

Notes for the video training - Update my cover letter

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 looking to find new job roles and need to learn how to create a cover letter tailored to each job role for which you want to apply. Other related training includes Update my resume and details where this can be found is described at the end of this session.

Objectives

In today's session you will learn about the purpose of a cover letter and, using an example, we will describe the key information that needs to be included. So that by the end of this session, you will know how to tailor a cover letter for each job role.

You'll have the opportunity to create your own cover letter.

There are opportunities within the video for you to stop and complete your own details and make notes at any time.

At the end of the session we will also let you know where you can go for further support 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 cover letter blank template and 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.

The list of action words

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

The purpose of a cover letter

Let's have a look at the purpose of a Cover Letter. It is often the first document that is read and should tempt an employer or recruiter to want to read your resume.

You have one page in which to highlight how your skills and experiences match the job role. So you will need to carefully identify which skills the employer is looking for and tailor your cover letter to match those skills and experiences.

This is why a different cover letter is written for each job role for which you apply.

Employers want to see that you are interested in this role and are not impressed by a standard cover letter that is not tailored to the particular job

This is your opportunity to concisely show how your skills and experience match what the employer needs

Most employers expect a cover letter and won't even look at a resume if there is no attached cover letter.

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

Simple Formatting Tips

So before we look at an example of a cover letter, let's look at some 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.

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. We will be going through the key points in detail, in the coming slides. But for now, we will just provide an overview.

- Your Name and Contact details and the contact name and address of the company
- 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 Cover Letter Template and you might like to open it now, so that you can complete it as we go. You can see that the template consists of words with arrows either side. For example your name with arrows and then your address etc. Where you see the arrows, this is an opportunity to insert your own details, and remove the arrows. To enter in your details, just click and select the relevant section, and start typing your details. Remember to make sure that you have deleted all the arrows and any directions provided within the template.

Let's look at updating a sample cover letter

Let's now look at an example, using the case of a job seeker whose name is Ben. We will introduce Ben, the work and experience that he has, the type of work that he is looking for and then learn how to update the cover letter to the specific job role that he has found.

This is Ben

So, this is Ben who has completed his VCE in 2000 and has been working for the past 20 years in Delivery and Warehouses. He recently renewed his LO and LF Forklift licenses.

After Ben left school, he picked up work as a Delivery driver for Freight Express. He enjoyed this but after five years wanted something different. He then moved to the Smith Kitchen company where he obtained work as a Warehouse Assistant and this is where he learned a lot of on the ground skills associated with warehouse operations. Once again, he was in this role for five years before getting a job as Assistant Team Leader at Roberts Warehouse International. Ben has been working here for the past nine years and has some great skills relevant for the Industry but is looking now for more senior roles in the Warehousing, Storage & Distribution sector Ben has a resume so lets have a look at it now.

Finding the job

Ben has found a job on Seek working as a Team Leader for the company, Wilson and Bradley.

This role would be a great match for his skills and interests as he enjoys working in warehouse operations.

Ben is really keen to apply for this role and wants to create a cover letter to accompany his resume. So, let's look at the next step.

Writing the first section of the cover letter

We'll come back to Ben in a moment.

We're now going to write the first section of the cover letter.

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 want employers to be able to contact you, so remember to include your phone and email address. Just a note regarding your email – try and make sure that it is professional. Having a Gmail account is fine and 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. I personally include my address in the cover letter but ultimately it is your decision as to whether you include a full address, just the suburb or no address details at all.

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 Ben’s example.

Ben’s example

Ben has included his name, contact number, email and full address. He decided to include his full address as the job is located close to his home and he feels that this will be an advantage to him. You can see that Ben has also included a LinkedIn address as well. He has checked and can also see that many roles at the Team Leader level, require you to have a LinkedIn account so he has created one and included the link here.

He has also included the current date.

There was no name or address in the job ad so Ben has researched the company and located the company address and the best person to address the letter to. The Job Title in the Ad is Team Leader Receiving and Dispatch and Ben writes it 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. When you open the template and start completing it, 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.

We’ll 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, 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.

Let’s have a look at an example **of education and interest could be:**

I admire the passion and commitment that the Atlas company has for high quality production processes. I am Diploma qualified with demonstrated experience in production roles. This combined with demonstrated initiative and strong warehouse operation skills would make me an excellent ambassador in achieving the Atlas company 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.

Ben’s example

Let’s look at Ben’s example. He’s used the template and makes slight changes to it, so that it reflects his “voice”. He identifies that he found the job via Seek on the 30 November.

He then provides two sentences on why he is interested in this role. He has also demonstrated that he has researched the company, Wilson and Bradley by showing his knowledge that they are a family company with a long tradition of high-quality customer service. He then describes how this focus matches his own approach.

This shows the potential employer that he was interested in the job and used initiative to research the company.

Time for you to complete the first paragraph

So, we’re now going to pause to give you time to complete your first paragraph. 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 details on top.

Remember to remove any of the instructions or arrows from your final copy.

In your first paragraph show the name of the job 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 an understanding of the company by including some key words from the company’s vision or operations.

We’ll see you soon.

Preparing for paragraphs two and three

The next two paragraphs will describe how your skills and experiences are relevant to the job. In order to do this, first you will carefully need to go through the job ad and highlight key words.

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 responding to customer queries.

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 and education to find examples. This is where your completed resume should be able to help you by having examples.

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.

Remember you want to show the employer that you are the best candidate and using their own key words helps to show them this.

Key responsibilities

Let's now come back to Ben's example and look at the job Ad that he has found

By going through the Ad carefully we can see that the responsibilities are varied and include:

- Range of duties associated with warehouse operations
- Supervising employees and responding to their questions
- Training new employees
- Ensure safety and compliance is met
- Answering questions about stock

Ben will look at all the responsibilities and identify those where he has experience and which key words he can include.

For example, with Ben's warehouse experience, he can adjust his statements to include key words/phrases such as:

1. Replenishing warehouse items
3. Unloading containers
5. Responding to employee questions
6. Answer employee questions and train new employees

These are just some of the examples that Ben can include

The personal qualities and experiences needed

Ben looks at the job again. This time looking at the personal qualities and experiences and then decides which of these he might like to highlight in the cover letter. Remember the cover letter is only one page in length, so Ben needs to select those attributes and experiences that he believes are the most important to highlight.

Time for you to highlight the key words in the job ad

So, you may have a copy of a job Ad. 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 highlight the key words.

We'll see you soon.

Writing paragraphs two and three

We are now going to look at 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.

Let's look at Ben's example

Ben's example – second paragraph

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. Ben has decided to use dot points.

Ben has gone through the job requirements and selected those criteria that he believes are the most important. Ben starts each dot point with an Action word. Action verbs show an employer what you actually did, and this helps them to better understand your achievements.

Some examples of action verbs include Accomplished, Effectively, collaboratively, demonstrated, solved etc.

There are many Action verbs that you can use, and we have provided you with a sample Action Word list.

Ben's example – third paragraph

In this paragraph Ben decides to write complete sentences and continues to incorporate some of the key words (friendly, approachable, strong and clear oral communication, organised and attention to detail). He has included the information in just two sentences. He's provided specific examples to add impact to statement

Time for you to write your second and third paragraphs

We're now going to pause while you 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 keep coming back and make changes.

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

We'll see you soon.

Writing the final paragraph

The final paragraph is only two to three sentences and provides a summary of why you want the job. It highlights why you are the best person by briefly mentioning relevant skills and experiences.

Remember to refer to your attached resume and include 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

Ben's example

Let's look at Ben's example. He provides a positive finish to the cover letter by briefly mentioning his skills and experiences and describes his enthusiasm and experience in warehousing. He then refers to his resume and mentions that he is available to answer any questions in an interview. He finishes the letter by politely signing off – your sincerely and shows his full name.

Time for you to write the final paragraph

We're now going to pause while write your final paragraph. Provide a summary of why you want the job and stating concisely why you are the best candidate by highlighting a few of the most relevant skills and experience. Mention that your resume is attached and let the company know that you are looking forward to answering any questions in an interview. Remember to sign off politely and sign your full name.

See you soon.

Putting it all together

Well we've now written all the paragraphs and 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

In summary, today we have looked at:

- how to tailor a cover letter for each job role.
- The importance of including key words from the job description.
- Including brief examples of your key skills and experiences
- Use simple and easy to read sentences
- Use the same font style and size throughout
- Check for any spelling or grammar mistakes
- It is very important that your cover letter is only one page long. 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 accurate.

Where to next?

It's been lovely sharing this journey with you today and we 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 cover letters, resume, 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.

We wish you all the very best with your job search.