

Writing a Cover Letter

A cover letter (sometimes called an application letter) is an important component of your communication with potential employers. It is the first document they will read and first impressions are vital when forming opinions.

In the past, cover letters were used as a covering page for the rest of the job application documents and may have been very brief and uninformative about the candidate.

In today's competitive employment environment you should use every opportunity to market your skills professionally. A cover letter should demonstrate to the reader that you have read the job advert carefully and you are interested in the position. It should give the employer a 'snapshot' of the reasons why they should employ you.

A good letter will introduce you in a clear and focused way and encourage the employer to read the rest of your application with interest. Do not rewrite your resume in your letter, but do draw attention to your most relevant and important achievements relevant to the position.

Given that your cover letter is designed to summarise the highlights of your resume and statement addressing selection criteria (if required), it should be the final document that is written after you have considered the position and your abilities in relation to it.

WHAT SHOULD A COVER LETTER COMMUNICATE?

Cover letters should communicate:

- your interest in the position (if advertised position) or potential opportunities
- your understanding and interest in the organisation
- the key skills, qualifications and abilities you have to offer
- what action you want from the organisation

Use positive, confident language throughout – a cover letter is a professional marketing tool and should demonstrate your suitability for the job by communicating to an employer how you will assist the organisation in reaching their goals.

Ensure you have proof read your letter carefully – grammatical or spelling errors will create a negative impression with a potential employer.

WHEN SHOULD I INCLUDE A COVER LETTER?

It is always good practice to write a cover letter when making contact with an employer, whether that is for:

- formal job application process by post
- cold canvassing – contacting an organisation / employer to introduce yourself and see if employment opportunities
- formal job applications online – if requested (at times there will be no place to attach).

It can be unclear at times in formal job applications whether an employer expects a cover letter, so if in doubt, ring the contact person to discuss.

Remember, the cover letter is about marketing yourself and creating a good first impression – so it is good practice to write one for every job application / opportunity.

FORMATTING YOUR COVER LETTER

Cover letters should be professional and written in business style format – your details on the top right, company details on the left. Given employers will not have time to read lengthy documents during the short listing phase, keep your letter to 1 page.

Paragraph 1

If replying to an advertisement, state the position you are applying for, any reference numbers and where you found the job vacancy. State what interests you about the job and how that links to what you know about the organisation needs.

OR

If cold canvassing, state the reason for writing and describe the type of work you are seeking, then why you are interested in working for the organisation. This sentence/s should combine your knowledge of the organisation with your experience and skills and how that links to what you know about the organisation needs.

Paragraph 2

A brief overview of what you've done in your life and your qualifications (a snapshot of your resume). This can include examples of your academic, employment and voluntary experiences, as well as extracurricular interests.

Paragraph 3

Your three main selling points – what can you contribute to the organisation? Give an example of each in a brief way (Bullet points work well for this). *Hint – ensure here that your key skills / strengths link to the position available and / or what the company may be looking for, as well as personal attributes highly regarded by employers – e.g. team work, communication, planning skills.

Paragraph 4

Reiterate your interest in the position / company. Explain what you have enclosed (resume, selection criteria, academic transcript) and ask for something – an opportunity to discuss your application in more detail, or to discuss what opportunity may exist in their organisation in the future. Reiterate how they can contact you.

Finish the letter with:

Yours sincerely,

Signature

Your Name

WHAT IF I AM APPLYING ONLINE?

More and more job applications are now being sent to employers online, either by a web portal system, or via email. So should you still write a cover letter?

Any opportunity to market your skills and knowledge to an employer should be taken up – so it is good practice to write a cover letter for each online application.

ONLINE APPLICATIONS

Read the instructions carefully for online applications, as many have word limits or no text box to include information you would normally put in a cover letter. If there is space to include a cover letter, or attach it, do so.

If there is only space to attach your resume, consider putting the cover letter and resume together and attach as one document.

EMAIL

There are 2 ways to send a cover letter via email:

- in a separate document attached to the email
- within the body of the email – using the same format suggestions as previous page

Whichever way you choose to send it, cover letters completed online should maintain a professional and business like approach. Ensure you have the correct email address for the application to be sent to.

* **Hint** – think about sending attachments to an online application as a PDF to ensure they cannot be corrupted / changed. However, read instructions carefully as many organisations ask for documents to be sent in Word format.

DO'S AND DON'T'S

The cover letter should:

- be to the point – clearly linking your experience to the role being advertised
- be positive and upbeat – make the employer interested in reading your resume
- be personal – where possible, find out who you should address the letter to
- be tailored – for each position you apply for

The application letter should NOT:

- be a summary or repeat of your resume
- be a uniform letter you send with all job applications
- be more than 1 page in length
- be unprofessional – use positive professional language throughout

FURTHER READING

For fact sheets on other career related topics; please go to:

www.utas.edu.au/students/fact-sheets

CONTACT US

Career Development and Employment offer support across all UTAS campuses, and regularly hold job application workshops and appointments.

For more information or to register, go to: <https://careerhub.utas.edu.au>

Submit your resume and cover letter for feedback to: resume.link@utas.edu.au

You can contact us by email or phone.

Email: Careers.Service@utas.edu.au

Phone: 03 6226 2511

Web: www.utas.edu.au/students/careers

www.facebook.com/UtasCareers

COVER LETTER – CHECKLIST

LAYOUT

- Is your letter addressed personally to the appropriate contact?
- Have you set out your letter professionally – employer’s details on top left, your details on top right?
- Is your letter 1 pg maximum?
- Have you included your address, phone numbers and a professional email?
- If applying for an advertised position, did you state the job reference / title at beginning of the letter?

CONTENT

- Have you highlighted your enthusiasm and interest in the job and organisation?
- Are your skills, qualifications and attributes described strongly and linked to the requirements of the job?
- Have you included information about your educational qualifications?
- Have you tailored your letter to the job, rather than use a template letter?
- Have you clearly and concisely expressed how your skills and experience will assist the organisation in achieving their goals / aims?
- Have you mentioned what you have attached (resume, selection criteria?)

LANGUAGE

- Is your letter grammatically correct – with no punctuation or spelling mistakes?
- Have you used positive language to describe your background and key qualities?
- Is the letter written in a professional way – no casual terms / references
- Have you avoided using negative statements about yourself / your qualifications?