

Cover Letters

Why send a cover letter?

An effective cover letter links the skills and experience on your resume to the job you're applying for and the organisation you're applying to. A strong link increases your chances of an interview.

Some recruiters and employers claim that a well written cover letter is just as important as your resume in making a positive first impression.

In order to take advantage of this valuable opportunity to market your skills and experience, make sure you tailor your cover letter to the specific requirements of the job and organisation. The primary emphasis should be on what you could contribute to the organisation, rather than on what you expect from the organisation.

Refer to the selection criteria mentioned in the advertisement, duty statement or job description to outline your skills and experience, using the language of your particular profession to identify you with that occupation.

Although each cover letter you write will have a certain amount of repeated information, avoid writing 'form letters' where only the name and address of the organisation and contact person changes. If you don't make an effort with your letter, it may be interpreted that you wouldn't make an effort in the role; and you could miss out on an interview as a result.

It is more effective to send fewer, well researched and tailored letters to targeted employers than to spend time and money sending multiple letters stating, 'Dear Sir/Madam, I am interested in a job with your organisation.'

If your letter is for a Local, State or Federal Public Service application, see our web page on Public Service Jobs. For jobs requiring you to address selection criteria, please refer to the handout on Selection Criteria.

A professional cover letter...

- Is typed with neat, consistent formatting and printed on one page of plain, white A4 paper. If you leave wide margins (2-3 cm each) it will be easier for the reader to write notes. Never send your first draft and if you can, ask someone else to check your letter for errors or omissions before you send it. You can also attend a Resume Rescue workshop at the Careers Centre to receive feedback on your job application documents. It's important to keep a copy of any letter you send to reread before an interview.

- Is addressed to a specific person. This means that you may have to phone the organisation and ask reception for the name and title of the addressee. Use 'Dear Sir/Madam' only if you're unable to find out the addressee's name.
- Reflects your personality and your enthusiasm for the role for which you're applying. On the whole, organisations like to employ people who enjoy their roles and will assume additional responsibilities to enhance their skills and the reputation of the organisation.

Sending your cover letter

If you're mailing your letter, send it with your resume in an A4 envelope (without folding or binding it, unless you've been asked specifically to do so).

If, however, you're e-mailing your letter, make sure you send it as an attachment. If a letter document is pasted into the body of an e-mail the formatting can be compromised, ruining the good first impression you wish to make.

For more information on electronic applications, please see the handout on Job Applications.

An appropriate cover letter format

- Your name, address, phone number/s and e-mail address

Title and name of addressee (spelt correctly), the addressee's position, the organisation's address

- The date
- A greeting e.g. "Dear Ms Jones", NOT "Dear Sophie"
- Application for position of xxx, Reference Number (if applicable)

Suggested Structure and Layout

[insert your name]
[insert your street number and name]
[insert your suburb, state and postcode]

[insert title and name of addressee]
[insert his/her position title if known]
[insert the organisation's address]

[insert the date]

Dear [insert Ms/Mr Xxx or Sir/Madam]

Application for position of [insert name of role], Reference Number [insert if given]

Paragraph 1 – Introduction - Mention the position you are applying for and where you saw the advertisement.

Paragraph 2 – Why Me - Give a brief outline of your academic and employment history in relation to the selection criteria for the position. State how you could contribute to the role and the organisation (or industry). Provide evidence by describing relevant qualifications and experience, taking care to cover those skills/areas the employer is looking for. These can include your studies, skills developed in extra curricular activities, work experience and employment history.

Paragraph 3 – Why Them - Explain why you're interested in the role and the organisation. In order to do this you need to have thoroughly read the selection criteria relating to the role and researched the organisation using the internet, newspapers, industry contacts etc. If you don't know the name of the organisation (e.g. the position is advertised by an agency), you can research the industry.

Paragraph 4 – The Hoped-For Result of Your Letter - Mention your availability for interview and the best way of contacting you. Conclude that on the basis of your outlined skills and experience you'd like to be considered for an interview. State that your resume, application form etc. is attached.

Yours sincerely

[insert your signature]

[insert your name typed]

Enclosures: (e.g.resume)

(Use 'Yours sincerely' for letters beginning with 'Dear plus Addressee's Name' and 'Yours faithfully' for letters beginning with 'Dear Sir/Madam')

For cold calling letters follow the format above, with a few adjustments:

Paragraph 1: If you've been referred by a friend or colleague known to the addressee, mention this. Because no job has been advertised, state that you're seeking employment opportunities in a particular occupational area.

Paragraph 4: You may wish to include your intention to contact the employer on a particular day to follow up. (Make sure that you keep your promise by noting the date in your diary and contacting the addressee on the mentioned date, as planned.)

You're welcome to browse the Careers Centre's hard-copy resources on writing job applications and cover letters. You'll also find that most libraries have books on the subject.