

APPLICATION LETTERS

Why do I need an application letter?

The application letter you send with your resume often provides you with your first opportunity to present yourself to a potential employer.

An application letter **should accompany each application** and is much more than a cover letter that introduces your resume. An application letter is a **targeted, precise, interesting** communication that provides an opportunity for you to **highlight skills and experience**, and **express an interest in the position**. The aim of an application letter is to encourage the employer to look closely at the accompanying resume and other paperwork, and to hopefully invite you to an interview.

An application letter should

- Be no longer than one page
- Be targeted for each application
- Aim at getting attention quickly
- Be error free
- Be courteous
- Have a positive, enthusiastic tone
- Make use of short paragraphs and clear language
- Refer to the organisation and include why you want to work for this particular employer
- Tell the employer how you will meet their needs
- Be a balance between self confidence and modesty
- Be drafted and redrafted until it is right
- Be checked by someone else before it is sent out
- Be presented on good quality paper
- Be printed on a quality printer
- Be typed, not handwritten
- Be sent unfolded with your resume (use an A4 envelope)

There are usually two types of application letters. One is a **response** to an advertisement, or personal contact, and the other is seeking to be considered for possible vacancies and is often called a **'speculative'** or **'cold canvas'** letter.

Sophie's story

I thought that writing an application letter would be really easy after all the time I spent doing my resume and portfolio.

*It turned out to be more difficult than I expected, especially because I didn't want to waste the chance of **making a positive first impression** in writing.*

*I tried to make it easy for the person reading it to see the **relevance** of my skills and experience.*

*That meant I had to **make the links** from my resume to the job I was applying for – rather than expecting someone to read between the lines.*

Luckily I emailed my draft letter to Careers and Employment at careers@qut.edu.au to get feedback – there were two spelling and grammatical errors that I hadn't picked up, even though I'd read it through really carefully heaps of times.



Example letter – Applying for a teaching position

Ms Allie Smith
473 Barrington Street
RED HILL Q 4059

30 August 2009

Ms Mary Sheehan
Principal
Holy Spirit Primary School
PO Box 123
BRISBANE Q 4001

APPLICATION LETTER TIP 1

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

Dear Ms Sheehan

Why you are making contact

- *To apply for an advertised position*

I am writing to apply for the position of Early Childhood Teacher as advertised in the Courier Mail, Saturday 22 August 2009 – Reference No:KL23 (or through QUT Careers & Employment).

- *To apply for work experience or voluntary work*

To follow up from our telephone conversation earlier today, I am writing to apply for a period of voluntary work with your school.

- *To apply for any positions that may become available (a speculative application – see page 5 for more about speculative letters)*

I am writing to express my interest in being considered for a position as an early childhood teacher within your school when I have completed my current studies.

Angela DeMasi, a member of your school board who I met through a professional networking event, suggested that I contact you directly as available positions at Holy Spirit Primary School are not always advertised.

Who you are



Currently I am in my final year of a Graduate Diploma in Education – Early Years at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and will complete my studies in November this year. Practical and theoretical work that I have completed throughout my course has had a strong emphasis on real education issues and how to enhance productive learning experiences for young children. I have achieved consistently high results in my assessments resulting in a grade point average of 5.45 on a 7 point scale, and I have particularly enjoyed my practicum and voluntary placements.

Example letter – Applying for a teaching position (continued)

In addition to my teaching qualification I have previously completed a Bachelor of Creative Industries (Media and Communication)/ Bachelor of Business (Public Relations) at QUT, and have three and a half years of employment experience in the media and communications industry. My work with children's television programming motivated me to gain an education qualification so that I can work more directly with children in a teaching role and make a positive difference in their lives.

APPLICATION LETTER TIP 2

Show that you value what you've learned from your degree and other work and life experiences, and that you recognise the transferable skills gained that you will be able to apply to this workplace. Focus on what the employer is looking for – they won't spend much time trying to find ways in which you can meet their requirements, so make it easy for them.

What you are offering – marketing yourself

You will see from my resume that I have participated in a range of education-related experiences in Catholic and government schools over the past 2 years. These experiences have enabled me to develop my skills in planning and implementing meaningful learning experiences for children within the context of Queensland curriculum guidelines. From my practicum placements, part time work and voluntary work I have gained a great appreciation of the importance of the role of teachers in children's early years of schooling.

I am a self-motivated and enthusiastic person with a strong passion to develop my career in early childhood education within a Christian environment. I am eager to implement the professional skills I have developed so far while being committed to ongoing learning. In addition, I have a range of skills from my employment experiences, including in time management, working under pressure, professional communication and presentation, and creative problem solving, which will add further value to my contribution.

APPLICATION LETTER TIP 3

*This is your opportunity to highlight your **relevant experience, skills and qualities**, gained from uni, part time and other employment, voluntary work, extracurricular activities and so on. Don't be shy – employers won't know what you are offering unless you tell them!*



Example letter – Applying for a teaching position (continued)

Why you are interested in them

From my research into your school, via your website and through discussions with one of your employees, I have been motivated to apply to work with you. I am familiar with, and fully support, the aims and objectives of your organisation, and am excited about the prospect of working with you. I am particularly impressed by your school's commitment to working as a partner with students, parents and the wider community, your emphasis on the values of the Catholic church in daily life, and your laptop computer program for all students.

APPLICATION LETTER TIP 4

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

I bring to my work a commitment to the teaching profession, a willingness to work collaboratively with others and a strong desire for quality outcomes. As a result of the knowledge and skills gained through my studies at QUT and my industry-based experiences, I am confident that I will be able to fulfil more than adequately the requirements of the position of Early Childhood Teacher. I am a practising Catholic.

Closure

Please find enclosed a copy of my resume and latest practicum report. I would appreciate an interview and can be contacted on telephone 3345 7768 (home) or 0413 721 201(mobile).

Thank you for your consideration of my application.

- *If this is a speculative letter*

I will contact you within the next week to discuss the possibility of meeting with you to further explore my suitability for current or upcoming positions at Holy Spirit Primary School.

Yours sincerely

(leave space here for your handwritten or scanned signature)

Allie Smith



APPLICATION LETTER TIP 5

*“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.*

APPLICATION LETTERS

What is a speculative letter?

This type of 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 jobsearch because

- 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 and accommodate your request
- an unexpected job vacancy may arise and your application is already in the employer's hands

Some sample paragraphs for speculative letters follow:

Example of speculative opening paragraph...

Recently I became aware of the new music program at St. John's School. My interest in this program and genuine commitment to teaching in a Christian educational environment provides the impetus for my request. I would like the opportunity to visit your school, learn more about your programs and if possible observe classes in action. I would also appreciate your advice as to the possibility of teaching positions at St John's in 2010.

Example of a paragraph which links you and the position...

Over the past six years I have held a number of part-time positions. These have involved working with children in a range of settings including after school and vacation care. This experience has provided the opportunity to develop planning and behaviour management skills, as well as communication, time management, and organisational skills.

Example of a closing paragraph...

Having contact with your school, which fosters learning in a Christian environment and values the arts and creative thinking, would be of great value to my growth as an emerging teacher. I would appreciate the opportunity to visit your school and will telephone you within the next week to discuss when this could be arranged.

Check out the **QUT Careers and Employment website** for more information on writing application letters. Go to www.careers.qut.edu.au, Look under Applying for a Job, and click on *Applications*. Also, the Australian jobsearch websites all contain resources on applying for positions.

Why not have a look?



MORE TIPS FOR WRITING APPLICATION LETTERS

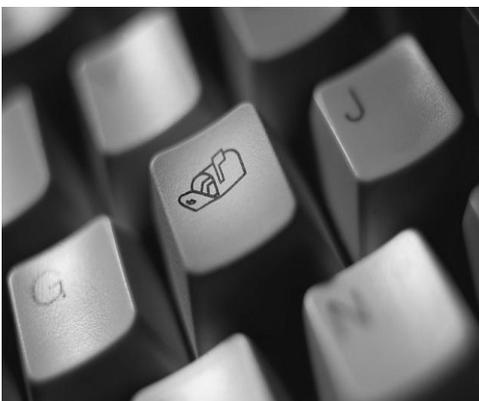
- Keep your application letter to **one page maximum**. Aim for 3-4 paragraphs of concise, easy to read text.
- **Personalise** your letter as much as possible. Find out the name and position of the person to send it to, and research the organisation so you can tell them why you want to work for them. This is great preparation for when you (hopefully!) get invited to an interview.
- **Get feedback** from an independent person. Fresh eyes will find mistakes you overlooked because of your familiarity with the content of your letter. Remember that you can email your draft applications to Careers and Employment for feedback.
- 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.



DID YOU KNOW?

Careers and Employment provides feedback on your draft application letter, resume and responses to selection criteria. Email your draft as a Word attachment to careers@qut.edu.au, or drop in a hard copy to Student Support Services, level 4, C Block, KG.

*Please allow **2 working days** for feedback.*



NEED MORE HELP?

- Check out the **Careers and Employment website** www.careers.qut.edu.au and look under Applying for a Job for info on application letters, resumes and other application paperwork as well as personal transferable skills.
- Have a look at **Australian sites** such as CareerOne for resources on application letter writing. Go to www.careerone.com.au/jobs/job-search/get-that-job/improve-your-cover-letter
- Also check out the **career resources** section on Seek at www.seek.com.au/career-resources/