

Letters serve many purposes in the career management process.

People write networking letters seeking information from colleagues, friends, graduate school faculty, etc. Letters often accompany resumes and job applications. Thank you letters are sent to interviewers following the interview. Candidates also write letters to withdraw from application processes when they have determined the position is no longer of interest or when they have accepted another position.

Letters must be personalized.

Letters should be addressed to the specific person who will read it.

Networking and cover letters follow the same format.

1. In the first paragraph, letters should specify the purpose for writing (to seek information, to apply for a position, to thank the interviewer, to withdraw an application, etc.).
2. The second paragraph should describe what you know about the person (if you are writing for information) or the organization (if you are writing to apply for a position). Include in this paragraph things that you think are important about the person or about the position. What has the person accomplished? What is the department known for? What kinds of skills or experiences will they be interested in cultivating for their organization?
3. A third paragraph should describe what you have (skills, accomplishments, experiences) that make the person want to talk to you further. Be specific, clear, and direct. Highlight the skills you have that match the interest of the person or the focus of the position. Focus on what you bring to the employer, not on the experience you are hoping to get. Provide 3-5 brief examples.
4. A final paragraph includes an action step that you will take to follow up on the letter. Avoid using language that implies the reader will take responsibility for further action ("I hope to hear from you soon). If you specify an action step, you can take the step and ensure that the follow up actually happens ("I will contact you next week to follow up on my request").

Communicate in writing when you wish to withdraw from an application process.

Include in your letter your decision to withdraw, your reason for withdrawal and express appreciation for the work of those involved in the application process. Include good things that you will remember about the organization or the application process and wish the reader continued success.

Craft clear and concise paragraphs.

Vary the sentence structure of your letter so sentences do not include excessive use of the word "I." Use active verbs. Emphasize accomplishments. Tie your experiences back to what the reader will be most interested to read. Avoid superlative phrases i.e. "extremely excited" or "highly motivated."

Your letter should be one page in length.

Grammatical and spelling errors must be nonexistent. Solicit feedback from multiple sources.

Have your letters reviewed by a variety of people including, career center professionals, employers in the functional area of interest to you, and by friends and family. Implement the advice that makes the most sense for the information you are trying to communicate. Remember you are the expert on your letters; make sure they reflect who you are!

See reverse for letter samples