

## How to complete a job application

Submitting a job application is often the first contact you have with a potential employer, so you better make a good impression. Knowing what to write and what the hiring manager is looking for will help you to submit an application that gets you an interview. There are several important steps that you should follow when completing your job application. You should:

### **1. Read over the job application**

Reading the job application may seem like an obvious step but people frequently skip it. Even if you scanned the job description before you decided to apply, it is still a good idea to go back and read it a couple of more times to make sure you did not miss any details. Employers typically receive hundreds of applications for a position. One of the most common methods they will use to narrow the applicant pool is to eliminate anyone who they think did not read the job description or requirements.

Many employers also use something known as an applicant tracking system (ATS). This is an automated system that can be fine-tuned to reject applications that are missing information or do not have the right keywords. Even though you may not be able to completely predict what the ATS is looking for, you can still advance your application in the system by making sure to include the correct information.

### **2. Use a professional name and email address**

A professional job application calls for a professional email address. Some employers might disqualify an applicant for having an unprofessional email, even if the rest of their resume shows they are perfect for the job.

If you need to create a professional email address, you may want to use a free email service to create an email account that you will use specifically for your professional life. Use your first and last name or a variant and use it for all your job applications. It is never a bad idea to separate work communication from personal communication. During your job search might be the perfect time to do so.

### **3. Follow the instructions**

Sometimes a field calls for a full paragraph, a couple of sentences or just a “yes” or “no.” There are also fields that require you to spend some time answering in-depth questions. Regardless of what the specific questions require, make sure you are answering them correctly. Read the question a couple of times to make sure you understand and take some time to formulate a thorough answer.

There are employers who ask a variety of types of questions, including character, behavioral and hypothetical. If you want to increase your chances of success, you need to respond to these questions effectively and accurately. Not all applications will include long answer questions, but it never hurts to adhere closely to the instructions. Taking care while filling out the information demonstrates to an employer that you are a worthy candidate and invested in the hiring process.

### **4. Tailor your cover letter to the job**

Environments like job fairs require you to repeatedly give the same documents to multiple companies. However, if you are applying for a specific job in person or online, you will want to tailor your cover letter and resume to suit the application. Before writing or editing your cover letter, look through the job description and pay attention to the kind of employee they are looking for. The job description has information that includes the required educational background, what type of personality fits the position, and the skill set they would prefer a candidate to possess.

Draw on the information in the job description and write a cover letter that frames you as the perfect candidate. Keep your sentences concise but impactful. Include as much relevant information as you can efficiently fit into a page’s worth of paragraphs. If the employer likes what they read, they will use the interview process to learn more about the goals or skills you mentioned in your cover letter.

### **5. Include keywords in your resume**

Review the description and find words that look like they relate to traits, skills or experiences that the company is looking for. Use them tactfully throughout your resume and cover letter. There is no need to be heavy-handed with them; a few subtle references are sufficient.

Make sure to include keywords that portray you as capable of fulfilling the job requirements. For example, if the job has any technical specifications, highlight your practical skills, relevant degrees or academic courses. If the job requires you to interact regularly with customers or coworkers, mention your interpersonal and communication skills.

## **6. Check your responses for errors**

Misspellings and grammar errors show an employer you did not care enough to take the time to proofread or that you are not proficient with written communication. Most jobs require basic communication skills, so not putting in the effort to submit a resume that is free from spelling errors, uses the correct pronouns and follows other grammar rules can hinder your chances of being hired.

Take your time when filling out the application. If you are not sure of how well you have done in terms of error correction, ask someone to look at the application for you and make corrections if they find anything wrong. An error-free application is far more likely to at least be looked at than an application that is full of easily-avoidable mistakes.

## **7. Track your applications when applying for multiple jobs**

Remember to keep careful track of all your online job profiles, so you know where you have applied and the roles you have applied to. Keep a spreadsheet or a list of the company names and roles you have applied to, to create a quick reference.

Occasionally, you might find that you qualify for multiple roles in one company, and you may decide to apply for several. What you don't want to do is to make a profile for every job you apply for. If the application system has a "shopping cart" for job listings you qualify for, put them into the cart for one account. Then, it will be easier to track what you have applied for in the event you get calls about multiple roles by different people. It is always a good idea to know exactly what someone is talking about when they call concerning an interview.

## **8. Tidy your social media profiles**

In the modern era, it is common for employers to look at your social media profiles. They want to know something about the person they are hiring and they feel that Facebook and other social media sites are good sources. Go over your profiles and consider removing anything objectionable. That means deleting posts or comments that might not reflect well on you or that do not represent your current maturity level. It is always a good idea to be aware of and control the image of yourself online.

It is still advisable to create a social media profile in your name and to share some personal information, even if you do not use it often. Familiarity and proficiency with social media is an important skill in the job market today and employers may check your personal accounts to judge your competency.

## **9. Upload your resume**

It may seem counterintuitive to submit the resume after you have entered all the information it contains into fields on the application. However, the applicant tracking system typically does not collect the information you have provided into a printable document and the employer may want to have a paper copy of your resume for reference. Resumes are also easy for the hiring manager to keep on file in case they decide to contact you about a job opening at a later date.

Make sure to name your resume file concisely and efficiently. Include your first and last name and the keyword “resume” for easy searching.

## **10. Review before submitting**

Even though you may have already reviewed the application for errors and checked that you followed the instructions, you need a final review of your entries before hitting that submit button. Remember: once you have submitted, you cannot make any changes. Once you are satisfied that you have done your best, click the submit button and leave the rest to the hiring team.

If you want to land a position that reflects your experience, education and skillset, you need to apply widely and often. This said, it is common for all the applications to start to look the same. If you can, ask someone else to proofread your resume

and cover letter for each application. A second set of eyes can make a big difference. You always increase your chances of finding employment when you focus on portraying yourself as detail-oriented and capable.

Following these tips can help you complete job applications more effectively. If you present your skills positively and accurately, relate your relevant experience well and proofread all your information, you will show yourself to be a more eligible candidate for any position. Use these tips and other Indeed resources to increase your chances of getting the job you want.

## What is a cover letter?

A cover letter is a document sent alongside your CV when applying for jobs. It acts as a personal introduction and helps to sell your application. A cover letter is necessary as it gives you the chance to explain to an employer why you're the best candidate for the job. You do this by highlighting relevant skills and experience; therefore you should always write your cover letter with the position you're applying for in mind.

Not to be confused with personal statements for your CV, cover letters should complement your CV but not duplicate it. The general consensus among recruiters when it comes to the length of these documents is the shorter the better. Typically three to five short paragraphs, cover letters should not exceed one A4 page.

If sending electronically, put the text in the body of the email rather than as an attachment, to avoid it being detected by spam filters.

Applications should always include a cover letter unless the job advert instructs you differently.

## How to write a cover letter

Before writing your cover letter it's important that you do your research. While reading the job description thoroughly is essential, it's often not enough. To help you craft a successful cover letter discover more about:

- who will be reading your cover letter
- the organisation and its culture
- the industry it operates in and any relevant news
- company competitors and market position.
- the organisations goals over the next five years.

When writing your cover letter keep it brief, while making sure it emphasises your suitability for the job. It can be broken down into the following sections:

- **First paragraph** - The opening statement should set out why you're writing the letter. Begin by stating the position you're applying for, where you saw it advertised and when you are available to start.
- **Second paragraph** - Highlight relevant experience and demonstrate how your skills match the specific requirements of the job description. Summarise any additional strengths and explain how these could benefit the company.
- **Third paragraph** - Cover why you're suitable for the job, what attracted you to this type of work, why you're interested in working for the company and what you can offer the organisation. This is a good opportunity to show off your knowledge of the company.
- **Last paragraph** - Use the closing paragraph to round up your letter. Reiterate your interest in the role and indicate your desire for a personal interview. Now is the time to mention any unavailable dates.

Once finished read through the document and cut out any unnecessary words and sentences. Don't fill up space by repeating what's already covered in your CV. As a general rule only mention your current salary or salary expectations if the employer has specifically asked you to do so in the job description. If you're asked to include this information put it between the third and last paragraphs.

Unless the job advert states differently (for example, it may ask you to provide your CV and cover letter as a Word document) save with a .PDF file extension to make sure it can be opened and read on any machine. Windows PCs and Macs don't always work in harmony - Windows use a .docx file extension and Macs .pages but if the recruiter uses the opposite system they may not be able to open your file. Using a .PDF file extension should solve this.

If you need help with your CV take a look at how to write a CV.

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## How to address a cover letter

Always try and address your cover letter directly to the person who will be reading it. Bear in mind that you're more likely to receive a reply if you send it to the right person.

If you're struggling to find a named contact you can use a general greeting such as:

- Dear Sir/Madam
- Dear Hiring manager

- Dear Human resources director.

However, general greetings should only be used once you have exhausted methods of finding a named contact.

## How to sign off

How you sign off your cover letter depends on how you addressed it. If you include a named contact, sign off 'Yours sincerely'. If you use a general greeting, finish with 'Yours faithfully'.

## Example cover letters

- **Sample cover letter** - Used to highlight your skills and experience and to express your suitability and passion for the job, cover letters are used to encourage recruiters to look at your CV. Attention to detail is crucial and spelling, grammar and formatting needs to be spot on. Take a look at our sample cover letter for inspiration on how to craft the perfect document.
- **Speculative cover letter** - These can sometimes be an effective method of creating an opportunity. To ensure that speculative cover letters are successful you'll need to do your research on the company you're applying to. Using our cover letter template, discover what to include in speculative applications.
- **Cover letter by a Masters graduate** - You probably embarked on a Masters to expand your subject knowledge, gain industry contacts and improve your job prospects but to really make it work you need to know how to sell your postgraduate qualification to employers.
- **Cover letter for a jobseeker with no experience** - It can be tough applying for a job with no experience but our example cover letter shows you how to promote yourself to an employer if you haven't got any directly related work experience.
- **Explaining a gap in your CV** - Knowing how to navigate around large gaps in your CV can be tricky but it's a mistake to try and gloss over them. Your cover letter is the perfect place to explain these gaps in your employment history to potential employers. Take a look at our sample cover letter to find out how to go about it.
- **Cover letter for changing career** - Find out how to explain a change of direction in our example cover letter for career changers. You'll need to cover why you want to change career (briefly - save the nitty-gritty for your interview) and relate your past experience and wealth of skills to the industry/job you're applying to.
- **Cover letter by an international graduate** - If you'd like to expand your horizons by working abroad, take a look at our cover letter of an international student applying for a job in the UK and apply these principles to the country of your choice.
- **Disclosing a disability** - Just like your gender, marital status and dependants your disability doesn't affect your ability to do a job and you're not legally required to disclose it on your CV or in your cover letter. However, if you would like to disclose a disability to outline any adjustments you may need, this sample cover letter will show you how.

- **Internship cover letter** - To set yourself above the competition you need to successfully sell your relevant skills and experience while conveying your passion for the role. As well as explaining to employers what the opportunity could do for you you'll need to communicate what you could do for the company. Discover how to craft the perfect application for a formal internship with our internship cover letter template.
- **Apprenticeship cover letter** - Apprenticeships are an increasingly popular route into work, as well as a great alternative to university. Find out how to apply for these roles with our apprenticeship cover letter example.

For inspiration and guidance on crafting a CV see example CVs.

## 5 tips for the perfect cover letter

With employers often receiving lots of applications for each vacancy, you need to ensure that your cover letter makes a lasting impression for the right reasons. Here are some tips to increase your chances of success:

- **Tailor to the organisation** - You should rewrite your cover letter every time you apply for a position in order to target the company. Sending out a generic letter for all applications rarely yields positive results and recruiters can spot your lack of time and effort from a mile away.
- **Format** - Presentation is important so you'll need to format your cover letter properly. Make sure the document is as uncluttered as possible, use the same font and size as you use in your CV and if you're sending it through the post or handing it in use good quality plain white paper to print it on.
- **Identify your USPs** - They're your unique selling points. Be positive about what you have to offer and clearly outline how your skills and experience meet those requested in the job description. Demonstrate why you're the perfect candidate.
- **Include examples** - Back up the claims in your cover letter with real evidence or examples that show how and when you've used your skills and experience.

If you're a student or recent graduate you can make an appointment with your university's careers and employability service to access further help when writing your cover letter. You'll be able to talk with specially-trained advisers, get advice on what to include and have a professional eye look over your application before sending.