

# PROFESSIONAL CORRESPONDENCE IN THE JOB SEARCH

The number one skill valued by employers is the ability to communicate effectively. Throughout your job search, you have the opportunity to demonstrate your communication skills with a professional tone in each written or face-to-face interaction you have with potential employers.

Consider the types of correspondence you might write in the course of your job search:

- **Request for information**
- **Cover letter**
- **Follow-up letter**
- **Thank you note**
- **Acceptance/ Declining of a Job Offer**

This handout focuses on two types of letters you might write during the application process: the [Cover Letter](#) and the [Follow-up Letter](#).

## COVER LETTERS

The purpose of writing a cover letter is to get the employer to read your resume and invite you for an interview. Your goal is to show why you want to work for this organization and that your qualifications fit the employer's requirements for the position.

Essentially, your letter should answer the question, "Why should we call you for an interview for this position?"

### WHEN DO YOU NEED A COVER LETTER?

Not all job or internship postings in Careers4Engineers require you to upload a cover letter. If a C4E job does not require a cover letter, you can still paste one into the Notes section of the application. However, you should write this type of letter anytime that you are submitting a job application on your own to a company or if you are writing to a faculty member asking to work in his or her lab.

### TIPS FOR CREATING A WINNING COVER LETTER

1. **Analyze the position description.** Before you start writing, pick out key phrases from the job description, especially the sections labeled Qualifications and Duties or Responsibilities. Highlight those keywords that match your experiences, skills and interests. Then think of 2-3 great examples from your resume that match those highlighted portions.
2. **Match, but don't reiterate, your resume.** This is one point many job seekers find tricky. You should never claim experience in your cover letter that isn't reflected on your resume. At the same time, your cover letter shouldn't simply restate your resume in prose.
3. **Personalize each letter by researching the organization.** Recruiters can tell when applicants use a form letter and simply change the name of the position and company. Those applicants rarely get an interview. Show your enthusiasm by researching the company beyond the job description so you can specifically address why you want to work there. For campus research positions, find out more about the faculty member's lab and publications. *This approach is much more effective than sending out hundreds of identical form letters.*
4. **Clearly describe ways you will contribute.** Describe your skills and experiences in the context of the company's needs, based on the job description and your research on the organization. How will you contribute to the success of the organization?

5. **Keep it short.** The ideal cover letter is about half a page long, and does not exceed one page. A concise letter demonstrates that you are focused and have strong communication skills. Aim for two to four brief paragraphs.
6. **State the position.** Clearly state the job title in the first paragraph of the letter, preferably in the first sentence. The recruiter who reads your letter may be hiring for several positions. Don't just use the job title as the subject line of your e-mail to a recruiter.
7. **Don't mention how you are NOT qualified.** Even if you think the position is out of reach, your job is to convince the recruiter you are qualified. A confessional letter is not going to get you the interview. Keep the letter positive by focusing on your transferable skills and unique accomplishments. Leave out irrelevant information.
8. **Keep the tone and content professional.** Don't be a comedian, don't get too personal, and don't beg for the job.
9. **Proofread.** Using a spell check is not enough. Many recruiters will dismiss even the most qualified candidate if there is one typo in a cover letter or resume. Reread your letter two or three times, then give it to someone else who knows a thing or two about good writing. Even if your letter is free of typos, poor grammar also makes a bad impression.
10. **Read samples to get ideas on how to personalize your letters.** Read as many cover letters as possible and find ideas and wording that you like for your own letters. You can find cover letter and resume books in the Engineering Co-op Office and the Career Center Resource Room, located in 3100 Hornbake Library.

#### WRITING THE BODY OF THE COVER LETTER

After following our tips above, write the body of your letter.

**First paragraph (Introduction):** *Explain why you are writing and get the reader's attention.*

- Name the position and identify the position and how you became aware of it.
- Explain why you are interested in the organization and position. Show you've done some research.
- If someone such as a professor, former employer, or family member referred you to the employer, this is also the best place to mention that person's name and to point out that he or she suggested you write.
- In one or two sentences, summarize your strongest qualifications for the position.

**Second (and possibly third) paragraph:** *Give examples of your strongest qualifications for this position.*

- Refer to your resume as you show how your skills and experience match the position requirements.
- Provide one or two great examples of your related work, extra-curricular and academic experiences and accomplishments that are relevant to the position and/or potential employer.
- You may need a second paragraph for this purpose, but keep your letter to one page or less.

**Final paragraph:** *State what you will do next.*

- Reiterate your interest in the position and organization.
- Request an interview and indicate how and when you can be contacted.
- Thank the reader for his/her consideration.

*Never underestimate the power of correspondence in your job search. Your cover letter, in particular, is an important marketing tool which highlights your most attractive qualifications as a potential employee and, if well written, will lead the employer to your resume.*

# BUSINESS LETTER FORMAT

If you will be providing your cover letter as an attached .pdf, or submitting it on paper, you should use standard business letter format.

## 1. Your mailing address

- Some people use their resume header, which is also OK.

## 2. Date you are writing (U.S. format)

## 3. Employer Contact Information (usually hiring manager or recruiter)

- Salutation( Mr., Ms., Dr.) + First & Last Name
- Job title of the person you are writing
- Name of Company/ Organization
- Mailing Address of Company

## 4. Salutation

- Dear Ms./Mr./Dr. + Last Name

## 5. Body of letter

- Introduction
- Example paragraph(s)
- Final Paragraph

## 6. Closing and Signature

Note the spacing in the sample letters. Your margins should be 1 inch all around. Use an easy-to-read 10 – 12 point font.

## BUT WHAT IF...

### ***...I don't know the name of the addressee?***

First, check the position announcement or employer page in Careers4Engineers to look for a contact name and address. If you can't find a name, you can address your letter to "Hiring Manager."

### ***...I'm writing to a faculty member to request to work in her lab so I don't have a job description?***

You still want to tell your potential supervisor why she should hire you. Look at her CV online so you can be sure to describe the skills, experiences and interests you have that would allow you to make a contribution to her lab.

### ***... I can't fit everything on one page?***

Make sure you include only essential, relevant information in your letter. You don't have to give every detail of your resume. Be sure to leave some talking points for the interview.

### ***...I'm sending the letter in the body of an email?***

Consider attaching your cover letter and resume as a .pdf to the email, to demonstrate your comfort with business letter format. In the body of the email, you can paste the body of your cover letter. You may still include the employer contact information at the top. Starting with the salutation, the rest is the same as above. Your email signature should include your mailing address and relevant contact information. Make sure your subject line is specific, ideally including the position title, as in, "Application for Field Engineer Intern Position (#123451)."

123 State St., Apt 100  
College Park, MD 20740

August 14, 2014

Ms. Jane Doe  
Coordinator, Campus Recruiting  
ABC Manufacturing  
Street Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Ms. Doe:

Intro paragraph

Example Paragraph 1 (and 2, if needed)

Closing paragraph

Sincerely,

*(Handwritten signature if mailed)*

Your Name Typed

# COVER LETTER SAMPLES

## TECHNICAL INTERN NEEDED

Summer Intern Program Requirements:

- C++ Programming in UNIX and Windows platforms.
- Excellent communication and analytical skills due to the large amount of interaction with team members and customers regarding code-related issues.

Preferred: Experience with application design, coding and testing of new business initiatives. Analyzing and solving programming issues on assigned production and/or development systems. Java, J2EE, webMethods, Lotus Notes, Rational Tools, Sybase.

10017 Brookstone Drive  
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772

November 21, 2012

Mary Larson  
Freddie Mac  
8250 Jones Branch Drive, Mail Stop #A3E1  
McLean, VA 22102

Dear Ms. Larson:

I am writing to express my interest in the Technical Intern position at Freddie Mac as posted by the Engineering Co-op & Career Services Office at the University of Maryland. Freddie Mac's mission to provide low- to middle-income homeowners and renters with lower housing costs and better access to home financing is truly a valuable public service. I know that I would be an asset to your organization. In particular, the following characteristics and abilities may be of interest to you:

- **Programming.** As my resume indicates, I have completed courses in C/C++ and JAVA programming and have worked with platforms such as UNIX and Windows. In addition, as a Control Systems Intern, I assisted in the design and implementation of a control emergency shutdown and process visualization system with a team of 3 engineers. The project included extensive hardware design of digital and analog control boards and implementation of control algorithms, and programming in C/C++ and X86 Assembly.
- **Communication & Analytical Skills.** My experience from previous jobs and group projects has sharpened my communication skills and taught me valuable lessons in collaboration and initiation. In my most recent digital postal scale group project, I needed to take five opinions and establish a compromise that would satisfy the entire team. Our successful team effort gave us the honor of being one of the four groups to compete in a final design competition.

I am confident that my skills and qualifications will enable me to make a positive contribution to the summer intern program. Please feel free to call me if you have any questions (301)555-1234. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,  
*(Handwritten Signature Here)*  
Keisha Taylor

Mail application to:  
Mary Larson  
Freddie Mac  
8250 Jones Branch Drive  
Mail Stop #A3E1  
McLean, VA 22102

*Mailing or submitting your application by hand? Use business letter format for your letter. Keep font size 10-12 pt and margins to about 1".*

**Qualifications:** The specific skill requirements will be determined based on the available assignments, but all candidates must meet the following qualifications:

- Rising Junior or Senior in a 4-year ABET accredited undergraduate engineering program, OR Graduate student in an ABET accredited engineering program
- The following disciplines will be considered: chemical engineering, civil engineering, materials or metallurgical engineering, mechanical engineering
- High GPA (3.00 / 4.00 minimum)
- Have the right to work in the U.S. without restriction

In addition to the above qualifications, the candidate must demonstrate the following skills and interests:

- Problem-solving, analytical and interpersonal skills
- Written/verbal communication and presentation skills
- Ability to work in cross-functional teams to deliver concrete project deliverables in a timely manner
- Previous co-op or research experience in the area of interest is preferred

Choose a Resume to submit for this position.

RESUME:

If you would like to add an optional personal note to the employer, please enter it here. This field is optional.

NOTES:

*Applying through C4E but no cover letter is requested? You can paste your cover letter into the "Notes" section.*

Dear Dr. Chen,

I am writing to express my interest in applying for an internship with DuPont. I attended your DuPont information session at the University of Maryland, College Park and was later informed of this position through e-mail. As a chemical engineer, I hope to influence the outcome of important projects and see real world application of the concepts I have learned in my first two years of engineering classes.

Over the summer I participated in a renewable energy program based in Costa Rica. The program educated me about implementation and production of renewable energy sources and instilled in me a strong desire to make a global difference. I am highly driven to make a positive impact in the world by improving consumers' lives through ethical and environmentally sustainable means. DuPont's core values resonate strongly with me and I am particularly interested in your megatrends of Sustainable Food and Energy. I look forward to using the internship as a way to be a part of DuPont's pursuit of scientific advancement while upholding the company's core values. As an active learner, I would quickly adjust to the demands of a DuPont internship and I will maximize the opportunities presented to me through an established company. Overall I am a very committed person and will work hard on a project from start to finish, ensuring the best outcome. I am a dedicated member of the Engineers Without Borders chapter at the University of Maryland. I am collaborating on a project to design and implement a water sanitation system to support a population of several hundred in Sierra Leone. Through this project I have practiced effective researching techniques and made significant contributions in order to meet required deadlines to have a deliverable system by the summer of 2014. Through athletics, extra-curricular activities, and classes I have had enormous exposure to team dynamics and different forms of leadership.

I am confident that with my skills and qualifications, I will be able to positively contribute to DuPont's internship program. Please feel free to call me if you have any questions at (123)456-7890. Thank you for your time and consideration, I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,  
Marta Perez

## **ABC ENERGY ADVOCACY - TECHNICAL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM**

**Responsibilities:** Review data to identify trends and patterns across related data points. Assist colleagues to identify hotspots for renewable energy policy. Conduct analysis through Excel. Advise on the potential benefits/uses of automation to improve the efficiency of administrative support and program operations. Communicate with colleagues on the progress of project implementation at posts worldwide. Prepare clear, concise, and well-organized written materials under supervisory direction. Work with a software development team to improve existing programs based on suggestions from users.

**Skills Needed:** Strong quantitative and analytical skills. Ability to collect and analyze data; Knowledge of automated processes to improve the efficiency of administrative support and program operations; Excellent oral and written communication skills; International experience (particularly Asia) and interest in management issues a plus.

*From:* [jjones123@email.com](mailto:jjones123@email.com)

*To:* [hiring@abcenergyadvocacy.org](mailto:hiring@abcenergyadvocacy.org)

*Subject:* Technical Internship Program Application J. Jones

*Submitting your cover letter by email? Include the position title and your name in the subject.*

Dear Mr. Patel:

I am writing to express my interest in the Technical Internship Program as posted on your website. After working in the private sector for a year, I am now pursuing my lifelong passion for public service. I have recently enrolled in the Master of Engineering & Public Policy program at University of Maryland where I intend to specialize in energy and environment. My analytical skills and knowledge of automated systems make me an ideal candidate for this position.

A mechanical engineer by profession, I started my career at Unilever Pakistan as Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) manager for the food factory. At Unilever, I ensured full implementation of applicable environmental regulations and undertook initiatives to automate systems which significantly reduced carbon, sulfur and nitrogen emissions as well as natural resources consumption. Furthermore, my experience as coordinator of the cost saving projects at Unilever honed my costing, financial analysis and interpersonal skills.

Working as a technical intern at ABC Energy will help me to analyze the economic implications of different environmental agreements and energy-related projects. Because of my exposure to South Asian cultures and knowledge of critical need languages like Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi, I can assist you in developing a better understanding of energy and environment related issues in third world countries while also promoting better technological knowhow within the department in light of my background in engineering.

At ABC Energy Advocacy, I could contribute significantly due to my strong quantitative skills and diverse experience while also learning more about the US energy and environmental policy. Please find my resume attached. I would welcome the opportunity for an interview to discuss my qualifications in detail. You may reach me at [jjones123@email.com](mailto:jjones123@email.com) or 123-456-7890.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John Jones

**LOCKHEED MARTIN AERONAUTICAL ENG. POSITION**

Duties include: Design, develop, and test next-generation Reentry Field Support Equipment (RFSE) for the U.S. Air Force's Minuteman III Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) system. Successful candidate will be a member of a focused team, and interface with peer-level team members.

Required: BS in Aeronautical Engineering or related field. Aircraft performance background testing a plus. Good oral & written communication skills. Demonstrated leadership skills.

2345 Saint Michaels Pl.,  
College Park, MD 20742

October 18, 2013

Hiring Manager  
Aerodynamics & Fluids Department  
Space Systems Company  
Lockheed Martin  
Valley Forge, PA 12345

Dear Hiring Manager:

Thank you for considering me for the Aeronautical Engineer Associate position within AF Reentry System Programs of Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company (Requisition # 216618BR). I learned of the position through the Lockheed Martin's database. I believe my testing and design experience, aerospace engineering education at the University of Maryland (UMD), and my technical communication experience make me an excellent candidate for this position.

As my résumé indicates, I worked at the U.S. Army's Aberdeen Test Center (ATC) for 3.5 years in the business of test and evaluation of military equipment as an engineering student trainee. I worked on several fire control system performance tests of foreign weapons ranging from small arms to tanks and have written a technical test report on the performance of a foreign tank's fire control system. I also supported evaluation testing of various UAVs, UAV launch systems, airborne sensors, and vehicle armor. Since I worked with both engineers and technicians, I effectively bridged the communication gap between these two groups so our team could successfully plan and execute tests. I currently hold a U.S. Secret clearance.

I am also the project manager for UMD's Design, Build, Fly (DBF) competition team. As part of the development of our radio-controlled cargo UAV, I will gain experience in wind tunnel testing, aerodynamic design and analysis, control surface design, structural design and analysis, composite manufacturing, and project management over the next few months. I am enrolled in a Flight Testing class that will refine my knowledge of and experience with aeronautical testing that will start with DBF. I honed strong leadership and communication skills which during my efforts to earn the rank of Eagle Scout with the Boy Scouts of America.

I am confident my skills and qualifications will enable me to positively contribute to the mission of Lockheed Martin as an Aeronautical Engineer. I welcome the opportunity to meet in person for an interview. You may reach me at [Mdwest25@gmail.com](mailto:Mdwest25@gmail.com) or 443-240-2345. Thank you for your consideration; I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Michael D. West

*Try to find the name of the hiring manager or HR contact in the job description or in C4E. If you really can't find a name, you can address your letter to "Hiring Manager."*

**Company Description:** Trident Engineering Associates, Inc. performs forensic engineering investigations for attorneys and insurance companies. Trident has evolved to become one of the leading forensic engineering firms in the country, investigating and determining the causes of accidents, explosions, fires and electrical and mechanical structural failures as well. We are proud to provide a team of experienced scientists and engineering investigators that cover a complete spectrum of forensic engineering needs from skills related to metallurgy, stress analyses, toxicology, flammability and laboratory analysis among other core disciplines.

**Intern Position Duties:** Assist engineering associates with projects, review engineering reports for archiving, assist office staff, and perform laboratory and field engineering work as needed. Be able to work in a team environment, have attention to detail, organizational skills, and is able to take initiative.

30 Knox Rd, Apt 1234  
College Park, MD 20742

January 26, 2013

Mr. Dennis Hurley  
Mechanical Engineer  
Trident Engineering Associates  
2010 Industrial Drive  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Mr. Hurley:

I learned that Trident Engineering Associates is planning to hire summer interns after having the opportunity to talk to Trident President, Donald Vannoy, when he was initiated as an honorary member to my chapter of Chi Epsilon at the University of Maryland. We had an in-depth conversation about civil engineering forensics, which is a topic that interests me because I believe the best way to prevent engineering failures is to know what causes them. After I graduate, I plan to pursue a career in engineering forensics, and an internship at Trident would put me on the right path. My employment, academic, and extra-curricular background make me a strong candidate for an internship at Trident.

As an intern this past summer for the Maryland State Highway Administration (MDSHA), I learned a lot about the design process of highway rehabilitation. In the process of working with different design procedures I learned how design assumptions impact an entire system, and how to account for those assumptions in my calculations. This knowledge enabled me to successfully design pavement structure improvements from the data collected from my field surveys and analysis of road performance histories.

My experiences at MDSHA would benefit your organization because they demonstrate that I can apply what I have learned in class, play an active role in real engineering projects, and cooperate well in a team environment. One team-based experience I had was as the structural engineering team leader for a project in my Design of Civil Engineering Systems class. I was able to keep all members on task, and thanks to everyone's diligent efforts, we produced a design that was well-received by our review panel. In addition, as Treasurer of Chi Epsilon, I took initiative and helped co-organize the spring 2011 Civil Engineering Career Fair which was attended by over 30 companies and 200 students. I planned and managed the participation of over 30 student volunteers to greet and assist recruiters and students at the fair.

I am excited about the chance to work for Trident because I know I can be a great asset to the company. If you have any questions, please email me at fakeaddress@terpmail.umd.edu. I look forward to hearing back from you soon. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

David Smith (*electronic submissions don't need a handwritten signature*)

*Uploading your cover letter as an attachment? Save the document as a .pdf before you upload it.*

### **BGE CO-OP POSITION**

Preferred Qualifications: College student, entering their junior or senior year, majoring in Civil Engineering, Architectural Engineering or Industrial Engineering with an interest in Construction Management. Prefer 3.0 GPA or above and some previous related work history.

John Doe, Co-op Coordinator, Baltimore Gas & Electric  
1234 Main Street, Baltimore, MD 20987

### **Jonathan Leonard**

4123 Hagerstown Hall • College Park, MD 20742  
[sstudent@umd.edu](mailto:sstudent@umd.edu) • (301) 314-5464

September 1, 2007

Mr. John Doe  
Co-op Coordinator  
Baltimore Gas & Electric  
1234 Main Street  
Baltimore, MD 20987

*If you aren't following  
business letter format, you  
can use the header from  
your resume.*

Dear Mr. Doe:

I am writing to apply for a cooperative education position in civil engineering so I can utilize my technical and interpersonal skills in the field of construction management. I learned of your co-op position through the Engineering Co-op & Career Services Office at the University of Maryland.

As my resume indicates, I worked for the Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO) for last summer. At PEPCO, I gained valuable experience working directly with contractors from the early stages of a project to its final completion. I also worked with design engineers within PEPCO and learned how to express my ideas clearly and concisely. I believe this combination of engineering and administrative experience has provided me with an excellent base from which to further develop my skills. My involvement in the Alpha Chi Sigma fraternity has also provided me with excellent leadership and service opportunities.

As you can see from my attached transcript, I am a senior at the University of Maryland. My overall grade point average is 2.9 but as you will note, last semester I received a 1.8 GPA. This was due to a motorcycle accident that required a lengthy hospital stay. At the time, I thought I would be able to keep up with my courses but unfortunately I miscalculated the extent of my discomfort and the time I would need to spend in physical therapy. I am now fully recovered and confident that my grades will improve dramatically. Please take my overall performance into consideration when you are reviewing my application rather than my most recent semester.

I hope you will find that my education and experience qualifies me for a cooperative education position with Baltimore Gas & Electric. I look forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Leonard

*Don't quite meet the GPA  
preference? You can address  
this in your letter. Keep it  
positive!*

## YOU SUBMITTED YOUR APPLICATION ... NOW WHAT?

**You wait.** After submitting an application, the next point of action is up to the employer. It's important to keep in mind that the employer may not be ready to review applications right away, or they may have hundreds to evaluate. Either way, this step of the process will most likely take time; ***now is the time to exercise patience.***

### FOLLOWING UP

It is acceptable to follow up with an employer after submitting your application materials to ensure your materials were received and to inquire about when you might expect to hear from them regarding an interview. ***This is to be done once***, typically about a week after submitting your application. On occasion you may only have an email address. When contacting the employer – whether by phone or email -- you will want to keep your inquiry brief. Consider the following:

“I submitted my application for your \_\_\_\_ position last week, and wanted to ensure my materials were received. I am very interested in X position and think it is a great match for me and my future goals. I would welcome the opportunity to meet in person to discuss my qualifications and to answer any questions you may have.”

This type of inquiry does not put pressure the employer but rather allows you to make contact while demonstrating your sincere interest. However, be sure you are following the employer's direction! If the application specifically says “*No follow-ups or phone calls*”, ***do not follow up***, no matter how tempting it may be. This will come off as though you do not know how to follow directions, or as though you lack attention to detail. You also risk coming across as desperate.

#### THE EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

Each employer will have a different method of processing their applications. In the event you don't hear back from the employer in response to your email, don't be discouraged. Know you have done all you can to make yourself stand out. The ball is now in their court. Instead, channel your energy into applying for other positions.

Bombarding the employer with email after email and phone calls about a decision timeline will not make you stand out as the best candidate ... you may even come off as annoying.

### FOR MORE GUIDANCE

See these handouts and workshops for help with different letters or emails you might write during your job search.

<b>Type of Correspondence</b>	<b><i>Handout/ Workshop</i></b>
Request for information/ Informational Meeting Requesting a Contact on LinkedIn	<i>Job Search Strategies/ Job Search 201</i>
Thank you Note	<i>Interviewing Techniques/ Job Search Strategies</i>
Accepting/ Declining a Job Offer	<i>Job Acceptance Etiquette/ Salary Negotiation</i>