

Guidelines

Preparing a Scannable Résumé

Follow these seven suggestions to make sure your résumé will scan correctly.

- ▶ **Use a good-quality laser printer.** The better the resolution, the better the scanner will work.
- ▶ **Use white paper.** Even a slight tint to the paper can increase the chances that the scanner will misinterpret a character.
- ▶ **Do not fold the résumé.** The fold line can confuse the scanner.
- ▶ **Use a simple sans-serif typeface.** Scanners can easily interpret large, open typefaces such as Arial.
- ▶ **Use a single-column format.** A double-column text will scan inaccurately. Left-align everything.
- ▶ **Use wide margins.** Instead of an 80-character width, set your software for 65. This way, regardless of the equipment the reader is using, the lines will break as you intend them.
- ▶ **Use the space bar instead of the tab key.** Tabs will be displayed according to the settings on the reader's equipment, not the settings on yours. Therefore, use the space bar to move text horizontally.

WRITING JOB-APPLICATION LETTERS

Whether you send a formal letter in the mail or upload a statement to a Web site, you will need to write a job-application letter. The letter is crucial not only because it enables you to argue that you should be considered for a position but also because it shows your writing skills. Make your letter appeal as directly and specifically as possible to a particular person, and make sure it shows your best writing.

Selectivity and Development

The keys to a good letter are selectivity and development. *Select* two or three points of greatest interest to the potential employer and *develop* them into paragraphs. Emphasize results, such as improved productivity or quality or decreased costs. If one of your previous part-time positions called for skills that the employer is looking for, write a substantial paragraph about that position, even though the résumé devotes only a few lines to it.

 **In This Book**

For more about formatting letters, see Ch. 14, p. 376.

For most candidates, a job-application letter should fill the better part of a page. For more-experienced candidates, it might fill up to two pages. Regardless, if you write at length on a minor point, you become boring and appear to have poor judgment. Employers seek candidates who can say a lot in a small space.

Elements of the Job-Application Letter

The inside address—the name, title, organization, and address of the recipient—is important because you want to be sure your materials get to the right person. And you don't want to offend that person with a misspelling or an incorrect title. If you are uncertain about any of the information—the reader's name, for example, might have an unusual spelling—verify it by researching the organization on the Internet or by phoning.

When you do not know who should receive the letter, phone the company to find out who manages the department. If you are unsure of the appropriate department or division to write to, address the letter to a high-level executive, such as the president. The letter will get to the right person. Also, because the application includes both a letter and a résumé, use an enclosure notation.

The four-paragraph example discussed here is only a basic model, consisting of an introductory paragraph, two body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. At a minimum, your letter should include these four paragraphs, but there is no reason it cannot have five or six.

Plan the letter carefully. Draft it and then revise it. Let it sit for a while, then revise it again, and edit and proofread. Spend as much time on it as you can.

The Introductory Paragraph The introductory paragraph has four specific functions:

- *It identifies your source of information.* In an unsolicited application, all you can do is ask if a position is available. For a solicited application, however, state how you heard about the position.
- *It identifies the position you are interested in.* Often, the organization you are applying to is advertising several positions; if you omit the title of the position you are interested in, your reader might not know which one you seek.
- *It states that you wish to be considered for the position.* Although the context makes your wish obvious, you should mention it because the letter would be awkward without it.
- *It forecasts the rest of the letter.* Choose a few phrases that forecast the body of the letter so that the letter flows smoothly. For example, if you use the phrase “retail experience” in the opening paragraph, you are preparing your reader for the discussion of your retail experience later in the letter.

 **In This Book**

For more about developing paragraphs, see Ch. 9, p. 211.

These four points need not appear in any particular order, nor does each need to be covered in a single sentence. The following sample paragraphs demonstrate different ways of providing the necessary information:

Response to a Job Ad

I am writing in response to your notice in the online May 13 *New York Times*. I would like to be considered for the position in system programming. I hope you find that my studies in computer science at Eastern University, along with my programming experience at Airborne Instruments, qualify me for the position.

Note that the writer identifies the date of the ad, the name of the publication, and the name of the position. Then, she forecasts the main points she will make in the body of the letter.

Unsolicited Job Application

My academic training in hotel management and my experience with Sheraton International have given me a solid background in the hotel industry. Would you please consider me for any management trainee position that might be available?

The writer politely requests that the reader consider his application.

Unsolicited Personal Contact

Mr. Howard Alcott of your Research and Development Department suggested that I write to you. He thinks that my organic chemistry degree and my practical experience with Brown Laboratories might be of value to XYZ Corporation. Do you have an entry-level position in organic chemistry for which I might be considered?

Notice the tone in all three of these samples: quiet self-confidence. Don't oversell yourself ("I am the candidate you have been hoping for") or undersell yourself ("I don't know that much about computers, but I am willing to learn").

The Education Paragraph For most students, the education paragraph should come before the employment paragraph because the education paragraph will be stronger. However, if your employment experience is stronger, present it first.

In writing your education paragraph, take your cue from the job ad (if you are responding to one). What aspect of your education most directly fits the job requirements? If the ad stresses versatility, you might structure your paragraph around the range and diversity of your courses. Also, you might discuss course work in a subject related to your major, such as business or communication skills. Extracurricular activities are often very valuable; if you were an officer in a student organization, you could discuss the activities and programs that you coordinated. Perhaps the most popular strategy for developing the education paragraph is to discuss skills and knowledge gained from advanced course work in your major field.

Example About a Project Based on a Course Assignment

At Eastern University, I have taken a wide range of science courses, but my most advanced work has been in chemistry. In one laboratory course, I developed a new aseptic brewing technique that lowered the risk of infection by more than 40 percent. This new technique was the subject of an article in the *Eastern Science Digest*. Representatives from three national breweries have visited our laboratory to discuss the technique with me.

Note that the writer develops one idea, presenting enough information about it to interest the reader. Paragraphs that merely list a number of courses that the writer has taken are ineffective: everyone takes courses.

The writer elaborates on a field other than his major. Note how he develops an idea based on a detail in the job ad. This strategy shows that he studied the ad carefully and wrote a custom letter. This initiative makes this the sort of candidate most hiring officials would like to interview.

The writer develops an effective paragraph about a small aspect of her credentials. She sounds like a focused, intelligent person who wants to do some good.

The writer makes the point that he is being promoted within the company because of his good work. Notice his reference to the specialized software and the size of the project.

The writer starts by suggesting that he is hardworking. Notice that he doesn't say it explicitly; rather, he provides evidence to lead the reader to that conclusion.

Another theme in this paragraph is that the writer knows how to work with people effectively. Again, he doesn't say it; he implies it.

Example About Writing a Document

To broaden my education at Southern University, I took eight business courses in addition to my requirements for a degree in civil engineering. Because your ad mentions that the position will require substantial client contact, I believe that my work in marketing, in particular, would be of special value. In an advanced marketing seminar, I used InDesign to produce a 20-page sales brochure describing the various kinds of building structures for sale by Oppenheimer Properties to industrial customers in our section of the city. That brochure is now being used at Oppenheimer, where I am an intern.

Example About a Competition

The most rewarding part of my education at Western University occurred outside the classroom. My entry in a fashion-design competition sponsored by the university won second place. More important, through the competition I met the chief psychologist at Western Regional Hospital, who invited me to design clothing for people with disabilities. I have since completed six different outfits, which are now being tested at the hospital. I hope to be able to pursue this interest once I start work.

An additional point: if you haven't already specified your major and your college or university in the introductory paragraph, be sure to do so here.

The Employment Paragraph Like the education paragraph, the employment paragraph should begin with a topic sentence and develop a single idea. That idea might be that you have a broad background or that one job in particular has given you special skills that make you especially well suited for the available job.

Example About Advancement on the Job

For the past three summers and part-time during the academic year, I have worked for Redego, Inc., a firm that specializes in designing and planning industrial complexes. I began as an assistant in the drafting room. By the second summer, I was accompanying a civil engineer on field inspections. Most recently, I have used AutoCAD to assist an engineer in designing and drafting the main structural supports for a 15-acre, \$30 million chemical facility.

Example About Experience Working Collaboratively

Although I have worked every summer since I was 15, my most recent position, as a technical editor, was the most rewarding. I was chosen by Digital Systems, Inc., from among 30 candidates because of my dual background in computer science and writing. My job was to coordinate the editing of computer manuals. Our copy editors, most of whom were not trained in computer science, needed someone to help verify the technical accuracy of their revisions. When I was unable to answer their questions, I was responsible for interviewing our systems analysts to find the correct answers and to make sure the computer novice could follow them. This position gave me a good understanding of the process of creating operating manuals.

Example Based on Project-based Experience

I have worked in merchandising for three years as a part-time and summer salesperson in men's fashions and accessories. I have had experience running inventory-control software and helped one company switch from a manual to an online system. Most recently, I assisted in clearing \$200,000 in closeout men's fashions: I coordinated a campaign to sell half of the merchandise at cost and was able to convince the manufacturer's representative to accept the other half for full credit. For this project, I received a certificate of appreciation from the company president.

Although you will discuss your education and experience in separate paragraphs, try to link these two halves of your background. If an academic course led to an interest that you were able to pursue in a job, make that point in the transition from one paragraph to the other. Similarly, if a job experience helped shape your academic career, tell the reader about it.

In this paragraph, the writer suggests that she has technical and interpersonal skills and that her company thought she did an excellent job on a project she coordinated.

The theme of all these samples is that an effective paragraph has a sharp focus and specific evidence and that it clearly suggests the writer's qualifications.

The Concluding Paragraph The purpose of the concluding paragraph is to motivate the reader to invite you for an interview. In the preceding paragraphs, you provided the information that you hope has convinced the reader to give you another look. In the last paragraph, you want to make it easy for him or her to do so. The concluding paragraph contains three main elements:

- *A reference to your résumé.* If you have not yet referred to it, do so now.
- *A polite but confident request for an interview.* Use the phrase *at your convenience*. Don't make the request sound as if you're asking a personal favor.
- *Your phone number and e-mail address.* State the time of day you can be reached. Adding an e-mail address gives the employer one more way to get in touch with you.

Example 1

The enclosed résumé provides more information about my education and experience. Could we meet at your convenience to discuss the skills and experience I could bring to Pentamax? You can leave a message for me anytime at (303) 555-5957 or cfilli@claus.cmu.edu.

Example 2

More information about my education and experience is included on the enclosed résumé, but I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you at your convenience to discuss my application. You can reach me after noon on Tuesdays and Thursdays at (212) 555-4527 or anytime at rforster@psu.edu.

All job letters end with a paragraph that urges the reader to contact the writer and provides the contact information that makes it easy to do so.

The examples of effective job-application letters in Figures 15.9 and 15.10 on pages 430–31 correspond to the résumés in Figures 15.5 and 15.6.

Figure 15.9 Job-Application Letter

Notice that the writer's own name does not appear at the top of his letter.

In the inside address, he uses the reader's courtesy title, "Mr."

The writer points out that he has taken two graduate courses. Notice that he discusses his senior design project, which makes him look more like an engineer solving a problem than a student taking a course.

Notice the use of "In addition" to begin the third sentence. This phrase breaks up the "I" openings of several sentences.

An enclosure notation refers to his résumé.

3109 Vista Street
Philadelphia, PA 19136

January 20, 2012

Mr. Stephen Spencer, Director of Personnel
Department 411
Boeing Naval Systems
103 Industrial Drive
Wilmington, DE 20093

Dear Mr. Spencer:

I am writing in response to your advertisement in the January 16 *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Would you please consider me for the position in Signal Processing? I believe that my academic training in electrical engineering at Drexel University, along with my experience with the RCA Advanced Technology Laboratory, would qualify me for the position.

My education at Drexel has given me a strong background in computer hardware and system design. I have concentrated on digital and computer applications, developing and designing computer and signal-processing hardware in two graduate-level engineering courses. For my senior design project, I am working with four other undergraduates in using OO programming techniques to enhance the path-planning software for an infrared night-vision robotics application.

While working at the RCA Advanced Technology Laboratory, I was able to apply my computer experience to the field of DSP. I designed ultra-large-scale integrated circuits using VERILOG and VHDL hardware description languages. In addition, I assisted a senior engineer in CMOS IC layout, modeling, parasitic capacitance extraction, and PSPICE simulation operations.

The enclosed résumé provides an overview of my education and experience. Could I meet with you at your convenience to discuss my qualifications for this position? Please leave a message anytime at (215) 555-3880 or e-mail me at crodrig@dragon.du.edu.

Yours truly,



Carlos Rodriguez

Enclosure (1)

In This Book

Many of the job boards listed on page 403 include samples of application letters.

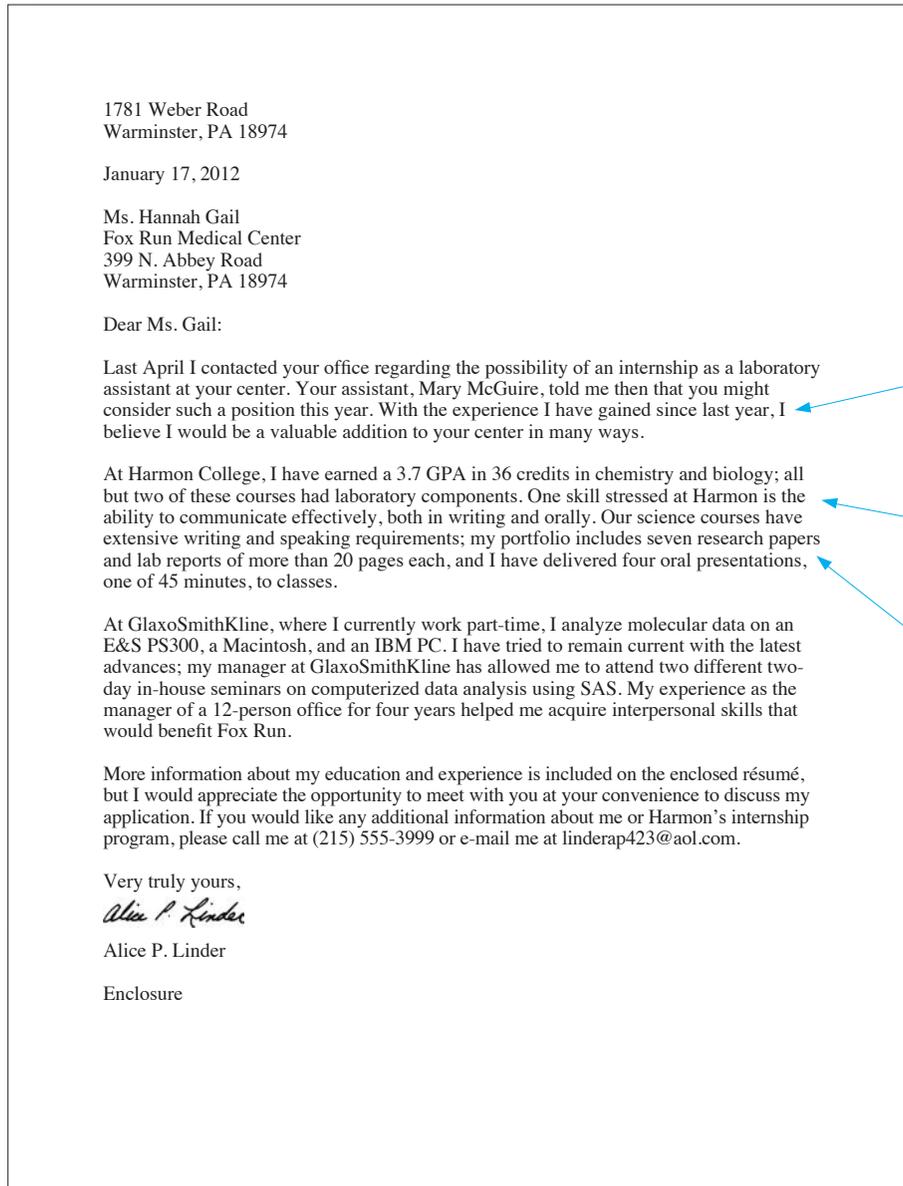


Figure 15.10
Job-Application Letter

The writer gracefully suggests that she would be an even better candidate this year than last year.

The writer is making two points: she is experienced in the lab, and she is an experienced communicator.

By mentioning her portfolio, she is suggesting that she would be happy to show the reader her documents. This statement is an example of understated self-confidence.

PREPARING FOR A JOB INTERVIEW

If your job-application letter is successful, you will be invited to a job interview, where both you and the organization can start to see whether you would be a good fit there.