



# Improve your cover letter

## Tell me why

The main role of a cover letter is to clearly outline how you fit what the employer is looking for. If you get it right you will trigger the employer's interest in reading your résumé and hopefully get shortlisted for a job interview.

Each job ad could attract many applicants. To stand out you need to demonstrate how your skills, experience, attributes and abilities match the job ad. Keep in mind the people responsible for the recruitment process will only spend a short amount of time reviewing your cover letter. Some businesses could even use software that "reads" your cover letter searching for keywords.

For all these reasons, you need to write a cover letter that is short contains only relevant facts, uses words you find in the job ad and is free from error.

## Tell me how

### Look for keywords and other employer essentials

Scan job ads to find words that describe what the employer wants. These are called "keywords" and can include:

- work experience, qualifications and technical skills
- "personal attributes" such as "enthusiasm" or "reliability"
- a particular occupational or industry licence, drug and alcohol testing or transport

If the job ad doesn't provide enough detail then ring the contact to find out more. Always use keywords and address these requirements in your cover letter.

### Work out what you can offer the employer

Once you understand what the employer wants, you then need to look at your work, education and life experiences that demonstrate your suitability for the vacancy.

Only make claims about your skills and experience which you can back up with examples and evidence. Review both your unpaid work experiences (such as volunteering for community organisations) as well as your paid work experiences – as both will help you demonstrate your suitability.

### Know why you want the job

The first line of your cover letter should clearly explain why you want the job. Only include reasons that are attractive to the employer. Saying the salary is right will be a turn off.

## Energy and enthusiasm

The last paragraph of your cover letter should be positive and upbeat. Consider thanking the employer for considering your application or indicating that you hope to meet the employer to talk about the job role and how you would make a good employee.

## Create an effective system for filing your job applications

Create a cover letter for each job you apply for and name documents either by date or by job role to make them easy to find again. Filing your cover letters and résumés as hard copies in a folder with the relevant job ad will help you keep track of the jobs you have applied for as well as the names and titles of employers that may contact you.

## Double and triple check

Use the checklist provided to make sure you have created a compelling cover letter. You can also hand the checklist to a friend or family member willing to help you check that your cover letter is first rate and likely to grab the attention of an employer.

## Checklist - My cover letter:

- fits onto one page
- includes my contact details
- is tailored to the specific job ad and I haven't mixed up names of people and employers
- my statements about my abilities use keywords from the job ad
- I have indicated I have all the essential items for the job
- all the claims I've made can be backed up with examples
- the employer is addressed in a formal way e.g. Mr, Ms, Miss
  - I have checked the name, spelling and title of the person I am sending the letter to by calling the employer; checking the job ad; and / or checking the manager's profile on the company website
  - if there was no name in the job ad and no way of finding out who is doing the hiring, I have addressed my letter to Dear Madam/Sir or as advised to do in the job ad e.g. To the Manager of Wheelies Bike Shop
- I have read through my cover letter to make sure there are no spelling mistakes, typos or grammatical errors
- I have signed off the letter in a formal way such as "Yours sincerely," and signed and dated the letter (if I am posting my application)
- I have saved the document with an easy to understand and appropriate title
- I have read the letter from an employer's point-of-view and made sure it sounds inviting