

Cover Letter Writing

The cover letter you send with your resume is an opportunity to summarise your suitability for the role you are applying for. To enable you to write an effective and competitive cover letter you are encouraged to call the contact person to clarify exactly what the employer requires in your application, including your cover letter.

It is more than just a brief cover note in which you merely introduce yourself, ask the employer to accept your application, and refer to your attached documents. Together with your resume it provides you with an opportunity to sell yourself as a highly suitable candidate for the job. There are usually two types of letters – one is in response to an advertised position or to a personal contact – the other is seeking to be considered for possible vacancies and is often called a ‘speculative’ or ‘cold canvas’ letter.



Careers and Employment runs workshops offering assistance with writing your cover letter – have a look at the workshop schedule on **CareerHub** in the **Resources** box under **events**.



Notes on Cover Letter Writing

- The letter is a link between your resume and the job or organisation. It is used to emphasise, to highlight or to add to the information in your resume, and to convince the organisation you have the skills and experience necessary to be the best applicant for the position.
- Your cover letter should be specifically tailored to each role you apply for.
- You should contact the company and find out additional information such as the name of the person to whom you need to address the letter and whether they can provide you with any additional information about the company e.g. brochures and annual reports.
- Use the Internet to research additional information about the company so that you can tailor your letter specifically to the company.
- As the employer might have many applications to read, your letter needs to be concise and to the point. A cover letter is no more than one page long. Four or five paragraphs will be needed however, to convey your essential messages (a suggested format is over the page).
- If the job advertisement lists a set of selection criteria, prepare a specific response to each of these on separate pages from your letter, to include in your application with your resume and letter. For help with preparing your responses have a look at our information sheet on Selection Criteria.

Your cover letter is much more than a ‘cover note’ – when it is prepared well it:

- **Introduces you** to the employer
- Highlights or adds to **key information** in your resume
- Tells the employer **why** they should consider employing you, based on your skills and experience
- Shows the employer that **you know** about their organisation and how **you match** their requirements
- Invites the employer to **read further** to find out more, and
- Convinces the employer that you’re **worth interviewing**



Cover Letter Outline

Your name and address - Include SUBURBS in CAPITAL letters

Their name and address (always address your letter to a specific person if possible)

The date - Use long date, e.g., 30 January 2010

Dear Mrs Flemington

(If name & title are unknown call them to find out, but if for some reason you can't find out, address it to: Human Resources Manager, or The Managing Director)

PARAGRAPH ONE: Outline what you are applying for.

e.g., Please find attached my application for.....

e.g., As part of my Bachelor of Business studies I am looking to gain work experience/work placement/WIL at (name the company).

PARAGRAPH TWO: Outline what you are doing now, how it relates to the position, and make a link

between this and the chosen company. Incorporate key themes from your resume. Include your latest qualification or the details of the degree you are currently completing. Mention the University and any majors studied and a project or interest area if relevant

e.g., Currently I am a third year science student at.....

e.g., I am interested in a position with your company because....

PARAGRAPH THREE: Make links between your skills and the skills that the employer is requesting, and benefits you bring to the organisation. Include reasons for wanting this particular job, and why you want to work for them.

e.g., I am able to assist your company because...

PARAGRAPH FOUR: Make any other links to the position/organisation from your life experience.

e.g., Recently I was chosen to be... which allowed me to...

e.g., I am involved with... which has developed my... skills

PARAGRAPH FIVE: Conclude by stating which documents you have enclosed, e.g. resume, response to selection criteria, statement of claim etc. and suggest that you would like to discuss your application further and can be contacted on...

e.g., I would value the opportunity to discuss this with you and...

Yours sincerely,

(Sign your name here)

Mary Jones



Cover Letter Writing Tips

TIP 1

Make sure you observe business letter writing conventions – left hand justified, open punctuation, clear, concise, readable – and of course, NO spelling or grammar errors! This is a formal letter, whether you know the person you are writing to or not, so make sure it reflects positively on you as a professional.

TIP 2

Personalise your letter as much as possible. Find out the name and position of the person to send it to, and research the organisation so you can tell them why you want to work for them. This is great preparation for when you (hopefully!) get invited to an interview.

TIP 3

Get feedback from an independent person. Fresh eyes will find mistakes you overlooked because of your familiarity with the content of your letter. Remember you can email your draft applications to Careers and Employment for feedback.

TIP 4

Make sure you tailor each cover letter to the specific organisation. This makes you stand out from other applications as it indicates that your job search is a targeted approach, rather than it seeming that you are sending the same generic letter to 50 employers.

TIP 5

Keep your cover letter to one page maximum. Aim for four to five paragraphs of concise, easy to read text.

TIP 6

Make sure you address any key requirements if you are responding to an advertisement. Selection criteria require a separate response in addition to your letter.

TIP 7

“Apply in writing” doesn’t usually mean a handwritten letter. Employers generally require typed hard copy or electronic (email or online) applications. Be guided by what the employer is asking for, and make sure you respond to selection criteria if requested. If it’s not clear what is required, contact the person mentioned in the advertisement to clarify.

There’s lots of information available to assist you to write a cover letter:



- Check out the **Careers and Employment website** www.careers.qut.edu.au for information on letters, resumes and other application paperwork as well as personal transferable skills.
- Have a look at **Australian sites** such as www.careerone.com.au and www.seek.com.au for resources on letter writing.
- For interactive help with your resume, letter and selection criteria, check out the online **Career Modules** on the Careers and Employment website under Students/Graduates – Career Development Programs.



Careers and Employment can provide feedback on your draft cover letters, resume and responses to selection criteria. Email your draft as a Word attachment to careers@qut.edu.au. Please allow 5 working days for feedback.

Speculative Cover Letters

This letter is sent to an employer or employment agency, seeking consideration for possible employment opportunities, i.e. positions which are not currently advertised or which do not currently exist.

It is vital to incorporate the speculative approach in your job search for the following reasons:

- A high percentage of jobs are filled in the unadvertised job market
- Many employers rely on keen students who write to them, of their own initiative, to fill vacancies
- An employer may be impressed with your initiative, experience, and excellent presentation and make efforts to create a position to accommodate your request
- An unexpected job vacancy may arise and your application is already in the employer's hands



Approaches to Adopt

Where you know the employer hires graduates:

If the employer you are targeting hires graduates regularly, you should indicate that you are 'seeking employment' with them.

Where you are unsure if the employer hires graduates:

If you are UNSURE how often the employer hires graduates, do not indicate you are seeking employment. This singular approach may close the door.

Instead, indicate that you:

- are (more broadly) seeking advice about graduate opportunities and/or
- are seeking information about the industry, career paths for employees, training opportunities, new developments, or areas of special interest to you.

This will:

- benefit your career planning, give you valuable contacts and provide an opportunity to network and to obtain other employer referrals.
- allow you to impress the employer with your initiative, knowledge and professionalism so that the employer will think of you when a future job vacancy occurs.

You could also indicate that you are:

- willing to undertake voluntary work, casual work or contract work.
- seeking vacation employment.
- undertaking a university project and interested in its application to a particular organisation or industry area.

Personalise your letter:

In every instance find out who you should send the letter to. This ensures you have a follow-up contact.

Include an action plan at the closure of your letter:

Do not expect an employer to contact you. In your letter state that you will make a follow-up telephone call. Give a time-frame for undertaking this. If you suggest this MAKE SURE YOU DO IT!

For example:

"I will telephone you within the next ten days to discuss my request with you or another suitable person. Thank you for giving my letter your time and consideration."

Include study, work, personal qualities and transferable skills information:

If you cannot access information on what qualities, skills, and experience a company seeks in graduates, refer to your university studies and work experience. Focus on the personal qualities and skills which research shows employers seek in graduates – see our information sheet on **Personal Transferable Skills** for more tips.