

# ▶ WRITING A COVER LETTER

A cover letter is usually no more than a one-page letter or short email that precedes a resume, and is the first point of contact with a prospective employer. The general purpose of the cover letter is to introduce yourself and your application to the organisation, demonstrate your interest in the position, and motivate the reader to read the rest of your application.

A cover letter must be individualised for each position you apply for and submitted with each application. Even if the job advertisement or application instructions do not specifically ask for a cover letter, you should submit one as part of your application. Most cover letters are short and concise and do not extend beyond one page, unless applications instructions state otherwise.

Cover letters are submitted in many ways including:

- as the body of the email that will have your resume and selection criteria attached
- as a formal cover letter/note that comes first, followed by your resume then your selection criteria response
- as your selection criteria document, which is essentially an extended cover letter.

## Structure of a cover letter

A cover letter generally consists of four to five paragraphs in the following format.

INTRODUCTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain why you're writing; why did the role catch your eye, and why are you interested in the position</li> <li>• Be clear and concise about what attracted you</li> </ul>
BODY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain what you have to offer the employer</li> <li>• Ensure you use full sentence structure and avoid dot points unless referring to statistics</li> <li>• Show that you have carefully read the job advertisement by using the key words to provide specific practical examples of how your experiences match the job requirements</li> <li>• Do not just repeat your resume</li> <li>• You can add other information and examples if relevant to the job requirements</li> </ul>
CONCLUSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank the recipient for their consideration of your application.</li> </ul>

## Things to remember:

- Start with a brief introduction about yourself and state the purpose for writing. Make sure you mention the job you're applying for and your interest in it
- Give a snapshot of relevant skills, qualifications and experience that relate to the job description – basically, a few lines summarising the content of your resume
- If you've claimed you have a particular skill, give real life examples. This is often required in more detail if there's a request to meet selection criteria.

## WRITING A RESUME

Your resume is a vital document in your job application as it is usually the first document read in the selection process. Your resume provides a summary of your skills, abilities, experience and achievements. It serves as the advertisement of who you are as a professional, and is used to make an initial determination of whether you have the right skills and experience for the job and meet the minimum criteria.

Selection panels are often faced with dozens of applications, therefore they do not always read resumes word for word. Your resume does not need to contain lengthy descriptions of previous positions or tasks. It needs to be short, concise, relevant and match the detail you provide in your selection criteria response (where required).

### Format

- Use 10–12 size font (Arial or Calibri are standard), unless otherwise specified
- Don't use gimmicks (e.g. fancy borders, coloured paper)
- Use consistent formatting throughout – font, size, justification, heading position
- Use sub-headings effectively and make relevant points easy to find
- Limit use of highlighting techniques – avoid uppercase, underlining, bolding, italics and multiple fonts
- Use bullet points or tables to categorise and list technical or IT experience
- Delete negative words or phrases to ensure you leave an overall positive impression
- Include page numbers in the footer (e.g. page 1 of 3)

### Sequence

- Enter most recent and relevant information first, then work backwards chronologically
- Order the headings and lists so the most important information comes first
- Address the position requirements closely – use evidence and examples
- Ensure all dates are correct (use months and years only) and explain any gaps

### Length

- Ideal length for professional resumes is 3–4 pages

### Language

- Use a combination of brief text and bullet points – no wordy paragraphs
- Use formal business language – be clear, concise and relevant
- Ensure correct grammar and punctuation
- Ensure correct spelling – English (Australian or UK not US)
- Avoid jargon and unexplained abbreviations
- Delete unnecessary words or punctuation
- Begin bullet points with active verbs (e.g. manage, report, develop, coordinate)
- Use consistent tense throughout (current tense for current job, past tense for previous jobs)
- Avoid repetition of information – draw on broader range of examples

### Detail

- Aim to stand out favourably from the crowd by providing relevant, factual and current information about your education, skills and experience
- Include detail and information to support your claim to the position
- Ensure your meaning is clear, don't expect the reader to interpret