Writing a cover letter

“Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life.”
- Confucius

Your cover letter is the first document most potential employers will read, so it pays to make sure it gives the best possible impression of you and your suitability for a role in their company.

Your cover letter must:
- Emphasise your interest in the position and the company.
- Clearly show how your skills and experience match the role.
- Provide a concise snapshot of all the reasons why you should be hired.
- Be a summary of the highlights of your resume and selection criteria; therefore write it last.
- Be kept to one page and printed on good quality A4 paper, or attached as a Word or PDF document if sent via email.

Do your research

Your cover letter will stand out if you can clearly show why you want to work for the particular company you are approaching. You can find useful information on a company through its website and annual reports, publicity materials, professional associations, business magazines, trade journals or the stock exchange.

Obtain the position description by phoning the company to request one if it is not mentioned in the advertisement. If writing an unsolicited cover letter, or cold call letter, target your letter to the needs of the employer by identifying key transferable skills that you possess.

Link your skills to the position

Your cover letter should flow in a way that takes the reader from one point to another naturally and logically. See over the page for suggestions on structuring and laying out your cover letter. Key points to remember:
- Avoid long, complicated sentences where your points can be lost.
- Do not start every sentence with ‘I’.
- Use concise and simple language.
- Use a professional tone.
- Make the first paragraph interesting to read.
- Avoid impersonal phrases like ‘as per your advertisement’.
- Use active verbs (see Fact Sheet – Applications Thesaurus).
- Incorporate the enthusiasm you feel for the job in the letter.
- Give the employer an insight into your personality.
- See the Career FAQs booklets on the SCU Career Development Program for sample cover letters, relevant to your industry.

Competency statements

Some recruiters recommend that you use competency statements in your letter and resume as a way of helping employers recognise your potential fit with the organisation. A competency statement highlights knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities that you have that are relevant to the job. An example for a role requiring exceptional communication skills might be: My varied experiences at university, work and volunteer community roles ensure I have strong verbal and written communication skills. As an outgoing person who is actively involved in mentoring programs, I have also had many opportunities to develop my interpersonal skills to a high level.
Cover letter checklist

- Is the employer’s name and address correct?
- Are your contact details correct?
- Have you clearly stated the type of employment you are seeking?
- Have you demonstrated evidence of your research into the prospective employer?
- Have you emphasised your key transferable skills and attributes?
- Have you mentioned when you are available to start work?
- Does the tone of your letter indicate self-confidence and respect without bragging or being too humble?
- Have you avoided apologising for what you don’t have or being negative about yourself?
- Have you avoided using slang terms or jargon?
- Is your letter grammatically correct and free from spelling errors?
- Have you shown your final draft to someone else for their feedback?
- Does your letter fit on one page?
- Have you signed your application letter with your name printed below?
- Have you avoided fancy or coloured stationery?
- If you are sending your resume, is the envelope big enough so you don’t have to fold your letter and resume?
- Is the envelope correctly addressed with your name and address on the back?

Your Name
42 Fern Avenue
Goonellabah NSW 2480
(02) 1234 5678
0414 123 899
your.correct.email@scu.edu.au

1 September 2014
Mr Peter Jones
Managing Director
P&O Cruises Australia
GPO Box 5287
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Mr Jones

Paragraph 1: Reason for your letter
- In reply to an advertisement
- Writing at the suggestion of … who …
- An application for employment or internship opportunities.

Explain your current status, e.g. that you are studying for a degree or about to graduate, or applying for an internship. Clearly state your availability and/or potential start dates.

Paragraphs 2 & 3: Targeted competency statements
These statements briefly outline the relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities that you possess. They should demonstrate your ‘fit’ with the organisation and focus on what you can offer or bring to the company. See section in this handout on Competency Statements for examples.

Paragraph 4: Areas of organisation which hold a special interest for you
For internships or cold call employment letters, indicate which areas or departments you are interested in (this demonstrates that you have taken the time to research the organisation) and make it clear that you are flexible and keen to accept any available roles in order to further develop valuable practical experience.

Paragraph 5: Close of letter
You must close your letter in a positive tone. Express your availability to attend an interview, thank them for their time, and say that you look forward to hearing from them or discussing opportunities with them further, in the near future.

Yours sincerely
Signature
Print Your Name

Where to find more help
- SCU Career Development Program on MySCU – learn.scu.edu.au
- Visit careerhub.scu.edu.au for job vacancies, events and resources
- Email for a careers consultation: careers@scu.edu.au
- For further resources and fact sheets go to scu.edu.au/careers