

*Maryann Jones reports that prospective employers consider application letters the*

# First Introduction

**A** LETTER of application is a sales letter," says Mrs. Mary Elva Sather, head of the Home Economics Placement Office. "You are selling your services and buying a career. While no rules can tell one how to write every application letter, I wish there were some way of impressing on an applicant the importance of sending complete information about herself in her first letter."

One employer wrote Mrs. Sather that a girl who fails to supply all of the information wanted by a prospective employer wins a thick black mark against her by the letter's recipient. Another employer wrote, "I have received a letter from Miss Blank but all she did was to ask questions so I have not answered it."

Many application letters are mailed unsigned. Sometimes, if the letter is a good one, an employer will send it to Mrs. Sather to inquire if she can supply the writer's name from the information given in the letter. Many others are simply thrown away.

Elaborate discussions are out of place in a letter of application. Statements should be presented as facts. One employer who had received a boastful letter from a home economics graduate wrote Mrs. Sather, "My first reaction was to fire all of my sales department and take on this girl." Another drew a red ring around the list of honor organizations and sent the letter to Mrs. Sather with the comment, "Let some one else say this."

In another example of an inadequate letter of application sent back to Mrs. Sather's office, the girl had mentioned salary first. She neglected to state her home economics major field at Iowa State, did not say what college courses she had taken which would qualify her for the position and gave no information about herself. The employer to whom this letter was directed had four positions available. If the applicant had included her qualifications in her letter of application, the employer would have known if she would fit one of them. Because of the poor letter, which gave the employer an unfavorable first impression, this girl did not receive a position with the company.

Employers are much impressed by good letters of application. A comment of this kind was sent to Mrs. Sather regarding an Iowa State graduate who had just returned from service and had written an unusually good letter of application for the position in which she was interested.

With the nearing of the end of the school year interest in application letters is mounting among graduating seniors and among others who plan to obtain summer positions.

A New York City businessman stated in the December issue of the *Journal of Home Economics* that he recently had an opening for a home economist which

he had made known to several leading colleges and to employment committees of home economics groups and individuals.

He said that the colleges replied promptly with records of several candidates, giving qualifications with reference to his needs. The replies which he received as a result of letters to the employment committees were unsatisfactory. "They gave practically no information about the candidate's experience or ability and gave no references."

"These letters in the latter group," the businessman stated, "made me wonder if home economics schools are properly training students in ordinary practices of the business field."

Iowa State home economics students in the Department of Institution Management are required to take one course in business correspondence. Household equipment and institution management majors are required to take a course in technical journalism. In many other departments, technical journalism is offered as an alternative required course. Other students often elect this course, which includes a study of letters of application.

**A**CCORDING to Mrs. Sather, "The four principles of salesmanship must be followed in a sales letter. Attract attention, arouse interest, convince and stimulate action."

"The same principles apply to letters of application for summer positions as for permanent ones," stresses Mrs. Sather. "The chief problem of most girls seeking summer positions is to convince the employer that lack of experience is not going to be a handicap. This can be done by stating any past experience which applies to the desired position in any way or by showing that one has had particular training that would offset lack of experience."

"Be sure to spell the employer's name correctly. Misspelling of a name is a common mistake which creates a bad first impression. A person's name is his trademark and he wants to be addressed correctly."

"It is always a good plan to let some time elapse between the writing and mailing of an important letter. A letter of application often can be improved by revision."

Prof. A. Starbuck, instructor of the business correspondence course, gives some points generally desired by a personnel officer in a letter of application.

Why is the applicant writing? What training and specific courses has she had that particularly qualify her for the position? What experience has she had that further qualifies her? What references does the applicant give?

The list of references should usually include at least one person from the college where the applicant

received her training, one from a previous employer and one from her home community.

The letter of application should request some action. It may ask for a position but usually asks for an interview.

**A**CCORDING to Miss Katherine Goepfinger of the Department of Technical Journalism, "If you are not a graduating senior and do not have credentials on file in the Home Economics Placement Office, it is a good idea to enclose a personal history sheet with your letter of application. This eliminates the necessity of telling in the first person all of your attributes. The same would be true in applying for summer positions.

"On the personal history sheet information should give a background of your training, particularly college courses related to the type of position for which you are applying."

The personal history sheet usually includes such items as experience, education, courses which would qualify the student for a position, college activities, college honors, travel, hobbies and personal information.

Under experience, even though only that received at home, list responsibilities assumed such as meal planning, marketing, food preparation, care of children or household management if they relate in any way to the position desired. It is a good idea to include

travel in a personal history sheet since it is some assurance to employers that you may have a broader viewpoint.

Additional guideposts the writer of an application letter should check include writing from the employer's viewpoint, pointing out specifically how she can fill his need and highlighting her experience instead of going into tiresome details. The letter should look attractive and neat, avoid all trite phrases, open with a snap and request action in the closing sentence. The writer should be explicit about her education, question whether it is pertinent to mention religion and nationality, include two or three business references and cut out all extraneous material. Is the writer sure that the name and title of the employer are correctly spelled? Did she enclose a stamp or a stamped envelope? Has she enclosed a photograph that looks like her? Is her choice of words above criticism? Has she included her telephone number? Is her name typed at the bottom? Has she avoided mention of a definite salary figure? Is it conversational? Does the letter sound like her or could anyone else sign his name?

Students who feel that they are in need of added training in business letter writing can take courses to prepare themselves or go to the library and read books on the subject. Career Clinic meetings sponsored by the Textiles and Clothing Club also provide an opportunity for students to review application letters.

*How to high-light her experience puzzles the writer as she begins an application letter for a summer position*

