How to Write a Cover Letter

Your cover letter is just as important as your résumé, as it’s typically the first document employers read when considering your application. Some employers even consider your cover letter more important than your résumé because it gives insight into who you are and convinces them whether or not they should continue reading your résumé. This is why you should make sure you have a polished and professional cover letter. Protect your first impression by clearing your cover letter of these few common mistakes.

1. Long and wordy cover letters
Employers and hiring managers are usually reading dozens of résumés and cover letters, so they won’t appreciate receiving a complicated letter that is difficult to follow. It is best to state what position you are applying for, what key skills and experiences you have that make you qualified for the job, and what you have to offer. Make sure you get to the point quickly.

2. Summarising or repeating content from your résumé
Your cover letter should not repeat everything on your résumé, but rather spotlight your experience in the context of the job and highlight the key achievements and skills that make you the best candidate for the position. Your cover letter should entice employers to want to read the whole of your résumé.

3. Sending generic cover letters to multiple employers
Hiring managers can tell when applicants use a generic letter for dozens of positions and doing this won’t convince them that you are serious about the job or really want it. You should tailor every cover letter you send out and personally address the letter to either the hiring manager or HR administrator interviewing you, or try to find out the name of the manager or supervisor you would work under should you get hired.

4. Failing to specify the position you are applying for
If you address the company you’re applying to but not the particular position, you could miss your opportunity. Unless this is a general enquiry, you should talk about the experience you have relating to the specific functions of the position. The employer has laid out what they’re looking for in the job advertisement so make it clear and easy for them to see how you’re a good match.

5. Typos or incorrect information
Your cover letter suggests to employers the quality of work you will produce if hired. If your cover letter is full of typos, grammatical errors or old contact details, this can show laziness and a lack of professionalism.

6. Talking about your personal life or salary expectations
Your cover letter should be focused on how your professional experience can serve as an asset to the company. Do not add personal information that is not related to the job you are applying for. You should keep it professional and never bring up salary expectations in the cover letter.
More tips on what NOT to do on a cover letter

There are plenty of things you can do on your cover letter to guarantee it will go straight into the recycle bin. Here are some of those things. A cover letter is intended to accompany and complement your resume. Making mistakes on it can be fatal for the future of your job application. Don’t forget to put your contact details at the top of the cover letter as well as the date and the address of the recipient.

Dear Sir

Don’t write a generic introduction and especially don’t make it gender specific. Try and find out who will be reading your application and address it to that person, e.g. ‘Dear Mr Jones’.

I would like to apply for a position at your company.

Don’t forget to say which position you are applying for. If the job has a reference number, include it. Many companies advertise more than one position at a time.

My attached resume shows that I have fulfilled all the required elements for employment: I am an Australian citizen, I have a clean criminal record, a degree and experience.

Don’t have a boring first paragraph.

I am of the professional opinion that my attributes as a human being are perfectly suited to the paradigm of this occupation.

Don’t use jargon.

What’s not to like?

Don’t use rhetorical questions.

I am exceptionally gifted at everything I turn my hand to. I have won numerous awards and all my friends would vouch for the fact that I’m a good bloke.

Be specific about your skills and how they will benefit the company.

Between 2004 and 2005, I worked in a fast food outlet where I was in charge of serving people and handling money. Between 2006 and 2009 I worked in a clothes store where I exceeded quotas. I am a member of the following professional associations: The Black Hawk Motorbike group, Clean Freaks anonymous and the Jane Austen Fan Club.

Don’t just repeat your resume. Use the cover letter to expand on and illustrate things you have covered in your resume.

I was sacked from my previous job for not agreeing with the boss on some ethical components of what we were doing, but I’m happy to look for a new job because my career was massively stuck in a rut there!

Don’t be negative.
Im not shore...

Don’t send a cover letter that has not been thoroughly proofread. Incorrect spelling and grammar create a poor impression.

...exactly what your company does but I know exactly what I want in a job.

Don’t send a generic letter. Tailor the cover letter for the job you are going for and do your research on the company.

I am looking for job with flexibility, competitive salary and a company car.

Don’t focus on what you want and what you’ll get out of the job. Tell them what you can offer them.

I have sent my resume to numerous organisations and am really keen to secure a position shortly.

Don’t appear desperate.

Catch you later alligator

Don’t be too informal. Use ‘Yours sincerely’ if you have address it to a specific person, e.g. Dear Mr Jones; or use ‘Yours faithfully’ if you’ve had to resort to Dear Sir/Madam.

John

Sign off with your full name and leave enough room for your signature above it.

Other hints and tips

• A one-page cover letter is best (if applicable, address selection criteria in a separate document).
• A staple in the top left corner of your application is sufficient (don’t use folders/binding/etc).
• Don’t send more documentation than requested.
• Double-check spelling, grammar and formatting (always get someone else to proofread).
• Have a professional-sounding email address (emogirl@hotmail.com is not appropriate).
• If you have to post your job application, send it unfolded in a plain C4 envelope (this fits A4 paper without having to fold it) and, if possible, use a printed label.
• Keep a copy of every cover letter you write and re-read before you go to a job interview.
• Type your cover letter (unless handwritten is specified) on good quality, plain white A4 paper.
• Use one, clear and professional font, and consistent formatting (don’t try to be ‘fancy’).

A cover letter template is provided over the page for your reference. We have also included an example of a job advertisement and cover letter.
Cover Letter Template

Your name
Your street address, Suburb State Postcode
Tel 00 0000 0000 | Mobile 0000 000 000
Email name@provider.com.au

Date Month Year

Mr/Ms full name
If a name isn’t specified on the job ad, call the company (if possible) and ask whom you should make the application to.

Title
Company name
Street address
Suburb State Postcode

Dear [name of contact] If you haven’t been able to find out the name of the person to address your letter to, use ‘Dear Sir/Madam’.

In the first paragraph you should briefly explain who you are and why you are writing to them. Name the position you are applying for and where you saw the position advertised. While it’s fine to start this paragraph with ‘I’, try not to start every paragraph in the same way.

Never forget to mention which job you’re applying for. If the company is advertising more than one position, and you don’t say which position you’re interested in, they may not even consider your application - especially if they receive loads of applications.

Explain why you think you are qualified for the position, emphasising how your previous experience and transferable skills make you ideal for the role. Mention your most important qualifications (for example ‘I have just graduated from a Bachelor of Business Administration’) and what you think you would bring to the company. If the job advertisement lists selection criteria, this is the place to say how your skills and experience meet the criteria they’re looking for.

If a job has asked that you address selection criteria separately, this can go in a separate document.

In the third paragraph, explain why you would like to work for this particular company, showing that you have done research regarding the position.

Companies want to know that you’re interested in them and understand what they do, and what they want from their employees. You may be applying for hundreds of different jobs but you need to make each prospective employer think that their job is the only one you want.

Lastly, politely request that they consider your application, conveying your appreciation for their time.

Being polite and enthusiastic will help to create an overall good impression.

Yours sincerely (or Yours faithfully if you have had to use Dear Sir/Madam)

[your signature]

Print your full name
Example Job Advertisement

**Graduate Accountant position**

Grimes & Associates is a progressive national financial services firm, currently seeking graduates to join our Business Advisory and Accounting department. Working in a close-knit team, you will be exposed to a broad range of accounting and taxation work for small to medium-sized businesses. Under the guidance of our experienced finance team, successful applicants will be trained in:

- Preparing tax returns for small business and individuals, ensuring compliance with payment, reporting and lodgement dates;
- Reviewing and analysing financial records to prepare financial and activity statements, FBT, BAS and GST returns using appropriate working papers and procedures;
- Assisting with budgeting;
- Consulting tax law handbooks or bulletins to determine procedures for preparation of typical tax returns;
- Checking data input and verifying totals on forms prepared to detect errors of arithmetic, data entry or procedures;
- Undertaking ad hoc administration tasks in relation to client files.

You will have the opportunity to liaise with clients, as well as the Australian Taxation Office and other regulatory bodies on a regular basis. As a contributing team member, you will be expected to provide the team with constructive comments, feedback and ideas on how to continuously improve to ensure efficiency.

We are looking for graduates who are client focused, innovative, team players and have a positive ‘can do’ attitude. Strong interpersonal skills are a must, and previous experience in a financial environment is ideal.

If you are a graduate seeking a successful career within a friendly team, in a modern office, apply now! Applications close on 7 July 2013.

**Mr David Jones**
Grimes & Associates
PO Box 123
Armidale NSW 2350
Tel 02 6773 4444
Email hr@grimesandassociates.com.au
Example Cover Letter

Joseph Doe
33 Armidale Street, Armidale NSW 2350
Tel 02 6773 2897 | Mobile 0412 456 789
Email jdoe9@myune.edu.au

1 July 2013

Mr David Jones
Grimes & Associates
PO Box 123
Aarmidale NSW 2350

Dear Mr Jones

Re: Graduate Accountant position

I am writing to apply for the advertised Graduate Accountant position. I am a recent Bachelor of Commerce graduate with a major in Accounting, seeking the opportunity to implement my knowledge and skills and make a contribution to your organisation.

I have experience in all of the areas encompassed by this role through both work and study, including accounts payable, accounts receivable, bank account reconciliations, statutory account preparation and tax compliance, including BAS, GST, payroll tax and budgets.

In addition, I bring a wealth of other essential skills and qualities that I have developed through study and various work experience: teamwork and communication, time management, attention to detail, presentation skills, customer service and the ability to meet deadlines.

During my university studies I demonstrated my ability and energy in maintaining accounting-related employment while studying full time. I believe that with my positive attitude and strong work ethic, I would be a great fit for the advertised position.

You will find me to be a positive, motivated and hard-working person who is keen to learn and contribute. Given the opportunity, I would apply myself with enthusiasm to all tasks, ensuring that I get the job done accurately and efficiently.

My résumé is attached, and I look forward to being able to discuss the position with you further.

Yours sincerely

[your signature]

Joseph Doe