Probably the most well known professional letter is the cover letter (also called letter of application or letter of inquiry). Cover letters are generally limited to one page and accompany your resume when mailed to companies in response to specific job announcements or inquiring about possible job openings. Cover letters are designed to attract the attention of a prospective employer, entice him/her into reading your resume, and encourage him/her to invite you for an interview. They should be printed on high-quality bond paper that matches your resume. Unlike resumes, a cover letter should never be reproduced. Prospective employers will probably view your cover letter as an example of your work, therefore, you will want it to be flawless. It is best to address your cover letter to a specific person in the department of the company in which you want to work. Contact the Career Center if you need assistance in locating such contact names and addresses.

Cover letters generally have three main paragraphs; the first paragraph should grab the prospective employer’s attention. You will want to include the reason for your letter, the name of the specific job for which you are applying, and a statement about how you heard about the opening.

The second paragraph should indicate why you are interested in the position, company, or company's services. Keep in mind that a company will receive several cover letters and resumes for each position it advertises. Therefore, in order to get noticed, it is in your best interest to research the company and to communicate your understanding of the position, company, or company’s services in your cover letter. Be sure to read the job description thoroughly, as it will be your guide to writing this portion of the letter. If a job description is not provided, think about what responsibilities the job might entail and what specific qualifications a well-suited candidate should possess. This paragraph should highlight your strongest qualifications and show how they coincide with the responsibilities of the position you are seeking. You might want to communicate how your career-related work experience or educational background has prepared you for this position, through the use of examples or by referring to your enclosed resume. Be careful not to repeat the information contained in your resume verbatim.

The closing paragraph should indicate what you would like to have happen. Unless you have other intentions, you will generally indicate that you would like to schedule an interview. You may also want to restate your phone number and offer to be available at the convenience of the employer. If you do not live in the immediate geographical area of the company, you should mention that you will be in their general area during a particular time. The company may be more willing to interview you if the interview is of little or no expense to them.

Although your cover letter should be unique, and should express your personal information in your own style, writing such letters can be somewhat intimidating. Refer to the following letter for an example of such correspondence:
March 10, 2011

Mr. Thomas Johnson
Vice President of Marketing
Fifth Bank of America
79 South Court Street
Memphis, Tennessee 38100

Dear Mr. Johnson:

I am applying for the position of Marketing Assistant, which was recently featured in the Nace-Link system of the Christian Brothers University Career Center. After reviewing the qualifications, I believe that my skills are an excellent match for this position. After reviewing my educational background, career-related experience, and career goals, I hope you will agree.

The position requires an individual who possesses excellent writing skills, public speaking experience, and the ability to plan and implement tours for the public. As an English major, I have written multiple term papers over the past four years and have received superior grades and verbal recognition for my writing style. As a member of the Alpha Beta Sigma Business Fraternity, I have been a writer and editor for the fraternity newsletter for the last two years. I have also worked as a tour guide for a local museum, which has provided me valuable experience in both public speaking and the coordination of tours. I have also assisted in coordinating large outings and activities for my fraternity.

The enclosed resume gives more specific details on my qualifications and experience. I would welcome the opportunity for an interview at your earliest convenience, and can be reached at the phone number above. I am genuinely interested in applying my skills and experience to this position at Fifth Bank of America. I thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jeff Anderson

Jeff Anderson
Enclosure