



## 1.15

### COVER LETTERS AND SELECTION CRITERIA

**At the completion of this fact sheet you will:**

- Understand the purpose of a cover letter
- Understand the format of a cover letter
- Understand the content of a cover letter
- Understand selection criteria and how to gain further information on responding to them.

#### WHAT IS A COVER LETTER?

This type of letter is used to apply for specific positions and accompanies your resume. It gives you an opportunity to introduce yourself to an employer and provides a link between the job and the skills you have to offer. Letters should be professional, yet written creatively enough to attract the attention of the reader. If a position is widely advertised, an employer might receive over 100 letters and resumes. A well-written letter could determine whether or not your resume will be reviewed. How well you write a cover letter may play a large part in how effective your resume will be. A good cover letter may get you an interview; a bad one may make your resume little more than an afterthought. The cover letter is your chance to sell yourself to a potential employer as the best candidate for a specific position. As such, it's just as important as your resume. In fact, you should never send out a resume without one.

The most important thing to remember is that your cover letter serves a separate function from your resume and should *not* be used to repeat the details of your resume, such as work history, education, or personal objectives. The resume is about you, your experience and your skills. The cover letter is about what you can do for the employer.

How you write your cover letter is as important as the message it delivers. Your letter is an example of how well you communicate, and no employer wants to hire people who can't do so effectively. With that in mind, here are some tips on making your cover letter look and sound professional.

#### THE PURPOSE OF A COVER LETTER

- To answer the employment criteria set down by the prospective employer.
- To introduce your resume to a prospective employer. This is a good way to highlight points on your resume.
- To introduce you and your background to the employer.
- To serve as a sales letter, intended to convince the prospective employer that you have something valuable to contribute and that it would be worth their time to interview you.

#### THE ORGANISATION OF A COVER LETTER

- **Paragraph 1:** Mention how you found out about the job and why you are writing (to apply for the position). Address it to a particular person – it is always better received when addressed to the person reading (if the application

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does not mention a name make a phone call to the business and find out who the recruitment officer is (if not address it to 'the recruitment officer').

- **Paragraph 2:** Why should they hire you? Refer to specific skills as they address the criteria laid down for the position. This takes the most work because you need to "hook" the reader. "As indicated on the enclosed resume..." mention degree, specific course work, work experience, extracurricular activities, summary of resume - two or three things most central to the qualifications.
- **Paragraph 3:** Why do you want to work for them? Optional.
- **Paragraph 4:** The close. Be assertive - I will call you (be specific about when) for an appointment (not "interview"). Do not hesitate to call me at (phone #). If you say you will call, then call. Telephone skills are very important.

### THE COVER LETTER NEEDS TO BE:

- Well structured and succinct
- Typed
- Original
- Addressed to a specific person (put every effort into finding a contact name!)
- Confidential
- Not repetitious of the resume
- Written on matching stationery
- PROOFREAD!!

### TIPS

- **One page is enough.**
- **Address the letter to a specific individual.** Call to request the name and title of the person responsible for hiring graduates in your career area. You may direct the letter to someone with a specific job title, such as Director of Editorial Services.
- **Sound positive and confident.** Your cover letter should motivate the reader to find out more about you, that is, to read your resume and perhaps even interview you.
- **Write an attention-getting introduction.** Remember the three basic functions of an opening: to invite, inform, and entice.
- **State the position for which you are applying and point out your relevant qualifications.** Tell why *you* are uniquely suited for the job you are seeking. Avoid using "I" to begin every sentence.
- **Focus on certain qualifications you wish to emphasize.** Do not merely repeat the contents of your resume. Select specific experiences relevant to the job and talk about details. Fill in the blanks your resume leaves open.
- **Tailor your letter to the needs of the company and the requirements of the position.** How will *the employer* benefit by employing you? Want ads and company publications offer clues about what to stress. Get inside information about the workings of your chosen industry by reading trade publications and business magazines and contacting trade associations.
- **Inform employers of your intention to contact them within the next few weeks.** Make a follow-up call once the resume and letter have been sent.

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- **Take time to demonstrate your enthusiasm and creativity** in this important part of your total sales pitch for the job.

### SELECTION CRITERIA

Responding to selection criteria may form a large portion of your cover letter.

Are you asked for *demonstrated skills*, *basic understanding*, *sound knowledge* or *high level of skills*? There may be other words and phrases used to qualify the amount of knowledge or skills required. Such words and phrases are important and will help you identify the level of skill, ability or knowledge required. Examples:

**Demonstrated or proven** – means you must give examples from experience that demonstrate your possession of the skill.

**Basic understanding** - Must know basic concepts relating to the topic.

**Sound understanding/knowledge** – Means you need an in-depth knowledge of the topic area and you need to go into detail to prove you have the knowledge.

**Potential** – means you must demonstrate you understand the attributes of the skill required, possess similar skills or have a proven record of adapting a particular skill.

The format should be set out in the application package – sometimes you must use the particular criteria as headings for sections in your letter – other times you will need to integrate the lot into one easy to read essay.

For further information on selection criteria and how to respond to selection criteria see the following web sites:

[www.careers.qut.edu.au/emprep.htm](http://www.careers.qut.edu.au/emprep.htm)

[www.uts.edu.au/afeg.htm](http://www.uts.edu.au/afeg.htm)

[www.careers.murdoch.edu.au/criteria.html](http://www.careers.murdoch.edu.au/criteria.html)

[www.deet.gov.au/recruitment/selcriteria.htm](http://www.deet.gov.au/recruitment/selcriteria.htm)

### Summary

- A cover letter is the first thing an employer will read about you – make sure it is interesting, to the point and addresses the selection criteria (otherwise your CV is not going to be read).
- A cover letter is easily constructed by merely following the above formula but addressing it to the particular job being advertised.
- Keep it short.

### References

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