



Constructing a Covering Letter

Covering letters; are they still a useful commodity or are they something better left in a bygone era? Regardless of industry this is a timeless question that candidates face when considering expressing interest in a position; whether that be an internal position or a position with an organisation you are considering joining. The answer to this question is rather complex, mainly because it relies on the personal preference of the individual reviewing your application. However, one thing remains true; a covering letter allows a Recruiter to gain an insight into your comprehension of the English language. As such, if you choose to include a covering letter, ensure that the content is perfect. Like your resume, a covering letter adds to your personal brand. A spelling mistake or a grammatical error could leave the reader questioning your attention to detail when it comes to your written communication capabilities. Consequently, if you are considering including a covering letter as part of your application you need to get it right.

As outlined in the section 'how to construct a resume,' a professional Recruiter on average will only spend about 30 seconds reviewing a resume. The cold reality is they will spend even less time reviewing a covering letter. As such, the key is keeping it simple. The underlying premise of a covering letter is to give an organisation a reason to interview you.

Covering Letter – Building The Foundation

Remember, like a resume a covering letter is normally a firm's first introduction to you - their new employee. Consequently, it is imperative to take the same amount of time constructing a covering letter that you would preparing for an interview. In isolation think of it as an entree to the main being your resume. If the reader does not like the entree there is a chance that they may not eat or even taste the main.

First and foremost ensure that you present the document in a business letter format, that is include your personal details and the details of the individual / department that you are addressing the covering letter too. Pay particular attention to utilising a consistent format through the entire covering letter - Time New Roman, size 12 font is usually best. Also, ensure that you double if not triple check your spelling and grammar.

The sole objective of a covering letter is to give the reader a taste of your personality, skills and experience. Consequently, make sure the tone of the language used is positive and catches the attention of the reader, with a particular focus on the skills and attributes you can bring to a role. Use short sentences and simple language, and remember there is no need to write war and peace, the more white space that appears the better.

Covering Letter – Adding the Steel Beams

As discussed the steel beams of a resume is the way in which you articulate the skills that you would bring to an organisation. In much the same way an effective covering letter is associated with engaging the reader and giving them a reason to review your resume. A key component of this involves taking the reader on a journey. A journey of who you are as an individual. The most efficient means of doing this is by making the covering letter personalised. Instead of stating 'To whom it may concern' include the name of the individual who is recruiting the role. That is, 'Dear Jane.' Going the extra mile and contacting reception to source the name of the hiring manager, shows interest. It also displays initiative and the ability to think outside the square. These are all important functions of building your personal brand and may assist in helping you secure the role of your dreams.

A majority of common mistakes made when drafting covering letters are grammatical. In particular individuals seem to forget to align the first word of their opening paragraph, with the comma that follows the individual's name that the letter is being addressed too.



Covering Letter – Adding the Cement

Apart from the discussed elements, a covering letter is constructed around three major paragraphs, that follow the ‘Dear Jane’ introductory line.

The first paragraph forms your opening statement. It is your opportunity to state the type of roles that you are seeking. At this juncture individuals try to keep it rather generic. That is, try to cast the net as wide as possible to suggest interest in a wide variety of roles within an organisation. Although this sounds like an excellent strategy, consider it from an organisations perspective. It paints the picture that you are unsure of the role that you are seeking and if given the opportunity you may not be as dedicated as someone that states that are only seeking position in a specific area. In short, only state the types of roles that you are expressly interested in. If an organisation thinks that your skills are transferable to another role, they will likely call you about that role also.

The second paragraph is associated with addressing the key competencies of the vacancy. This includes both technical expertise and the personality traits that you are able to bring to the role / firm. Remember your goal is to provide a reason for the hiring manager to review your resume. Consequently, there is no need to transcribe your whole resume into this paragraph – keep it short and simple.

The third paragraph is associated with leaving the reader with a reason to either contact your or read your resume. As such, try to convey why you are interested / passionate about the opportunity / opportunities at hand. Give the reader a reason to remember you.

Finally, when signing off the covering ensure that you include something professional. Traditionally individuals have used ‘yours sincerely’ however that may seem dated to a lot of people. As such, take the opportunity to include something and little more current –potentially ‘kind regards.’

Covering Letter – Food for Thought

Remember spend the time needed to make your covering letter look presentable. Also make sure you check your spelling and grammar. This is your own personal brand after all.

Remember if you are sending your covering letter, send it as an attachment so the formatting stays the same. Use basic word fonts and try to make sure the formatting is simple and easy for the reader to follow. Remember this is a firm’s first impression of you, and including redundant information is not necessary.

Your new career opportunity awaits. Good Luck with the job search.