



# Write a cover letter

## futuredirections

When you send off your resume in a 'cold' contact with a potential employer or with a job application you should always include a cover letter. This worksheet gives you some tips for writing a cover letter.

### Presentation

Cover letters win interviews—not jobs! A cover letter should:

- capture the employer's interest
- show why you are writing
- indicate how you will benefit the company
- convince the employer to ask you for an interview.

Cover letters target your skills, highlight your 'selling points' and answer these questions:

- **Can you do the job?** What are your abilities, skills, knowledge, experience and qualifications?
- **Will you do the job well?** Are you motivated, dependable and enthusiastic?
- **Will you fit into the organisation?** Do you match the company's image, values and goals? Will you get along well with clients and co-workers?

Time pressures and the number of applications give an employer approximately 30 seconds to decide whether to consider your application further. At a glance an employer looks for:

- how you match the selection criteria
- how well you communicate, including structure, grammar, spelling and punctuation of the letter
- your experience, skills and qualifications
- your level of professionalism
- clues to your personality
- your attention to detail (eg errors or wrong information).

### How should I write it?

Use simple, natural language and:

- be honest, professional, warm and friendly
- use positive words and phrases such as:

I have ...

I am able to ...

I can ...

Experienced in ...

- don't use negative statements such as 'I had personality conflicts with ...'
- don't start every sentence or paragraph with 'I'—try to limit yourself to one 'I' per paragraph or less
- make the letter interesting to read, short and to the point
- be enthusiastic and assertive but not 'pushy' or begging for a position.

### What should a cover letter look like?

- Type your cover letter on a computer and print on clean, white A4 paper.
- Leave space around the edges and clear space between each paragraph.
- Use an A4 envelope if your cover letter and attachments don't fit a DL size envelope.
- Staple your cover letter neatly.
- Don't send cover letters that are photocopied.
- Use a basic font such as Arial, Bookman Old Style or Century Gothic.

## WHAT SHOULD A COVER LETTER CONTAIN?

Check that it contains the following:

- Contact details
- Date
- Name and address of recipient
- Salutation
- Opening paragraph—introduction to the topic of the letter
- Second paragraph—your qualifications and skills
- Third paragraph—your interests and personal qualities
- Fourth paragraph—conclusion
- Closing

On page 2 you can see an example.

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## Example layout

Your contact details.

Name and address:  
Person's full name

- title
- Company name
- Street number and name or PO Box
- Town or suburb, state, postcode.

Salutation should use correct spelling of person's name.

**First paragraph** explains the purpose of the letter.

The **second paragraph** demonstrates that you can do the job, why you are the 'best fit' for the organisation and how your skills meet the organisation's needs.

The **third paragraph** shows you are willing to do the job, motivated and enthusiastic and can fit into the organisation (eg communicate well with co-workers and clients).

The **fourth and final paragraph**: Refers to your enclosed resume, application form or other attachments. Thanks the reader for considering your application. States you would welcome an interview to discuss your suitability (include your phone number again).

If you started with **Dear Ms Smith** you should end with **Yours sincerely**.  
If you started with **Dear Sir/Madam** you should end with **Yours faithfully**.

Use this abbreviation if you enclosed your resume or other pages.

**Kathy Porter**

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Date

Ms Sarah Job  
The Principal  
Burnleigh Primary School  
11 High Street  
Burnleigh SA 5432

Dear Ms Job

**Ref: Teacher Aide**

I wish to apply for the position of teacher aide as advertised in the Adelaide Advertiser on 2 September 2002.

Last year I completed Year 12 at Valley View Secondary School. I obtained good results in English, mathematics, home economics, biology and geography. I am particularly keen to obtain a position as a teacher aide as I am interested in working with children and have held several voluntary and paid positions as a baby sitter for children up to ten years old. I relate well to children and can sing and play the guitar. I also have a portfolio of my art work.

Since leaving school, I have been employed part-time as a checkout operator. In this role I have demonstrated that I am responsible and reliable and a good team worker. Customers have often complimented me on my attention to their needs and my willingness to go beyond the call of duty.

Thank you for considering my application. I have enclosed a copy of my resume. I look forward to meeting you and providing further information in an interview. I can be contacted at anytime on my mobile phone number which is 0405 111 111.

Yours sincerely

*Kathy Porter*

KATHY PORTER

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## Addressing selection criteria

Your cover letter should contain a brief summary of how you meet the selection criteria. It is easier to write a cover letter after you have prepared your resume (see **Worksheet 7: Write a resume**).

Make sure you have addressed the selection criteria by checking off all the following steps.

### SELECTION CRITERIA CHECKLIST

- Read the advertisement, job and person specification or selection criteria carefully.
- Phone the employer for more information if you don't understand something.
- Highlight all the requirements.
- Divide the requirements into 'hard' and 'soft' requirements. Hard requirements include the desired work experience, qualifications and particular skills. Soft requirements are personal qualities such as 'energetic', 'a good communicator' and 'organised'.
- Identify what you have done that proves you can meet the job requirements. These are your 'selling points'.
- Think about how well you meet the requirements in the categories of:
  - skills
  - qualifications
  - experience
  - desirable personal qualities.
- Collect proof of your skills, knowledge, experience and personal qualities.
- Decide how you will address any barriers to your application (eg demonstrate how you could manage the job with a few weeks' experience and transfer of skills if you don't have knowledge of a particular software program).
- Summarise your skills, knowledge, experience and personal qualities under each of the selection criteria.

## Different types of cover letters

There are four different types of cover letters:

- responding to an advertisement
- cold-call or canvassing letters
- referral letters
- online letters.

Identify which type of letter you are writing and follow the hints below.

### Responding to an advertisement

These letters should highlight your skills and respond to the requirements stated in the advertisement.

You should write directly to the contact person stated in the advertisement.

When responding to a recruitment agency, refer to 'your client' or 'your client's organisation' rather than 'you' or 'your company'.

### Cold-call or canvassing letters

This type of letter is written to find out about and express interest in jobs that may be available now or in the future.

Because you're not writing to answer a specific job advertisement you need to:

- say in the opening paragraph that you're enquiring if a position is available
- describe the type of position you're looking for
- research the company to match your selling points to the needs of the company
- interest the reader enough to contact you.

### Referral letters

A referral letter is written to a person in a company or recruiting firm on the recommendation of someone in your network (see **Worksheet 4: Find a job**).

The main difference and advantage of a referral letter is that you begin with mentioning the person who has referred you as an introduction.

Make sure that the person who has referred you has given you permission to use their name.

### Online letters

An online letter uses e-mail to respond to advertisements on the Internet, in the newspaper or on a touchscreen.

You need to consider the following features of an online letter:

- The letter is briefer, but still includes the top two or three selling points.
- Short paragraphs or bullet style format is common.

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- The letter should be easy to read and to the point.
- The title of the position you are applying for goes in the 'Subject' line of the e-mail.
- Don't put the full mailing address of the person you are sending it to in an e-mail. Use the salutation line only (eg 'Dear Mr Jones').
- Remember that writing in all upper case in an e-mail is seen to be a form of yelling.
- Don't use bold type or italics.

## TIPS FOR COVER LETTERS

### **A cover letter should accompany your resume.**

Cover letters communicate 'what you can offer', not 'what you want'.

### **Write a rough draft first to refine, order and edit the letter, and get someone else to read it.**

Keep copies of letters so that you have a record of who you have written to and what you said.

### **Make sure your contact details are up to date.**

Use similar terms the employer uses in the advertisement or terms that are industry specific.

### **Don't list your work history if you already have it on your resume.**

Highlight points from your resume you want to draw attention to.

### **Remember you have less time to catch an agency's attention. An agency wants someone who matches the hiring company's criteria, so be honest and 'quick'.**

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This worksheet is one of a series which supplements the booklet, *Getting A Job - future directions*.

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