

Writing a Cover Letter

A cover letter is usually the first thing an employer will read about you!

Purpose

You should use a cover letter to introduce yourself, and highlight relevant skills, qualifications and experience so you will be considered for a job interview. For speculative letters, where you are enquiring whether positions are available now or in the future, ensure you are specific about the kind of work you are looking for – not just any available position and emphasise your key selling points.

Employers use a cover letter to quickly decide if an applicant meets the minimum selection criteria and demonstrates an appropriate background to be competitive for the position. Your cover letter should provide an active incentive for an employer to find out more about you in your resume. Remember, your cover letter may be one of tens or hundreds the employer receives. If you are writing an unsolicited cover letter in which you enquire about possible job openings, it is even more important to capture the employer's attention.

Formatting and Style

Format your cover letter in a standard business style, so that it is concise and is easy to read. Use these features:

- One A4 typed page
- 10-12 point standard font (eg Times New Roman, Arial)
- Clear structure – one main idea per paragraph
- Plenty of white space (standard margins and space between paragraphs)
- 100% accurate spelling and grammar
- Short, well-constructed sentences with no unnecessary words
- A positive tone (do not include your weaknesses)
- Plain English (avoid slang, SMS or other abbreviations, jargon or terms which are too casual)

Content

Target the letter to the position and to the organisation.

The letter should demonstrate strong written communication skills, your level of interest in the position, your knowledge of the organisation, and a brief description of your relevant skills. Use well structured paragraphs and points supported by your resume.

Include:

- Your name, address, phone number and email
- Today's date
- The recipient's name, title, organisation and address
- A formal greeting to the relevant contact person
- The purpose of the letter, including details of the position (position title, reference number)
- Evidence of your interest in the position and the field – state why you want the job
- Evidence of your research into the organisation
- Your skills and experience

The content should **not** include:

- A simple list of your skills without any supporting evidence of **demonstrated** skills
- Sentences or phrases plagiarised directly from the organisation's website

Typical Structure

Your address
Suburb State Postcode
Your telephone / mobile
Email address

Date

Name of contact
Title (HR Manager etc.)
Name of the organisation
Address
Suburb State Postcode

Job title and/or reference number

Dear Mr...Ms... or if name unknown, Sir/Madam

Opening Paragraph

The Fundamentals: What is the purpose of this letter?

Introduce yourself and explain why you are writing. If responding to a job advertisement, include the position title and any reference number if applicable. If you're canvassing for potential employment, introduce yourself and your current career circumstances as concisely as possible, including any specialised professional interests and abilities.

Paragraphs 2, 3, 4/5

Why you want to work for this employer and why they should want you.

It is essential that you demonstrate within these paragraphs your ability to gather the most relevant information from a range of sources to state your claim as a suitable candidate.

Briefly cover your current or completed course, the planned finishing date, your major, specialisation or special interest, and any outstanding academic results.

Highlight the skills, expertise, qualities and employment experience you have included in your resume that you believe are most relevant to the requirements of the position. Make sure that you can demonstrate how you meet the selection criteria, and how what you have to offer relates to both the current and future needs of the employer.

Include other factors that point to your possession of key general skills (e.g. communication, teamwork, initiative, self-management) through your experiences in voluntary or community activities, clubs and societies etc.

Show that you have researched the organisation and the position. Include this when you show your enthusiasm for that particular position with that particular employer (Do not copy sentences from the employers website).

Final Paragraph

What do you want to happen next?

Confirm that you have included your resume and any other documents requested. Finish on a positive note, thank the employer for their time and express interest in attending an interview.

Close

Yours sincerely (if you have addressed them by their name) or
Yours faithfully (if you have addressed them by their title)

(Place your signature here)

Your Name