

PROFESSIONAL WRITING GUIDE:

COVER LETTERS, NETWORKING COMMUNICATION, THANK YOU NOTES

TRINITY COLLEGE | CENTER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT



Table of Contents

Introduction to Professional Writing	p. 3
Cover Letters, Letters of Inquiry	p. 3
Cover Letter Content & Structure	p. 4
Letter of Inquiry Content & Structure	p. 5
Networking Communication	p. 6
LinkedIn Requests	p. 6
Informational Interview Requests	p. 6
Thank You Letters	p. 6

INTRODUCTION TO PROFESSIONAL WRITING

This guide covers how to develop strong written materials for internship searches, job searches, and networking communications. Written communication is often your first chance to make a positive impression. Following the guidelines below can help ensure you are putting your best foot forward in your search.

PROFESSIONAL WRITING GUIDELINES

- Proofread: All documents should be grammatically correct and error free
- Be concise, avoid repetition and unnecessary details
- Write in an active, not passive voice
- Keep tone positive, confident, and courteous
- Avoid jargon, abbreviations, and informal writing

WRITING RESOURCES AT TRINITY

- Attend the Career Studio to learn how to structure written communication in your search
- Schedule a document critique with a career coach in [Handshake](#)
- Work with the Writing Center to improve your writing skills

ONLINE RESOURCES

- Visit the [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#)

COVER LETTERS

Many applications require or encourage a cover letter. Cover letters give you an opportunity to express your enthusiasm for the role and company, and prove that you have the necessary skills and experience to do the job. While cover letters are not always required by the employer, if they are an option, we encourage writing one to emphasize your interest.

COVER LETTER GUIDELINES

- Tailor to a specific position; never submit a generic cover letter
- Follow traditional business letter formatting and structure – do not indent paragraphs
- Only one page in length – margins, font, and contact info to mirror résumé
- Research the position and company prior to writing the letter
- Address your letter to a specific person; when not possible – address to “Hiring Manager”
- Do not write “hello my name is” or “to whom it may concern”

LETTER OF INQUIRY

If you are interested in an employer that does not currently have a position posted, you can express your interest in the company by writing a letter of inquiry.

LETTER OF INQUIRY GUIDELINES

- While you can't tailor to a specific position, you can still emphasize what specific skills you have and what types of positions you would be qualified for or details on an internship you are proposing
- Follow traditional business letter formatting and structure – do not indent paragraphs
- Only one page in length – margins and font mirror résumé
- Research the company prior to writing the letter
- Address your letter to a specific person; when not possible – address to “Hiring Manager”
- Do not write “hello my name is” or “to whom it may concern”

COVER LETTER CONTENT & STRUCTURE

Your Address

City, State Zip

(Or use the letterhead from your résumé)

Date (January 1, XXXX)

Name of Employer Contact (or HR Director)

Contact's Title

Organization Name

Street Address

City, State Zip

Formatting Note:

- Do not use bullet points or indent paragraphs
- Single spaced

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. _____: (use last name)

INTRODUCTION PARAGRAPH:

- Introduce yourself and what you are applying for – include company name and position title
- How you learned of the position – include a connection at the company (with their permission)
- Why you are interested in the company/positon and how it relates to something you've done – don't give generic facts from their website or make broad statements
- Conclude the paragraph with a thesis statement on what you would bring to the organization – introducing the skills, knowledge, and/or experience that you will address in the next two paragraphs

BODY PARAGRAPHS:

- Show that you can do the job by providing specific examples of past work, internship, volunteer, leadership, or classroom experiences to illustrate that you have the top skills from the position description
- Choose 2-3 examples maximum – focus on depth over breadth
- Do not list everything on your résumé
- Limit to 1-2 paragraphs

CLOSING PARAGRAPH:

- Thank the employer for looking over your application materials, and reiterate your interest in the position and/or organization
- Express your willingness to follow up with more information if needed; provide your phone number and email address if you did not use letterhead from your résumé

Sincerely,

Signature

Your Name (Typed)

LETTERS OF INQUIRY CONTENT & STRUCTURE

Your Address

City, State Zip

(Or use the letterhead from your résumé)

Date (January 1, XXXX)

Name of Employer Contact (or HR Director)

Contact's Title

Organization Name

Street Address

City, State Zip

Formatting Note:

- Do not use bullet points or indent paragraphs
- Single spaced

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. _____: (use last name)

INTRODUCTION PARAGRAPH:

- Introduce yourself and why you are writing
- How you learned of the company – include a connection at the company (with their permission)
- Why you are interested in the company and how it relates to something you've done – don't give generic facts from their website or make broad statements
- Conclude the paragraph with a thesis statement on what you would bring to the organization– introducing the skills, knowledge, and/or experience that you will address in the next two paragraphs

BODY PARAGRAPHS:

- Show that you can do the job by providing specific examples of past work, internship, volunteer, leadership, or classroom experiences to illustrate that you have the top skills from the position description
- Choose 2-3 examples maximum – focus on depth over breadth
- Do not list everything on your résumé
- Limit to 1-2 paragraphs

CLOSING PARAGRAPH:

- Thank the employer for looking over your application materials, and reiterate your interest in the position and/or organization
- Express your willingness to follow up with more information if needed; provide your phone number and email address if you did not use letterhead from your résumé

Sincerely,

Signature

Your Name (Typed)

NETWORKING COMMUNICATION

When networking with career professionals, it is critical to send polished and concise messaging. The following advice can help you construct appropriate LinkedIn connection requests and requests for informational interviews. Learn more about using LinkedIn and conducting informational interviews in Career Development's **Networking Guide**.

LINKEDIN CONNECTION REQUEST

If you have never met:

- Include formal greeting and salutation – “Dear Ms. _____” and “Best Regards, _____”
- State what you have in common and that you’d appreciate connecting

If you have met before:

- Include formal greeting and salutation – “Dear Ms. _____” and “Best Regards, _____”
- Remind them of how you know each other – “It was great working with you last summer at ...”
- Ask if they are willing to connect

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW REQUEST

- Include formal greeting and salutation – “Dear Ms. _____” and “Best Regards, _____”
- Introduce who you are – Trinity student/alumnus, class year, major
- Explain how you found the person and what you have in common
- Be specific about what you are asking for – 20-30 minutes to learn more about their career path and advice for you as a current student
- Do not ask for a job or any other favors – you are asking for their time

THANK YOU LETTERS

Writing a thoughtful thank you note can give you an edge as a candidate and sets you apart as a polite and professional person. Writing thank you notes after an interview allows you to reiterate your interest in a position, emphasize your key strengths, and connect over something discussed in an interview. For informational interviews, a thank you note shows you value the other person’s time and hope to maintain future communication.

Thank you letters can be hand written and mailed (best for informational interviews) or sent by email if the employer is making a quick decision on a job or internship.

THANK YOU LETTER CONTENT

- Include formal greeting and salutation – “Dear Ms. _____” and “Sincerely, _____”
- Thank them for their time
- [After an interview] Reiterate your interest in a position, emphasize your key strengths, and connect over something discussed in the interview
- [After an informational interview] Summarize what you learned and an interesting insight from the conversation

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Keep your content short and to the point
- Send each person you interviewed with a tailored thank you note
- Send within 24 hours of interview or conversation