

Writing a Covering Letter

A covering letter (application letter) provides a potential employer with a first impression of you; therefore it should be an impressive introduction. Since employers receive hundreds of applications, your letter aims to increase your chances of being short-listed for an interview.

There are two types of application letters:

1. Letter written in response to an advertised position;
2. A canvassing letter, written to a company/employer where there is no advertised position. It is estimated that only 30% of all job vacancies are advertised, so this type of cover letter can be an effective marketing tool.

The aim of your application letter is to convince the employer that you are worth talking to.

- Begin with a strong positive statement about yourself and how you qualify for the position.
- State why you want to work for the organisation.
- As with your resume, the covering letter should be original and prepared anew for each job application.
- Your letter should be typed (unless handwritten is specified) on A4 good quality paper. Personalised stationery is inappropriate for business correspondence.
- Be clear, concise and specific. The letter is usually a single page in length, consisting of 4 to 5 paragraphs. It may not be read if it's too long.
- Ask someone else to proof read the letter to ensure there are no spelling, punctuation or grammar mistakes.
- End your letter by asking for an interview.
- Neatness, balance, use of space, all these will have something to say about your personal standards and your mental organisation. The letter should look business like.
- If you do not know the name of the person to send the letter to, but you have their title, try ringing the organisation to ask for their name. Starting the letter with "Dear Ms Smith" is friendlier than 'Dear Sir/Madam'. **Note: if you start with "Dear Ms Smith", it is usual to finish with 'Yours sincerely'; if you start with "Dear Sir/Madam" you should finish with "Yours faithfully".**
- Keep a copy of every letter you write. You will need to re-read it before you go for an interview.
- Use an A4 envelope so your application can be inserted without folding. Do not include more documentation than is requested. Do not use folders, binders or other covers. A secure staple in the top left-hand corner is best.