

## HOW TO WRITE A COVER LETTER

(jobseeking advice from Youth Central - [www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au](http://www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au))

A cover letter is a single-page letter that should be part of any job application.

The only time a cover letter should not be included is when a job ad clearly says to NOT include one. At all other times you should include a cover letter.

### The Purpose of a Cover Letter

You might be applying for a specific, advertised job, or you might be contacting a potential employer to see if they have any vacancies. Either way, your cover letter needs to:

- Introduce you
- Mention the job (or kind of job) you're applying for (or looking for)
- Match your skills and experiences with the skills and experiences required by the job
- Encourage the reader to read your resume
- Finish with a call to action (e.g., requesting an interview or asking to meet)

For more about each of these steps, check out "What to Include on Your Cover Letter", below.

### How Long Should A Cover Letter Be?

A cover letter shouldn't be more than one page. It's only meant to be a summary of the information you put in your resume, so remember to keep things short.

### Customise Your Cover Letter

You should never use one cover letter for lots of different job applications.

Your cover letter needs to show that you know what the job involves and what the organisation requires. To do this you need to be as specific as you can about your skills and qualities and how they match the job or organisation's needs.

Here are three simple ways to make your cover letter as specific as possible:

#### 1. Find Out Who to Address it To

Avoid addressing your letter "To Whom It May Concern" if you can. Finding out who to address your application to takes a little bit of effort, but it's worth it.

If you found the job in an ad, the ad will probably name a person to send the application to. If not, call the employer or recruitment agency (don't email them) and ask who to send the application to.

When addressing a letter, don't use the person's first name. Use either "Mr." or "Ms."

#### 2. Find Out More About the Job

When finding out who to address your application to, you should also try to speak to that

person so you can ask questions that will help you tailor your cover letter (and resume).

Questions you might consider asking include:

- What can you tell me about the job?
- What can you tell me about the ideal candidate for the job?
- Is there a position description I can look at? (only ask this if the job ad didn't mention a position description)

The answers to these questions will give you an idea of what you should mention in your cover letter.

### *3. Find Out More About the Company*

Finding out more about a company is also a good way to work out how to tailor your cover letter. Here's some tips:

- If you know the name of the company, look for information online
- If they have their own website, check it out, especially their About Us page
- If the company name isn't in the ad, call the recruitment agency and ask who the employer is

### **What to Include in a Cover Letter**

Here's a list of things that you should include when you write a cover letter. For examples of these things in action, check out the [Sample Resumes and Cover Letters](#) page on Youth Central.

#### *Your Name and Contact Details*

Put your name and contact details at the top of your cover letter. You don't have to give your postal address, but you do need to include your email and phone number.

Make sure you'll be able to answer the number you give - no sense giving your home phone if you're not going to be home to answer it.

Make sure your email address is a professional-sounding one. An email address like [yolo@zapbangpowdude.co.uk](mailto:yolo@zapbangpowdude.co.uk) doesn't create the right impression.

#### *Their Name and Contact Details*

Under your own name and contact details you should include:

- The name of the person you're writing to
- Their position or the name of their company
- Their contact details

If you're having trouble finding this information you can call the company to ask who you should address your application to. You can also use "To Whom It May Concern" - but try to only use this as a last resort.

### *The Name of the Job You're Going For*

At the start of your cover letter explain which job you're applying for. You can either do this on a line by itself (e.g., "Re: Application for Stock Controller position") or in the opening paragraph (e.g., "I am writing to apply for the recently advertised Stock Controller position.")

For examples of how to do this, check out the [Sample Resumes and Cover Letters](#) page on Youth Central.

### *A List of Your Relevant Skills*

Your letter should include a brief summary of your skills and experiences that match the job description. A short bullet-pointed list is fine.

If you're answering a job ad, either the ad or the position description may provide a list of skills and experiences that are essential for doing the job. It may also provide a list of "desirable" skills and experience. Your cover letter needs to respond to all of the items on the "essential" list and as many items as possible on the "desirable" list in as short a way as possible.

Remember that if you say you have a skill or experience, you need to show how you've used it or how you got it (e.g., if you say you've got child-minding skills, mention some jobs where you've used them).

For examples of how to do this, check out the cover letter templates on the [Sample Resumes and Cover Letters](#) page on Youth Central.

### *A Summary of Why You're Right for the Job*

After listing your skills and experience you should explain why this means you're suited to the job (e.g., "The combination of my interest in AFL and my experience with book-keeping makes me ideally suited for this job.")

For examples of how to do this, check out the cover letter templates on the [Sample Resumes and Cover Letters](#) page on Youth Central.

### *Speak Their Language*

Using the same language as people who do a particular job is a good way to convince people you're suited to the job.

Getting familiar with what a company does and how it talks about itself can give you ideas about things to mention in your cover letter, and how to talk about them.

For example, if there's a tool or software or skill the job requires - like machining tools or cash handling - mention it in your cover letter (but make sure you mention it correctly!).

Check out the "Customise Your Cover Letter" section on this page for tips on finding out more about a company.

### *Ask Them to Check out Your Resume & Contact You*

Your cover letter should finish by asking the reader to look at your resume. It should also ask them to contact you about an interview.

Try something simple like, "I have attached a copy of my resume for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you about this application."

For more examples of ways to finish a cover letter, check out the cover letter templates on the [Sample Resumes and Cover Letters](#) page on Youth Central.

### **What NOT to Include in a Cover Letter**

Here is a list of things that you should NOT include in your cover letter:

#### *Typos or Factual Errors*

You should always spellcheck your cover letter. It's even better to get someone else to read it and point out any mistakes or confusing things. People you can ask include friends, family members, your careers teacher or a careers counsellor at your university or TAFE.

Double-check everything in your cover letter. If you mention a company's name, make sure you get it right. If you mention places you've worked before, make sure you get their names right too. Mistakes on cover letters are worse than typos.

#### *Your Entire Resume*

Don't cut and paste your resume into your cover letter. Try to re-word the information on your resume rather than just repeating it. Keep your cover letter short and let your resume tell the whole story.

#### *Using "I" Too Much*

Try to make sure that you don't fill your cover letter with things like "I believe", "I have" and "I am". Once you've written your letter, look over it and see if you can take out - or rewrite - any sentences that start with "I".

#### *Don't Mention Your Other Job Applications*

You'll probably have more than one job application on the go at any one time. It's important, though, not to mention other job applications. You're trying to convince people you really want the job - it's hard to do that if they know you're looking for other jobs as well.

Even though most people assume you aren't only applying for one job at a time, it's best if you act as though you are.

### **Cover Letters for When There's No Job Advertised**

Sometimes you might want to work for a particular business or organisation even though there haven't been any specific jobs advertised. Contacting these businesses directly to ask if they

have any jobs available is a perfectly legitimate thing to do. It can show a high level of motivation and enthusiasm, and could even lead to a job.

Even if there's no job currently available, there's a chance they could keep your details on file and get in touch with you when a job does become available.

This kind of cover letter should be written in the same way as a general cover letter, but with a few differences. You need to:

- Show you've researched the organisation or business and know about what it does
- Mention why you're interested in working for them (in terms of what they do and your own long-term goals)
- Show how your skills, experience and interest fit in with the goals of the business or organisation
- Indicate what you're hoping to get out of contacting them - do you want to know about positions currently available or to speak to someone about what it's like to work there?
- Finish the letter by saying that you'll contact them in a couple of weeks, but that you're happy to talk to them if they want to contact you before that

If you haven't heard back in a couple of weeks, it's okay for you to contact them to ask for a response - try emailing them or calling them to discuss your letter directly.

For examples of this kind of cover letter, check out the [Cold Calling Cover Letter template](#) on this USB. For more information about approaching organisations and businesses directly, check out the [Cold Calling - What Is It?](#) page on Youth Central.

## Email Cover Letters

Sometimes you'll be asked to send your cover letter as an email instead of a separate document. If this is the case you should:

- Write your name and the job title in the email subject line (e.g., "Jayani Lal - Application for Administration Assistant role")
- Remember you still need to use the name of the person you're writing to
- Avoid formatting the body of the email like a traditional letter - leave out the contact details (yours and theirs) and just go straight to the "Dear XXXX" part.
- End the email with a professional signature that includes your phone number
- Always send the email from a professional-looking email address

## What to Do When Only A Cover Letter is Requested

Some organisations may specifically ask you to respond to requirements of the job in a one-page cover letter instead of submitting a resume.

When this happens it's important to link your experience to the job's requirements in your cover letter. When writing this kind of cover letter you should:

- Include contact details (yours and theirs), a reference line and a brief introduction to yourself, as advised in "What to Include in Your Cover Letter", above

- Briefly summarise your experience
- Use bullet points (one bullet for each requirement of the job) to clearly outline a) each requirement and b) how you meet it (each point should be 2 lines maximum)
- Conclude by asking them to contact you, as advised in "What to Include in Your Cover Letter", above

Check out the Applying with a Cover Letter Only template on this USB for examples of how to write this kind of cover letter.

### Cover Letter Templates

For examples of ways to write a cover letter, check out the sample cover letters on the [Sample Resumes and Cover Letters](#) page on Youth Central. These samples have also been included on this USB for you to use to create your own cover letter.

Good luck!

*The information on this page was last updated on 25/2/2015. For up-to-date versions of this & other jobs and careers information, visit Youth Central at [www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au](http://www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au).*