

COVERING LETTER

Please don't feel anxious about your covering letter! Many people overestimate its importance. Keep it in perspective – while it is an element of the application process, we've never heard of anyone landing a job – or losing one – on the strength of the covering letter alone! Chances are the letter will be read once and not saved beyond that application as it is particular to that vacancy. The CV is far more important. If the ad doesn't ask for a covering letter, it is still safer to include one, but understand that it might not be read.

Include the name of the application contact if provided. If not, try calling the organisation to find out. If the role is internal and you know the person, write "Dear [First Name]". There is no need to be overly formal with someone you see every day. Where you don't know the name and can't find out, you can write "Dear Sir/Madam" or "Dear HR Manager".

The main mistakes people make with a covering letter are:

- Too long and wordy – try to keep it to one page.
- Explaining to the reader where and when you saw the ad. There is no need.
- Writing a boring prose version of the CV that is going to be read anyway.
- Introducing general information not included in the CV. The CV should be a stand-alone document. It is unreasonable to expect the reader to cross-reference two or more documents. The covering letter may elaborate on information contained in the CV but should not introduce new material unless it is of a personal nature eg "Please note I will be relocating to Sydney in September" (although we would recommend noting this after the address field on the CV as well!).
- Failing to focus on what matters to the reader. The reader is both your audience and your buyer. The letter should contain what the reader needs to know, not what you want to tell them. For example, you may speak 15 languages but if it is not relevant for the job, there is no need to include this interesting fact.
- Focussing only on the "soft" skills [personality] rather than the "hard" [factual] ones. You should do both but mainly the hard.

- Using overly formal language (eg "perusal") – it can appear stilted, depending on the role.
- Setting the document out like an old-fashioned letter. There is no need for your home address in the top right-hand corner etc. No one is posting anything.

Don't be afraid of writing a covering letter that is simple and different. Show some empathy for the reader by making it easier for them to connect your experience and their needs. Your letter can contain a short, punchy list of relevant qualifications, skills and experience. You can write simply "I can offer you:" followed by a list that mirrors what the reader wants as noted in the ad and/or job description eg:

I can offer you:

- *Ten years of hands-on ward experience in emergency paediatrics.*
- *Masters qualifications in Public Health and an undergraduate in nursing.*
- *Five years' tenure with The Children's Hospital at Westmead.*
- *Excellent research skills, having prepared several brochures for the public.*

Our handout, Key Selection Criteria, explains how to write a covering letter where KSC are provided but not required to be addressed separately. In this case, you might have a list of general offerings then a section addressing the KSC very briefly eg:

My CV demonstrates that I can meet the Key Selection Criteria, for example:

- *Project management: I was Project Lead on the recent electronic medical records project, a first for NSW. I also coordinated hospital-wide preparations for accreditation audits for the past three years.*
- *Communication skills: My referees will be able to attest to the high quality of my written communication skills. On the verbal side, I have delivered training and articulated the professional development needs of nurses as a member of the Hospital's Education Steering Committee. I also note your focus on disability and am fluent in Auslan.*

MORE
INFORMATION

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Many people “sign” the letter in a cursive font. This is far preferable than printing, signing and scanning. If you can scan your signature as a clear picture file and insert it into the letter, then use that, otherwise a cursive font is probably better than a blank unsigned space.

SAMPLE:

[Date]

[Their Name]
[Their Position]
[Their Company]
Via email [email address and remove the hyperlink]

Dear [Name]

POSITION

Thank you for the opportunity to apply. I am a [Job] at [Organisation]. In relation to this position, I can offer you:

- [Mirror their first requirement in a sentence or two in your own context].
- [Second point etc].

I'd welcome to opportunity to discuss the position and my application with you further in an interview. Please contact me at any time on [Mobile Number – and make sure there is proper voicemail].

Yours faithfully

Samantha Citizen

[Your name]

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