



**Northeastern University**

**GUIDELINES FOR WRITING SUCCESSFUL  
COVER LETTERS  
AND  
THANK YOU NOTES**

**FALL 2009  
SPRING 2010**

# WRITING A SUCCESSFUL COVER LETTER

## Part 1 of 2

### *Why Write a Cover Letter:*

- It adds a personal “voice” and passion to the information outlined in your resume.
- It provides an opportunity to “flesh out” the information in your resume.
- It may be required by the employer (e.g., if applying for an open position).
- For unsolicited resumes, a cover letter should always be included.

### *General Guidelines:*

- Your Cover Letter should stand “on its own”. It should “sell” you even without your resume.
- Do not “mass-produce” a cover letter. Each cover letter should be tailored to the organization for which it is intended.
- Be concise – Do not exceed one page.
- Avoid beginning paragraphs with “I”. It is not about “you” – it is about getting an interview.
- Use a business letter format.
- Address the letter to a specific individual. Include the individual’s title and professional degrees. [Using “Dear Sir/Madam” is acceptable but only as a last resort.]
- Salutation: “Dear Dr. Brown” or “Dear Mr./Ms. Brown”.
- Closing: You cannot go wrong with “Sincerely”.
- Sign your name in blue ink, if possible (Alternative – black ink).
- Make sure you use Spell Check but then go back and reread each word. Check your punctuation and use of grammar.
- Print the letter on the same stationery as your resume. Use the same heading as your resume.
- Use a business envelope (#10). TYPE both your return address and the employer address.

### *Organization of the Cover Letter*

- Paragraph 1: Purpose of the letter  
This paragraph should be no more than a few lines. Answer the question “why are you contacting this employer?”
- Paragraph 2: History  
In this paragraph, you may provide a brief history of your educational status and future career goals and how this opportunity may tie in.
- Paragraph 3: Your qualifications  
In this paragraph, you should answer the question “why should this employer hire you?”
- Paragraph 4: Closing  
If applying for an open position, restate your interest. Thank the employer for his/her consideration. Include contact information, that you look forward to hearing from her/him, that your resume is attached.

**JUDITH JONES**  
35 Carrot Road  
Boston MA 02115  
617-555-5555  
a.jones@neu.edu

Month DD, YYYY

Richard M. Smith, M.D., Ph.D.  
Director, XXXX Research Center  
Brigham and Women's Hospital  
44 Binney Street  
Boston, MA 02115

Dear Dr. Smith:

As an undergraduate at Northeastern University and as a participant in its Cooperative Education Program, I am writing to see if there is an opportunity to become involved in your research. I read your most recent paper in the *Journal of Biomedical Research* and I am very interested in the exciting work in which you are involved.

My long term goal is to become a physician and pursue a career in infectious disease and to contribute to the body of knowledge that translates research into effective therapeutic application. I chose, as my major, Behavioral Neuroscience, an interdisciplinary program in which students are required to complete courses offered through the biology and psychology departments at NU. This major combines a rigorous course of study in biology with a solid background in understanding human behavior, both of which will contribute to my potential success as a physician.

Although I am seeking my first practical research experience, my academic preparation (GPA: 3.5) includes a solid foundation: two semesters of organic chemistry, genetics and molecular biology, and microbiology. All courses have included classroom lab experiences. In addition, I have strong organizational skills and computer skills (particularly in Excel and PowerPoint). Because of NU's commitment to experiential learning, I am available to work on a full-time basis for six months beginning in MONTH YYYY and, perhaps, part-time after I return to classes in MONTH YYYY.

In closing, thank you very much for your consideration. My resume is enclosed, for your review. I may be reached by telephone (617-555-5555) or by e-mail (j.jones@neu.edu).

I do look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

*Judith Jones*

Judith Jones

Enclosure

## WRITING A SUCCESSFUL COVER LETTER Part 2 of 2

*When sending a Cover Letter via E-Mail:*

- To Prepare:
  - Combine your cover letter and resume into one document – Page 1 should be your cover letter and page 2 should be your resume.
  - **Convert the format to pdf.**
- To Send:
  - Copy and paste the first paragraph from your cover letter into the body of your e-mail.

As an undergraduate at Northeastern University and as a participant in its Cooperative Education Program, I am writing to see if there is an opportunity to become involved in your research. I read your most recent paper in the *Journal of Biomedical Research* and I am very interested in the exciting work in which you are involved. [EXPLAIN WHY – one sentence.]

- Add a closing (similar to the closing in your cover letter).

Attached are my cover letter and my resume describing my professional interests and outlining my qualifications.

Thank you very much for your consideration. I do look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Judith Jones

- You may wish to include the following information as a P.S. to your cover letter and/or e-mail:

For additional information about the Northeastern Cooperative Education Program, please visit [www.northeastern.edu/lifescicoop](http://www.northeastern.edu/lifescicoop) or feel free to contact First Last, Coop Faculty Coordinator (617-373-5555 or [f.last@neu.edu](mailto:f.last@neu.edu)).

*Next Steps*

- Send original cover letter and resume by US MAIL. Save Copies.
- Make sure you have a professional greeting on your voice mail or answering machine.
- Follow up by telephone after two weeks without a response.

## WRITING THANK YOU NOTES

*Why Write a Thank You Note:*

**It demonstrates that you are courteous and professional.**

*General Guidelines:*

- Send your note within 24 hours of your interview.
- Although handwritten/typed notes sent by US mail are, by tradition, the “gold standard” for many employers, e-mail thank you notes are becoming much more accepted as professional. Use your own judgment in deciding which format to use.
- If you type your thank you note and send by US mail, use the business format and the heading you used for your resume.
- If you were interviewed by more than one individual, you should send separate notes to each. However, if there is a primary contact with whom you have been working, one thank you note may be sufficient. Use your own judgment.
- Include information in your note that demonstrates you were paying attention during the interview – say something about the work or the project that you could not have learned from reviewing the website.

*Organization of the Thank You Note:*

- First paragraph: Thank the interviewer for the opportunity to learn more about the position and the organization. Add some information that may remind the interviewer of who you are (e.g., did you talk about sports? About Hackensack NJ? About the weather?)
- Second paragraph:
  - If you still wish to be considered for the position, reinforce your qualifications, explain briefly why you are the right candidate for this position.
  - If you DO NOT wish to be considered further (i.e., you would not accept an offer of employment), please tell the employer. It is professional to do so at this point. [If the employer was impressed and you are the lead candidate, please save the employer the time it takes to check out your references and to discuss your candidacy with others.]
- Third Paragraph:
  - Closing – Thank you again. If you are interested in hearing back, say so. Refer to any follow up instructions you may have discussed at the interview.
  - Include your telephone number.

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Month DD, YYYY

Richard M. Smith, M.D., Ph.D.  
Director, XXXX Research Center  
Brigham and Women's Hospital  
44 Binney Street  
Boston, MA 02115

Dear Dr. Smith:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to meet with you and Dr. Johnson yesterday morning. The Coop position of Research Assistant in the clinical study that you are directing is still very interesting to me now that I know even more about the position. As we discussed, if you should decide to offer me this position, I am available to begin working at the XXXX Research Center as early as May 1<sup>st</sup>.

The professional/volunteer experiences that I have had, as well as the academic classes that I have completed (psychobiology, genetics and molecular biology, and biochemistry) would be a great match for the background and experience you are seeking. (The work that you are doing to further delineate the chemical pathway of insulin metabolism is particularly interesting.)

Thank you, again, for meeting with me. It was nice to meet your staff, including Dr. Johnson (whom I will thank separately for the company "tour" that he provided). I do look forward to hearing back from you within the next few weeks. Please feel free to contact me by e-mail or by phone if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

*Judith Jones*

Judith Jones