Cover Letter Checklist

Overview

The purpose of a cover letter is to effectively market your skills to a potential employer to help you gain an interview.

A cover letter is often the first part of your application that an employer will read. You need to make a great first impression or they may not continue on to read your resume.

Your cover letter should demonstrate your understanding of the position and the organisation you have applied for and how your skills and experience match the position.

An effective cover letter complements your resume and will help answer an employer's three main recruitment questions:

- **Can you do the job?** – Show you have the right knowledge, experience abilities and skills
- **Will you do the job?** – Show you are interested in the role and the organisation and that you have the other attitudes necessary for success
- **Will you fit in?** – Show how your values and goals match the organisations values and goals. Your language and stories can also demonstrate how you might fit in with clients and co-workers

Writing an Effective Cover Letter

To write an effective cover letter, you need to:

1. **Analyse the job advertisement**
    Tailor your letter to the requirements of the organisation – do not send the same letter to every company. To prepare your letter, make notes on what the job's selection criteria are (i.e. the required technical and personal skills and attributes) and examples of how you meet them.

2. **Find out as much as possible about the company and the role**
    Research the organisations' products and services, current / recent projects, new initiatives, awards or achievements, values and culture. Possible research sources include the internet, Factiva, industry magazines, the UNSW Careers Library and website, professional associations, newspapers, Information Interviews, publications and reports, etc.

3. **Write with the employer's needs in mind and state your potential contribution to the organisation**
    Organisations hire staff because they have a need that they want met or because the person has the potential to contribute something new. Identify what needs the organisation may have and / or how you could potentially contribute to their future success.

4. **Address your cover letter to a person**
    If the advertisement includes the name of someone to write to, make sure you spell that person's name correctly, use a formal greeting "Dear Ms Roberts" and use "Yours sincerely" to sign off.
    For advertisements without a name, you should contact the company and ask for a name, however, be aware that some organisations will not tell you.
    If you cannot get the person's name, your greeting should be "Dear Sir / Madam or Dear Recruitment Manager or HR Manager" (not "To whom it may concern"), with "Yours faithfully" to sign off.

5. **Grab and keep the reader's attention**
    First paragraph – state what attracts you to the company and/or industry and/or role. Middle paragraphs - briefly outline how you meet the role's selection criteria by referring to your experience. Use relevant examples drawn from your work history, studies and/or extracurricular activities. Final paragraph – provide a brief summary, thank the reader, refer to your resume and state your expectations e.g. "I look forward to the opportunity of an interview." Ensure that you address at least three to five key criteria.

    Use succinct sales pitch or marketing brochure language rather than the language you use for an essay. Describe the benefits you offer rather than lengthy explanations.

    Fillers such as 'Most recently', 'In addition to those skills mentioned previously' and 'However' are unnecessary as the recruiter is most likely under strict time pressure.

6. **Value your skills and experience**
    Phrases like "while I don't have…", and "although I have limited work experience,…" create the impression that you are not confident or proud of your achievements. It is important that you enthusiastically describe your skills and experience.

7. **Format your letter effectively**
    It should be one page only. Allow plenty of white space at the left and right hand margins. Use easy-to-read fonts such as Arial or Calibri in size 10.5 or 11 and keep the font and font size consistent between your resume and cover letter.

8. **Check your spelling and grammar**
    Mistakes show poor attention to detail. Do not rely entirely on your word processor's spelling and grammar checker (especially with Australian vs. US spelling). Reading your letter aloud and showing your letter to others will help to improve the quality of your writing.
    *Please note: Careers Consultants should not be used to edit your spelling and grammar!

9. **Manage your time effectively**
    Writing a good cover letter can be time consuming, and application closing dates can fall around exam times or assignment due dates. When applying through an online portal or via e-mail, aim to send your application before the closing date. If you wait until the closing date and then encounter technical problems, your application may not be accepted late. Also, some employers will begin interviewing as soon as they receive applications that meet their needs.

Cover Letter Structure

Your name
Address
Phone
Email

Date

Contact Person's Name
Contact Person's Position Title
Company Name
Company Address

<div align="center">**Re: Name of position – Company Name**</div>

Dear Ms Jones or Dear HR Manager or Dear Recruitment Team (Only use Dear Sir/Madam if you are unable to find a name)

First paragraph
Detail why you want that job and why you want to work for that company (NB: make sure you highlight how you will meet their needs).

Middle paragraphs
Outline your relevant qualifications, work / volunteer experience, extracurricular activities, training and achievements and link these along with any relevant skills to the selection criteria or the job description.

Do not assume that an employer will automatically read your resume AND cover letter. Always include your key selling points in both of these documents.

Summary paragraph
Tell them why you are the best fit for the company and how your skills will meet their needs. (Tip: you could summarise the 3 best things about you that make you most competitive for the job and how these things will allow you to make an impact / get results in the role.)

Closing paragraph
Thank them for considering your application and make a positive statement about discussing your application and the position further at an interview.

Yours sincerely (Yours faithfully if you do not have a name and have used Dear Sir/Madam)

Your name

Cover Letter Checklist

This checklist will help you assess and improve the effectiveness of your cover letters.
- Place a √ in the right column against all statements that you believe apply to your draft letter
- Where you have **not** ticked a box, consider if implementing the recommended checklist tips will help.

OVERALL PRESENTATION	Letter is one page only	
	Layout is not cramped (*include plenty of white space and generous margins*)	
	No long paragraphs have been used (*guideline: 6 lines max. Per paragraph*)	
	In summary, overall layout looks professional	
TOP SECTION OF YOUR LETTER **includes:**	Your address, preferred telephone contact number / s and e-mail address (*a professional e-mail address incorporating your name*)	
	The date	
	The recipient's correct title (**Ms**, **Mr**, **Dr** etc.) with first name / initial and last name, job title and contact address	
	A personalised, formal greeting e.g. **Dear Ms Roberts** (*or Dear Sir / Madam or Dear HR Manager) (Avoid To whom it may concern*)	
	A subject line e.g. **Re: Project Officer Vacancy (Ref: X0504)** (*Tip: don't use a subject line with speculative / unsolicited application letters*)	
OPENING PARAGRAPH **Why Them?**	Aim to spark a busy reader's attention and interest with your first paragraph	
	Demonstrate that you have done some thorough background research (*do not just quote from the company's website*)	
	Explain specifically what attracts you to the role and / or organisation and / or industry	
	Use appropriate industry specific language – do not use SMS abbreviations, and do not use uncommon acronyms without explaining them	
MIDDLE SECTION **(one to three paragraphs)** **Why You?**	Avoid trying to address all the selection criteria (*keep the focus of your middle paragraphs on the most critical 3-5 criteria*)	
	Do not just state you have a skill – provide evidence. Demonstrate your suitability for the role by providing specific examples outlining where you have previously shown relevant capabilities (*Tip: use achievement statements for each of the above criteria*)	
	Keep to one theme per paragraph (*e.g. relevant experience, or relevant qualifications and knowledge*)	
	Convince the reader why you are more worthy of an interview	
CLOSING PARAGRAPH **Summary and Expectations**	If there is space, summarise the key strengths and qualities that you offer	
	There is no need to mention that your resume is attached	
	Thank the reader for considering your application	
	Request an interview or meeting e.g. "I look forward to the opportunity of an interview/to hearing from you"	

LANGUAGE **Ensure that you:**	language and phrases you have used	
	Thoroughly check all grammar and punctuation: use a good dictionary and people – do not rely solely on the spell check function	
	Use appropriate language – do not use SMS abbreviations, and do not use uncommon acronyms without explaining them	
	The writing style should be appropriate to the industry, direct and succinct	