How to Write a Cover Letter

A cover letter should:
- State the reason for your interest in the position, organisation, industry
- Be tailored to suit the position/industry, so you must do research first
- Link your résumé to a particular position
- Be a marketing tool to draw attention to your skills and attributes, relevant to the position
- Mention job requirements as in the advertisement/selection criteria and link to your skills and strengths
- Persuade the employer that you are suitable
- Emphasise skills, qualifications, experience, strengths, successes that you have documented on the résumé which give you the competitive edge
- Usually is no more than one page in length.

In the greeting:
- Make the effort to find out and hence include the name of the contact to whom your application is being sent.
- Address this person formally, e.g. Professor <full name>, Doctor <full name>, Mr <full name>, Ms <full name>, Miss <full name>.

In the first paragraph:
- Express your interest in the position/organisation, stating exactly what it is you are seeking; include the job reference number if appropriate.
- Indicate how you were informed about the job. For example “as advertised in The Australian on 3rd March 2004”.
- Inform the reader as to what you are currently doing by way of study and/or employment.

The body of the letter – usually two to three paragraphs:
- Think clearly about how you will fit into an organisation and draw attention to your strengths: Do you have strengths in interpersonal skills? Are you a good leader or organiser or time manager? How will this give you advantages in fitting into the organisation’s culture?
- Indicate how a position in that particular organisation will help you achieve your career goals or satisfy your interests/values.
- Focus on the particular contribution you can make; show enthusiasm.
- Explain why you want the job; give an indication of why you are interested in this particular organisation.
- Link your qualifications and skills to the position/industry.
- Refer the reader to your résumé for more details.
- If you do not have relevant experience or skills explain how you think you might gain them.
- State how your course/work experiences (full-time, part-time, voluntary and community activities) have given you the necessary technical and generic skills and experience to do the individual duties of the position.
- Explain how the position will fit into your career ambitions and plans for the future.
- If responding to an advertisement you should focus on criteria mentioned in the advertisement.
- If responding to formalised selection criteria, this section of the letter will be shorter as you will write a separate supporting statement to address the criteria.
- Include a summary paragraph which clearly indicates your suitability for the job.
- Always be positive.
- Arrange the content of your letter so it flows logically.
- Allow your own individual style or ‘voice’ to come through.

The conclusion:
- Thank the prospective employer for receiving your application.
- Conclude with a confident statement requesting an interview, or discussion of possibilities if it is an inquiry letter, and reconfirm your interest in and suitability for the position/industry.
- If it is an inquiry letter, always suggest you will phone in ten days or so to check the progress of your inquiry.

General
- Keep the letter brief and factual and no longer than 1 page.
- Proofread very carefully for grammar and spelling errors.
- Show how you can “add value” to the organisation; to do this you must do your research.
- Use words/jargon relevant to the industry; reading company brochures and web pages will help.
- Keep a copy of everything you send to a prospective employer.

The cover letter, like your résumé, is a marketing tool for you. It must be well written and professionally presented.
Frank Ashbury  
27 Appleby Rd  
Chapman ACT 2611

Ms Kylie Noble  
Graduate Recruitment Manager  
ABC Bank  
210 Bourke St  
Sydney NSW 2001

16 March 2005

Dear Ms Noble

After attending your presentation at the Australian National University last week, I wish to apply for a graduate position with ABC Bank. ABC Bank sounded particularly appealing to me because of its strong presence in the Asian markets.

I am in the final year of a combined Economics/Law degree and I am particularly interested in pursuing a career in investment banking. As well as holding a distinction average, I have been an active member of the Economics and Commerce Students Society for the past 2 years and have participated in many events conducted by the ANU Debating Society.

My skills and experience at university have been enhanced by five years as a part-time sales assistant at David Jones, a recent stint as a volunteer guide at the National Museum and a vacation placement last summer as a Research Assistant with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.

ABC Bank is a prominent and dynamic global organisation to which I would enjoy making a strong contribution. In addition, the opportunities for variety, advancement and international postings that you offer to staff as they progress through their careers are very appealing to me.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss this application with you further.

Yours sincerely

F Ashbury

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Tracey Leads
Department of Neuroscience  
University of Science ACT 0000  
Ph: 000 863 1234

Ms Catherine Fishbone  
Senior Editor  
Aus Popular Science  
601 Magazine Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

27 August _ _ _

Dear Ms Fishbone

I am writing to apply for the position of Membership Liaison Officer with the Institute of Science Communicators, advertised via your website.

My excellent communication skills are demonstrated through several teaching appointments and most recently the position of Writing Associate with the University of Science’s Writing Centre. As Writing Associate I have developed and conducted writing seminars for small groups of students as well as editing and providing individual assistance to students writing a wide variety of research papers. I also have outstanding analytical and project management skills developed through completing a PhD in Neuroscience and working part-time as a regular columnist for the website The Chronicle of Higher Education.

My ability to manage multiple projects, and my passion for science communication will make me an enthusiastic and valuable addition to the Institute of Science Communicators staff. I have attached a resume and sample of my writing for your further consideration.

This is a unique opportunity to work with the best science communicators in Australia and I look forward to discussing my skills and experience at interview.

Yours sincerely

Tracey Leads

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