



Get Attention with Your Cover Letter



Work It Out

Growing Your Knowledge Base



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Get Attention with Your Cover Letter

A well written application cover letter can be the difference between getting an interview for a job or not. Knowing how to present yourself so that you sound interesting or even irresistible to the employer is the key. In many ways it is all about the story that you manage to tell as part of your letter.

Whenever you are sending an application, whether for an advertised job or through cold calling, mail or email, you will need some sort of covering letter. The content of that letter will vary depending on the purpose and/or the employer's stated needs, such as advertised selection criteria or any other information noted in the advertisement. Job advertisements can be very specific about what you must include for an application to be considered, so get clear on the requirements.

When employers advertise a position, they will normally list required skills and knowledge to undertake the job. These items are known as selection criteria – the items they will use to choose the right applicant. When a business lists selection criteria you need to include comments or statements on your skills and abilities in relation to these, either in your covering letter or as a separate attachment. This is referred to as making a statement of claims or addressing the selection criteria. Sometimes employers want a separate statement of claims to be attached. If so, refer to the *Guide: Addressing Selection Criteria* listed under Other Resources on the next page. If a separate statement is not required, then your cover letter needs to include comments relating to these selection criteria.



It is important to keep in mind that the covering letter is always written from the perspective of the benefits to the potential employer, so it sets out what you have to offer the employer, not what you want to offer or show. A good covering letter is intended to get you an interview and so it must contain certain things to hook the employer's interest.

Covering Letter Content

Your covering letter should have your name and contact details clearly noted. The date and the name of the person to whom the letter is addressed should be included. If you are applying for an advertised position the job title, and where relevant, the reference number should be clearly noted.

Your covering letter should be brief yet contain sufficient detail to persuade a potential employer that you are worth interviewing. The whole purpose of your resume and covering letter is to get yourself in front of the potential employer. You are undertaking a marketing exercise and the product you are selling is you; your skills, abilities, experiences and character traits.

You need to comment on all the essential needs of the job, including any skills and selection criteria noted. If the advertisement is not clear, or you are cold calling, then you need to do some research on what would be needed in the job to demonstrate that you know. You can research training qualifications, similar job advertisements, or just Google it, You might ask your network of contacts if they have information on the business. Anything that shows you have made an effort to find out about the nature of the job will benefit you.



Understanding the Psychology of the Sale

If the purpose of a great resume and a well written letter is to sell yourself to an employer to get an interview for a job, then it is important to understand the psychology of the sale.

Most sales strategies rely on a sense of potential loss, the idea that you need to act now or miss out. The weird thing about our brains is that all of us have a negativity bias. We are more concerned about missing out on something than making a gain, so anything that can generate this feeling will encourage us to buy. This is why you often see sales that are “for a limited time only” or “only while stocks last” and so on. These approaches work because people are frightened of missing out.

So what this means for you, is that you need to understand how to sell to the specific business using sales psychology. You need to get the potential employer to think that they will miss out on something if they do not interview you.

To do this, you will need to do your research on the business or industry. Identify the pain points in a business or industry, those things that are problematic. For example a business may suffer from high staff turnover, so you want to mention that you are a stable and reliable person, keen to secure a long term position. Ultimately what you are doing is subtly stating something that takes away the employer’s pain. Given the brain’s negativity bias, we get focussed on our pains and issues. When you demonstrate that you can take away a pain, you create a bias towards you in the employer’s mind.

Other Resources

Get a template document here:

[Simple Cover Letter](#)

Get the guide here:

Addressing Selection Criteria

On the government training website you can see the units of training that can be undertaken for certain qualifications which will help you to understand the nature of related work.

[Training Competencies](#)

Here is a short video on bias and how this affects decisions.

[Unconscious bias](#)

These videos cover the psychological triggers for buying. While they relate to business activities the psychology is the same. Tell them your story and make sure you make it clear you will take a way their pain. Recruiting new staff can be “painful” because it can take time and effort to get people started in a new job. So demonstrating you will be effective from the start can be a big sales trigger.

[Psychology of Selling 1](#)

[Psychology of Selling 2](#)

Another way in which you can influence an employer's thinking is to understand how people make decisions. People make emotional decisions and rationalise their decision afterwards. The decisions they make tend to be self-centred, away from pain or towards pleasure and subject to their particular biases. It is important to understand that our brains are biased when it comes to making decisions.

One of those biases is "like me". We tend to feel drawn to people who are similar to us, because we feel more comfortable with people who are like us. So you need to create an impression that you are similar to the employer.

The advertisement will give you clues as to what is important to the employer. The selection criteria will be written from the employer's view point and so will incorporate their thinking and what is important to them (or biases). Keep this in mind.

Tell your story through your letter and resume, let the employer see that the sorts of tasks or the industry in which the job is situated is something to which you have always been drawn. Stories are liked by people because they appeal to our emotions – remember we often make decisions emotionally not rationally.

Finally keep in mind that recruiting new staff can be "painful" for employers. This is because it can take time and effort to get people started in a new job and trained to a point where they will contribute to the business. So if your letter can add pleasure or take away pain (the pain of recruitment) and show a common interest, and that you have knowledge or skills that will allow you to contribute to the business from the start, then you are going to be hitting some positive notes.

The key is to do some research and understand what is important to the business.

On the next page, you will see a sample letter and the link for this simple covering letter template is on the previous page in the blue box.

In this letter, you will see the psychology of the sale in action. The reference to being "an effective and valuable employee" and noting existing skills and experiences, including the use of industry terminology, shows that the recruitment and starting phase of employment should be fairly pain free.



You want your letter to shout Hire Me!

I am the one you are looking for, the right mindset or attitude, the right skills and abilities and my story shows a demonstrated interest in and understanding of the type of work for which I am applying.

Sample Cover Letter

18th June 2018

Mr Adam Hollis
Managing Director
Adam Hollis Plumbing
P.O. Box 9999
Casino, NSW 2470

Dear Adam

Ref: Apprentice Roof Plumbing

I wish to apply for the Apprentice Roof Plumbing position, as advertised in the Northern Star on Saturday, 16th June 2018, reference #123.

Last year I completed Year 10 at Casino High School where I obtained very good results in Construction and Design. Since leaving school, I have completed my white card training and I have been involved in a voluntary youth training program designed to development my employability skills to support my entry to work as an effective and valuable employee.

I am particularly keen to obtain the position of Apprentice Roof Plumbing. I enjoy working with my hands and I am interested in pursuing trade qualifications in the construction industry, and in particular roofing. I have over 12 months experience working in roof plumbing through my voluntary work while at school and casual employment as a roofing assistant since leaving school. I am very fit and would be able to undertake the types of activities involved in the position, including working at heights.

I have good foundational skills in roof plumbing through my casual work with Maxwell Tyler. This experience included weathering and passing sheets up, screwing off roof sheets, operating a pop riveter to build stop ends in guttering and fixing flashings as well as setting up and pulling down trestles. I have experience in basic building construction including the use of power and manually operated tools and equipment relevant to the position. These skills and experiences will ensure I can make a valuable contribution to your business from the start.

I am hard working, punctual and understand the importance of following instructions accurately and, as required, taking initiative. I am very keen to secure work, willing to undertake new challenges and to learn new skills. I believe these personal characteristics will help me to fit in well in your organisation. I also have very good literacy and computer skills which will allow me to complete the formal training component of the apprenticeship, whether this training is delivered online or face to face.

Thank you for considering my application. I have enclosed a copy of my resume. I look forward to meeting you and providing further information in an interview. I can be contacted at anytime on my mobile phone number 0999 999 999.

Yours sincerely,

Mathew Williams

CONNECT, Northern Rivers Inc is a not-for-profit entity that operates in the Northern Rivers of NSW, Australia.

CONNECT is focused on supporting young people still in school, and those who have recently left school, to reach their full potential in the fields of work, education and training.

CONNECT offers a range of youth services, including the Work It Out programme which operates in the Northern Rivers of NSW. The Work It Out Programme is designed to support young people aged 15-19 who are not in employment, education or training to either re-engage with school or transition to training or work.

More information on the Work It Out Programme can be found at the Work It Out website, along with other guides in this series.

Check out our website at the link below for more Guides in the Work It Out series.



Work It Out

www.workitout.org.au