

Application Letter Writing

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

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 application letters – one is a response to an advertised position or personal contact – the other is seeking to be considered for possible vacancies and is often called a ‘speculative’ or ‘cold canvas’ letter.



For more information on application letter writing, select **Applications** in the **Applying for a job** section of the C&E website, and view the list of **events** in CareerHub for **Resume & Letter Writing** workshops.

Notes on Application Letter Writing



- The letter is a link between your resume and the job or organisation. It is used to emphasise, to highlight or to build on information in your resume, and to convince the organisation you have skills and experience necessary to be the best applicant for the position.
- Your application should be specifically tailored to each situation.
- 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 Library or 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 the letter needs to be concise and to the point. An application letter is no more than one page long. Four or five paragraphs will be needed however, to convey your essential messages (see format on the next page).
- If the advertisement lists a set of selection criteria then prepare a specific reason to each of these to include with your letter and resume.

Your application letter is much more than a “cover letter” – when it is well done it:

- **Introduces you** to the employer
- Highlights **key information** from your resume
- Tells the employer **why** they should consider employing you
- Tells the employer why you are **interested** in them
- Invites the employer to **read further** to find out more, and
- Convinces the employer that your **worth interviewing**



Format

A possible format for your letter is as follows:

Your name and address

- Include SUBURBS in CAPITAL letters

The date

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

The person & address you are writing to

- Include the person's name & title if you know it,
- e.g. Ms Smith, Manager
- If name & title are unknown address it to:
- Human Resources Manager, or The Managing Director

Salutation

- e.g. Dear Sir/Madam, Dear Mr/Ms

Why you are writing

- In response to a job advertisement which you need to quote in detail
- Seeking to be considered for any vacant positions which might become available (a 'speculative' or 'cold canvas' letter)

Who you are

- Distil five lines 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

Marketing yourself

- Experience/skills developed which are relevant
- Include reasons for wanting this particular job
- Why you are interested in them
- Any benefits you bring to the job or company

Other documents you may include

- Resume, selection criteria, academic record
- Provide details on how to contact you
- How, when, and where you can be contacted for an interview
- Include semester, home or holiday contact and hours of contactability

Closure

- Use 'yours sincerely' if you address the person by name
- Use 'yours faithfully' if you don't know the persons name
- Sign the letter above your typed name

What to include in an application letter

Remember...

Have a look at the **sample letter** on the next page to get some ideas of how to write an application letter.

- Check out how to divide your letter into key sections.
- Read the application letter tips throughout the letter.
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→ DON'T FORGET!

Example Letters

General Example

Lucy Nguyen
62 Staghorn Drive
BALMORAL Q 4171
Tel 07 3341 4333

10 March 2009

Mr Brad Smith
Australian Institute of Criminology
PO Box 123
CANBERRA Q 2601

Dear Mr Smith

Please accept my application for the position of Research Officer (PN.37) as advertised in the Canberra Times on Saturday 6th May 2009 (or through QUT Careers & Employment).

or

I am writing to express my interest in being considered for an appropriate position within the Australian Institute of Criminology when I have completed my current studies.

This year I will complete a Bachelor of Justice (Honours) with a primary major in Justice Policy and secondary major in Critical Criminology, at Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

As outlined in my attached resume, I have extensive experience in the management and analysis of research data particularly within the criminological field. In addition, I have extensive practical work experience in administrative positions. My duties in these positions included office and staff management, data collection, and report writing. I am proficient in the use of software including Microsoft Office - Excel, Access and PowerPoint, as well as Lotus based systems and freelance graphics programs for the collation of graphs and tables. I also have experience in database administration and statistical analysis with programs such as SPSS.

I am a confident and willing public speaker. During my university studies, I organised and chaired a presentation to a number of criminal justice organisations including NCA and the Federal Police.

My experience in criminological research and research methodologies, combined with my administrative experience and tertiary qualifications, would be an asset to your team.

Enclosed is a copy of my resume and academic transcript. I would appreciate an interview and am available at short notice. If I am not contactable on my home phone: 07 3333 4444, a message could be left with my neighbour, Mrs Reid on 07 3434 3434 (or my parents on 07 5555 4444).

Yours sincerely

Lucy Nguyen

Application 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 application 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 sending the same generic letter to 50 employers.

TIP 5

Keep your application letter to one page maximum. Aim for three to four 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 an application letter:

- Check out the **Careers and Employment website** www.careers.qut.edu.au and look under **Applying for a job** for information 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.
- Also check out the career resources section at Seek.

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 the C&E Office at Level 2, X Block, Gardens Point campus. Please allow 2 working days for feedback.

Speculative 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 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 and 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 hire 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.

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. Not 'work experience'.
- 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 to arrange a brief interview. Give a time-frame for undertaking this.

For example:

"I will telephone you within the next ten days to arrange a brief interview with you or another suitable person. Thank you for giving my letter 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.

Various Examples

Examples of speculative opening paragraphs...

- 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.
- I am writing to be considered for an appropriate position within your company when I have completed my current studies.
- I am writing to you having been referred by Ms Maria Comic. Ms Comic works in the manufacturing division of your organisation and suggested XYZ may be recruiting Information Technology graduates for commencement in 2010.

Examples of paragraphs, which link you and the position...

- The above outlines my commitment to utilising the quality skills that I have developed to date. As you can see from the attached references, my previous employer has acknowledged my innate skills in the management and leadership areas. I found my employment experiences stimulating because of the challenges each position offered. These qualities, I find, add to the satisfaction and enjoyment I obtain from my work and study. I therefore look forward to the possibility of honing my skills and abilities further within the 123 Graduate program.
- Over the past six years I have held a number of part-time positions. These have involved working with a broad cross section of people in a range of settings including home health care. This experience has provided the opportunity to develop communication, time management, and organisational skills.
- From your annual reports and product profile publications, it is evident that XYZ places a strong emphasis on environmental issues. My interest in this area is reflected by the subjects and projects undertaken during my university studies and by my participation in the Mine Safe vacation project with ABC, as outlined in my attached resume.

Examples of closing paragraphs...

- 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 two weeks to discuss when this could be arranged.
- I am confident my experience, academic qualifications and interests would fulfil the requirements of the position outlined. The opportunity to discuss my application with you would be appreciated. I can be contacted on ... or by message on ... during business hours.
- Thank you for considering my request. Please find attached a copy of my resume, academic record, and a selected reference. I am available for an interview and can be contacted on I will make contact with you within the next two weeks to check on the progress of this application.