

My First Cover Letter Notes

Front page

Welcome to this online training presented by Swinburne Skills and Jobs centre and my name is Fiona Fowler. This training is for you if you are either looking for your first job or have had jobs where you haven't previously needed to write a cover letter. This session complements the My first Resume video training which you may also like to view, if you have not yet had the opportunity to create your Resume.

Objectives

In this session you will learn about the purpose of a cover letter and, using a sample cover letter, we will describe the key information that needs to be included in the cover letter. So that by the end of this session, you will be able to create and tailor a cover letter for each job for which you apply. To help you do this, you may also like to stop the training at any time and complete your own details as we go. At the end of the session we will also let you know where you can go for further support and to help answer any of your questions.

What you will need during this session

To get the most out of this session, you will need the following:

The My first cover letter blank template which is available in a word doc. Make sure that you have it open on your computer as we go along.

You will also need a copy of your completed Resume.

It would also be good if you have found a job that you would like to apply for and have the Job Ad open as we go along.

You might like to stop and take notes so a pen and paper will be very handy.

The purpose of a Cover Letter

The purpose of a Cover Letter is to encourage a potential employer to read your resume. It is often the first document that the employer or recruiter will read when considering a job application. So, this is your opportunity to provide an overview of your skills and experience and how they match what the employer is seeking.

Most employers do expect a cover letter and not including one, means that you could be at high risk of not progressing to the next stage of the job application process – that of getting short listed for an interview.

It is very important that a different cover letter is written for each job that you apply. Employers are not impressed by a standard cover letter that is not tailored to the particular job. Remember this is your opportunity to show why you want this job and how you can provide value to this role and to the employer.

Before we look at what a good cover letter includes, we will run through some basics around formatting.

Simple Formatting Tips

A potential employer or recruiter will only spend seconds or just a few minutes looking at your cover letter. So, you need to ensure that the letter is very easy to read and clearly laid out.

Here are some simple formatting tips to encourage the employer to start reading your letter.

- Use the same font throughout. Use a classic and easy to read font style such as Calibri, Arial, Verdana or Helvetica.
- Use the same font size around 11-12 is good.
- Write clear sentences and once you have completed your cover letter check for any grammatical or spelling mistakes. Many employers have been put off by simple typing errors and simply discard your letter. Some believe that if you don't check your letter carefully, this may be an indication of your attitude towards completing work tasks.

Cover Letter Layout

Let's now look at what a Cover Letter looks like and the important points to include. We will be going through each of these points in detail, in the coming slides. But for now, we will just provide an overview.

- Name and Contact details
- Personally addressed
- Job Title
- Introductory paragraph
- Paragraphs highlighting how skills and experiences are relevant to the job
- Conclusion
- Polite finish to the letter

Cover Letter Template

- You have been provided with a Template and you might like to get it out now, so that you can complete it as we go.

Let's look at completing a sample Cover Letter

Let's now look at an example, using the case of a job seeker whose name is Simona and we are now going to start writing a Cover Letter. We will introduce to Simona, the work she is looking for and then learn how to tailor the Cover Letter to the specific job.

This is Simona

Simona is a young woman who has previously worked as a babysitter part time for two years and she also volunteered at a few different sports venues. She completed a Certificate II in Sport and Recreation while at Secondary school and recently obtained her Victorian Driver's license, as well as completing the Responsible Serving of Alcohol (RSA), early in 2020.

Simona's interests are Sport and Photography.

Finding the job

Simona really enjoys helping people and she would love a job that combines her interest of sports and helping others. So, she has decided that a customer service role would suit her skills, experience and interests.

Simona has found a job on Seek that would be a good match for her skills and interests. This receptionist role is working for Kaiser Physiotherapy.

Let's look at what Simona needs to do now that she has found her job.

Writing the first section of the Cover Letter

Let's look at starting the cover letter by using the template provided.

Your name and contact details are placed at the top of the page on the left- hand side. This is a traditional layout to a letter and easy for the potential employer to read.

You need to ensure that employers can contact you, so do include your phone and email address. Please ensure that you email is Professional sounding. Having a Gmail account is fine but having an address that you think may be funny such as "I am sexy" is not and can put employers off. If possible, try and create a simple email address that includes your name.

Regarding your home address there are differing viewpoints. Traditionally, your full address is included. However current practice is to show only the suburb or to not include the address at all. The reason for not including the address is if you feel that there may be a potential bias working against you. For example, if you apply for a job in the Northern suburbs but live in the South, some employers may wonder if you can regularly get to work on time. Now you may know that you can do this, but you may decide to leave your address off the resume and wait until you get to the Interview and impress the Interviewer there. On the other hand, sometimes your address may be an advantage. The job may be located in your local area, and you want to highlight how close you are to this job. Ultimately it is your decision as to whether you include a full address, just the suburb or no address details at all.

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Include the current date – the date for which you will be sending the letter

Then as a first step to show the potential employer that you are customising your cover letter, make sure that you address the letter to the company name and its address. Now you may have to do some research to find the location of the company. If the cover letter is being sent via email it is still polite to show that you have researched the company location.

Next it is very important to address the letter to a specific person. Try not to use “To whom it may concern, Dear Sir or Dear Madam”. If you don’t know to whom to address your letter to, then ring the organisation to learn the name of the most appropriate person. This will show the company that you have the capacity to research and that you are able to take initiative, as displayed by contacting the company.

You want to show the prospective employer that you are polite and respectful. So, when addressing the letter, make sure that use “Dear Mr Smith or Dear Ms Smith”. Don’t address the person by their first name e.g. Dear John or Dear Susan as this is not seen as respectful. You obviously want to create the very best first impression that you can.

Finally, clearly show the title of the job position as displayed in the job Ad.

Let’s now look at Simona’s example.

Simona’s example

Simona has included her name, contact number and email only. Simona could have included the full address or just her suburb. However, as the job is located quite a distance from her room, she has decided not to include her address details.

She has included the current date.

The original job Ad was signed by a James Cole and she has researched the company and found that he is a Senior member of the team. She has also located the address of the company.

She addresses the letter to Dear Mr Cole

The Job Title in the Ad is shown as Customer Service Assistant and this is what Simona writes. It is shown in bold to make it stand out. Sometimes a company may be advertising for more than one position at a time, so that it is very important to clearly show for which role you are applying.

Time for you to complete the first section

We're now going to pause while you start completing your details using the template provided. You will just need to hover your mouse over each line, highlight the word or phrase and then type your detail on top. You want to ensure that you don't leave any of the template's words or arrows in your final copy.

So, you may have a copy of a job Ad for which you want to apply, so now is the time to get it out and have a look at the Ad.

So, for this section, you will complete your Name, contact details, date of application, name of the company and their address. Importantly address the letter to a person and not to "Whom it may concern". If you don't know the name, then try contacting the company.

Then finally show the job title as displayed in the Ad.

See you soon.

Writing the first paragraph

The purpose of this paragraph is to identify the job that you are applying for, where you found the job and the date of the job ad. If there is no job ad, then you would describe how you found out about the job vacancy. This paragraph is short and to the point and is designed to capture the eye of the potential employer and to encourage them to keep reading.

A good way to start the paragraph is to say "I am interested in applying for.... (then show the job role) or I wish to apply for the position of (then write the job role).

If you look at the template above, you can see that an opening sentence has been provided for you and all you need to do, is to add in the name of the job role and where you found the job.

The next section of this first paragraph is to briefly describe why you are interested in this role. If qualifications are a key aspect for the role, then you may mention them in this first paragraph. An Example **of education and interest could be:**

I admire the passion and commitment that the BBB company has for improving customer experiences. I am Diploma qualified with demonstrated experience in customer support roles. This combined with demonstrated initiative and strong Microsoft skills would make me an excellent ambassador in achieving the BBB customer vision.

The above statement shows that you have researched the company's vision and have highlighted how your qualifications and skills can bring value to the role.

Simona's example

Simona uses the template and makes slight changes to it, so that it reflects her "voice". She identifies that she found the job via Seek on the 10 September.

She then provides two sentences on why she is interested in this role. She has also demonstrated that she has researched the company, Keiser's vision, by including the key words "developing an individual's long-term health focus". She then describes how this focus matches her own interests.

This shows the potential employer that she was interested and used initiative to research the company.

Time for you to complete the first paragraph

We're now going to pause while you start completing your details using the template provided. You can use the first sentence that is provided in the template if you like, just remember you will need to hover your mouse over any words and arrows that you want to replace. Then type your detail on top. You want to ensure that you don't leave any of the template's words or arrows in your final copy.

As a reminder, show the job title for which you are applying, where you found it and on which date.

Then write a couple of sentences that describe your interest in this role. Remember it will add to your application if you can show evidence of research by including some key words from the company.

See you soon.

Preparing for Paragraphs Two and Three

The next paragraphs will describe how your skills and experiences are relevant to the job. To show this, first you will need to carefully go through the job. In the next slide, we discuss how to do this by highlighting the key words in the Job Ad.

Highlighting key words from the Job Ad

Once you have selected a job, you need to carefully look at what the employer is looking for in an ideal candidate.

Go through the Job Ad, line by line and highlight the following;

Identify the tasks and skills – to do this find the words used to describe the skills that are needed. Skills show you can complete the tasks. For example, the ability to use Excel or to answer phone enquiries.

Also identify the personal qualities or attributes that you can show the prospective employer that you can bring to the role. For example, communication skills, teamwork, problem solving.

Now you need to determine how well you fit the employer's needs

This is an opportunity to review your past experiences of employment, volunteer roles, work experience and education. Your completed resume should help you in this process.

Using the key words from the job Ad, write down examples that show how your skills and attributes will meet the requirements of the role and be a good fit for the employer.

It is important that as you are matching the employment requirements, use their key words

Example

Let's look at the job Ad that Simona has found

By going through the Ad carefully we can see that the key tasks are;

- greeting and assisting customers and having the ability to confidently handle enquiries using telephone, face to face or email
- Providing a range of Administrative support
- Computer experience, Microsoft Software, data entry, invoicing & payments

The attributes or the qualities or characteristics that are needed include;

- Having a strong work ethic
- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills.
- Focus on helping the Team to achieve their outcomes. So, showing the ability to work well in a team and being focussed on the group and not just the individual
- Being Flexible in the hours available to work
- Being adaptable and having a friendly attitude
- Having the ability to take direction. This means having the ability to listen to a Manager's request and to ask questions where necessary.
- Willingness - willing to undertake training

[Time for you to highlight key words in selected Job Ad](#)

So, you may have a copy of a job Ad for which you want to apply, so now is the time to get it out.

Go through it carefully to see if you can identify what you think may be key tasks, skills and qualities that the company requires.

Doing this stage is very important as you will be writing a couple of the paragraphs that demonstrate that you have the necessary skills and experience.

We're now going to pause while you make a note while you highlight the key words.

See you soon.

Writing paragraphs two and three

Now that you have highlighted all the key words, the next step is to incorporate them into short and descriptive sentences.

Now you can show the information as full paragraphs or even as dot points. Using dot points, can help the key skills to really stand out. Let's look at Simona's example

Simona's second paragraph example

Now Simona may not have experience with all the job requirements and that's okay. We will see how she can show examples of the experiences and skills that she does have.

Simona has decided to use a combination of dot points and sentences.

While the job does not require any formal educational qualifications, Simona has displayed her interest in this area by mentioning her Sport and Recreation qualification. This also illustrates to the Employer why she would be seeking a role working with Physios.

Simona then describes her experience of how to assist customers and demonstrates examples of interpersonal skills

She further describes examples of the qualities; organisation, coordination and teamwork by including examples from working as part of a sport team. Now the qualities organisation and coordination were not specifically mentioned in the Ad, but Simona has researched and found that these qualities are highly desired skills in an office environment.

Simona then states that she is skilled in the required computer software and importantly, that she is very comfortable learning new software.

She then provides examples of other administrative tasks with which she is familiar.

Simona's example third paragraph

In this paragraph Simona continues to incorporate some of the key words (strong work ethic, undergo in house training and focus on customer service). She has included the information in just two sentences.

Time for you to write your second and third paragraphs

We're now going to pause while write the next two paragraphs. You may find that this takes some time and you may even do several versions. This is totally normal, and it is okay to keeping coming back and make changes.

Remember Incorporate the key words and demonstrate how your skills, experiences and qualifications will benefit the organisation.

See you soon.

Writing the final paragraph

This paragraph provides a summary of why you want the job and states again concisely, why you are the best candidate. Also state that your resume is attached. Provide a call to action – by saying that you look forward to an interview. So you are reminding the employer that you are willing and keen to attend an interview.

Remember to sign off politely and sign your full name

Simona's example

Simona provides a positive finish to the cover letter by saying that she is flexible in working hours and has an enthusiastic and positive attitude. She highlights how these qualities are important for a customer service role. She then refers to her resume and mentions that she is available to answer any questions in an interview. She finishes the letter by politely signing off – your sincerely and shows her full name.

Time for you to write your final paragraph

We're now going to pause while write your final paragraph. Remember to use the template and to remove any words and arrows that are not needed. This paragraph provides a summary of why you want the job and states again concisely, why you are the best candidate. You should also provide a call to action – by saying that you look forward to an interview. Remember to sign off politely and sign your full name.

See you soon.

Putting it all together

Now that we have written all the paragraphs, it is time to put them all together to check how well the whole letter reads. We want to double check that key words from the job Ad have been included and that we have provided examples of relevant skills and experiences in the completed letter. It's a good idea at this stage, to give your cover letter to a friend or family member to read and they can provide feedback on how well the letter reads and whether they have picked up any spelling or grammatical mistakes.

Summary

We have now completed the cover letter. The main points to remember – keep it simple and easy to read. Ensure that you use the same font and size throughout. Check for any spelling and grammatical errors. Your cover letter should be only one page. A potential employer will initially want to skim the information, so make it as easy as possible for them. If you have gone to more than one page, you have put in too much information and will need to edit.

Do ensure that everything that you include on your cover letter is the truth. You can get caught out if you are not honest and this does not look good to potential employers.

Where to next?

It's been lovely sharing this journey with you today and I want to let you know that there are supports that we can offer you at the Swinburne Skills and Jobs centre. We offer a free service where we can help you with your resume, cover letters, offer interview assistance

and a range of other services. You can also email your cover letter to us and we can check through it and provide suggestions. Shown here are our contact details and we look forward to helping you.

Further training sessions are available, please check our website or contact us for details.