the week of May 26th I will be visiting San Diego for a number of interviews. If possible, it would be wonderful to meet with you to discuss job opportunities at your firm. I will call you during the week of May 1st to inquire about your interest and to set up a convenient meeting time. Please let me know if you would like to receive additional work samples prior to my stay in San Diego. I can be reached at (617) 555-yyyy or at me@gsd.harvard.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Hannah P. Student

Sample Cover Letter (2)

March 1, 2009

William H. Roberts
Wallace, Roberts & Todd
260 South Broad Street, 8th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Mr. Roberts:

Michael Van Valkenburgh is a critic for one of my landscape studios at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Through him, I learned that you are seeking a landscape designer with experience and interest in urban design. I would very much like to be considered for this position. While at the GSD, I have taken the opportunity to study some of your projects in greater detail. WRT's high standards in the design of environmentally-sensitive projects that define and create our world are very impressive and inspire my deep respect.

Enclosed you will find my resume and design sheets for your review. As you will see, after graduating from Carnegie-Mellon in May of 2004, I spent one year as an intern at the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation in Boston where I drew plans and perspective illustrations. My career at the GSD has provided outstanding training in the large-scale planning of urban settings and has provided an integrative approach to design as well. My capabilities with CAD design include 3D Studio Max, AutoCAD and FormZ. Studio work has included a corporate-sponsored regional plan in the Upper Galilee in Israel with Carl Steinitz and the Jersey City waterfront development proposal with Art Wrubell.

I look forward to the opportunity of meeting with you in person to review my portfolio and discuss how my skills and experiences would be of interest your firm. During the week of March 20-25, I will be in Philadelphia. I will telephone you to see if we might arrange for a meeting during that time. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any additional information. I can be reached at 617-495-xxxx.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Harvey J. Student

Sample Thank You Letter

March 1, 2009

William H. Roberts
Wallace, Roberts & Todd
260 South Broad Street, 8th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Mr. Roberts:

Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me yesterday to discuss your opening for the position of landscape designer. Our meeting confirmed both my interest in your firm and my impression of WRT's commitment to high standards and quality design.

Your explanation about the office culture and management was particularly helpful. I am excited about the firm’s commitment to an interdisciplinary approach. My diverse experience working in teams at the GSD while interning at the Olmsted Center have provided me with a solid foundation for this type of work environment. I am confident that I could easily meet your expectations regarding new employees and look forward to becoming a productive member of your team.

It was a pleasure interviewing with you. I look forward to hearing from you soon. Please contact me if there is any additional information you may need. I can be reached at 617-495-xxxx.

Sincerely,

Jacob J. Student

Sample Acceptance Letter

May 12, 2009

Ms. Jane Smith
SOM
14 Wall Street, 25th Floor
New York, NY 10005

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am very pleased to accept your offer of a position as an Intern Architect at the annual salary of $xx,000. I am very impressed with everyone I met during the interview process and I look forward to joining your staff.

As we discussed, I will report for work on August 1st. During the next month, I will complete my move to New York City and I hope to have some time to join my family for a vacation on the Cape. If you need to contact me prior to August 1st, please contact me at (508) 222-xxxx.

Thank you for all of your effort to make the interviewing process such a pleasant experience. I am very excited to have the opportunity to become a part of SOM.

Sincerely yours,

Jane M. Student

Sample Declining Letter

June 27, 2009

Mr. John Fulton
Gensler
1 Rockefeller Plaza, Suite 500
New York, NY 10020

Dear Mr. Fulton:

I was pleased that I was able to reach you by telephone this morning. Although I have declined your job offer, I am grateful that you understand my decision and honored by the thought that I will always be welcome at Gensler.

Everyone that I met at your firm was wonderful, which made this decision a very difficult one. As I stated on the phone, I have accepted a position as an Intern Architect with SOM in New York.

I want to thank you again for all your help and support during my job search.

Best regards,

Jared T. Student

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