

Work Integrated Learning Preparation Program

Workshop #2

Applications, Cover Letters and Introduction Letters

Make Yours Stand Out!

Work Integrated Learning
Faculty of Business and Law
April 2011



Session Outline

- Introduction
- Cover Letters - True or False exercise?
- Types of Application Letters
- 1. Cover Letters – Responding to advertised positions
 - Addressing Selection Criteria
- 2. The Letter of Introduction – Being Proactive
- Questions and Concluding Comments

True or False?

➤ **It is OK to send your resume without a cover letter**

False. Your cover letter stamps your personality on your resume and explains why the employer should be interested in you.

➤ **Cover letters are typically read in less than one minute**

True. Eight out of ten HR professionals spend less than one-minute on average reading a cover letter.

83% spend one minute or less

15% spend more than one minute

The larger an organisation is, the less time the HR professionals spend reading letters and resumes.

True or False?

➤ **Applications with typos/mistakes are not considered**

True. Three out of four HR professionals would remove an application containing errors.

➤ **Keep your cover letter really, really short – like a paragraph**

False. The length of your cover letter depends not upon absolute rules of measurement, but upon the amount of content you have to convey. About one page, with 4-6 paragraphs would be about right.

Source:

Lain Kennedy, Joyce. Cover Letters for Dummies. IDG Books Worldwide

The Cover Letter – Types

There are essentially two types of “Cover” Letters

(ie letters which accompany and ‘cover’ a resume as part of the job search process.)

1. COVER LETTERS - FOR AN ADVERTISED POSITION

- Also referred to generally as “Application Letters” as these are typically a written response to an advertised position in any media;
- It is one component/element of an “application for employment with” the organisation recruiting.
- As a response to a published position, it can be referred to as a “reactive approach”.

The Cover Letter – Types

2. THE LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

- Where an applicant is being **proactive** in approaching a prospective host organisation/company which is NOT advertising at the time.
- May be referred to as a “Proactive Approach”
- This approach is more intensive, time consuming and requires a greater commitment.
- Involvement will allow development of personal networking skills and can be more rewarding.

The Cover Letter – Basic Rules

Employers use cover letters as a screening process to ‘weed out’ many applications which are not professionally prepared and/or do not address the specific requirements of the role.

A cover letter should address specific selection criteria shown in a job advertisement or position description.

The Cover Letter – Basic Rules

You may be required to identify selection criteria when they are not listed explicitly in the advertisement.

In this case you may need to review an advertisement carefully with a highlighter to identify selection criteria which may be stated in sentences in the body of the advertisement

eg ... “the ideal candidate will possess excellent organisational and time management skills” ...

Or in a section of the advertisement may be shown as “desired attributes” or “personal characteristics” which include: ... strong organisational skills ... or ... superior presentation ...

The Cover Letter – Basic Rules cont.

1. Date and sign letter
2. Include Name, Title/Role (e.g. 'Manager, Human Resources'), Organisation and Address
3. Check, double check and ask someone else to check your letter for spelling and typing mistakes. It is often difficult to see your own typing mistakes, but the employer reading the letter will certainly notice them.

Do not rely on your computer spelling or grammar checker – it can not tell you whether 'an' should be 'and' or 'Ron' should be 'Rod'

The Cover Letter – Basic Rules cont.

4. Maximum of **one page**.
 - a. Be concise
 - b. Capture the attention/interest of the reader
 - c. Make the letter enthusiastic, but be sure to address all selection criteria you can find in the advertisement.
5. Do not attempt to prepare one letter for several applications. Each letter **must** be tailored to a particular position
6. Do not ignore any selection criteria. If you can't provide a demonstrated example for one of the criteria required, be prepared to write something about your understanding of the relevance of the criteria.

The Cover Letter – Basic Rules cont.

7. Always use 'action' words to add realism and intensity e.g.. managed, supervised, produced, developed, demonstrated (refer to student handout)
8. Try to vary your language – do not start every paragraph with 'I'.
9. Use the language relating to the industry. Improve your knowledge of the industry by reading relevant journals etc.

Ensure your letter is unique!

Don't use templates or copy examples from books or other students

The Cover Letter – Layout

Example

Date

Your name
Address

Employer's Name
Title (role)
Organisation
Address

Dear [Ms, Mr etc] [Family Name] or [Dear Sir/Madam] if you do not know their name

Opening Paragraph:

- Reason for the letter, i.e. to apply for a specific position. Mention how you became aware of the position.
Eg. *I read with interest your advertisement for a Customer Service Representative, which was advertised through the Centre for Work Integrated Learning recently ... I believe that I have the necessary skills and experience to fulfil the requirements of this position and wish to submit the attached résumé.*

...

The Cover Letter – Layout cont.

Example

Middle Paragraphs:

- Current activities, i.e. Qualifications and current course, part-time work and the skills and abilities obtained through these activities that can be transferred to the position.

This is the most important section of the letter.

- Demonstrate where and how you developed the skills that are being sought in the advertisement, and indicate **how these will be of value to the company.**
- Address selection criteria - provide specific evidence of how you have demonstrated these skills in previous jobs, at school or uni, voluntary work, sport etc. giving examples where possible

...

The Cover Letter – Layout cont.

Example

Closing Paragraph:

Ask to be considered for interview and ensure that your contact details are provided.

If an overseas or interstate position is being targeted, then the possibility of a telephone interview might be suggested.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

[Type your name underneath]

The Job Advertisement Exercise.

Task: Using your job advertisement or one supplied, identify the skills required for the position.

1. What qualities/skills/selection criteria does the position require?
2. How can you demonstrate these qualities/skills/selection criteria through your current & past experiences? Provide specific examples under each skill.

Example

Identified Skill: Teamwork

- Ability to contribute to small teams during uni group projects, offering ideas, knowledge and assistance to other team members.
- Productive team member at Kmart, Highpoint working collaboratively with different team members and sharing tasks fairly.

KEY SELECTION CRITERIA

- If the role has detailed 'Selection Criteria' or 'Key Selection Criteria', it is often best to include an attachment to your résumé addressing the criteria in full with a brief summary in your covering letter;
- This is common in government organisations, Universities & industry bodies and or associations where a systematic response to each stated Selection Criteria is required;
- In this case it is advisable to address specific requirements with demonstrated capability/skills statements, preferably also stated succinctly, and within a separate document outside of the traditional cover letter format (may be in bullet point format);
- Where a formal systematic response is required, the Job Description or Position Description should clearly state the criteria.

2. The Letter of Introduction

WHEN and WHY YOU MAY USE A Letter of Introduction

- Used as a method to proactively search for employment in a particular field/industry.
- Is often referred to by the Centre for WIL as a “self marketing” (or “candidate marketing”) strategy where a student may be seeking a “self sourced” WIL position.
- This approach needs to be discussed and approved by your WIL Co-ordinator.
- See “How to Obtain an Authorised WIL Position” – #3 - “Positions Targeted Proactively” for details on this approach
- Introduces yourself to a potential employer (WIL host organisation) and outlines your **relevant** skills and experience and your desire to obtain employment or other career opportunities with this targeted organisation.

2. The Letter of Introduction

- Is usually **not** in response to an advertised position and therefore a position description is usually not available ...
- ...**SO** ... you are not able to address stated explicit selection criteria as per a formal application/cover letter (that is you are not responding to an ad, job or position description) ... but are still required to address **expected skill sets for the targeted organisation and industry**;
- Strategy can be extremely rewarding and will help develop your ' networking skills and capabilities;
- Requires a far greater and more intensive effort and time. Therefore requires a longer lead-time and close consultation with the WIL Co-ordinator;
- Can utilise personal/family/other previously established professional networks.
- Must seek **approval from WIL Co-ordinator** before embarking on this strategy - usually 3 - 6 months prior to the expected time of commencement.

The Letter of Introduction: 6 points to remember

1. **Research.** Brainstorm, ask others, research (e.g. check organisation websites, speak to others in the field – “information interviewing”, read annual reports if available) to gain an understanding of skills and attributes the employer would want in a trainee or entry-level employee and include these with specific examples.

An example: If you are searching for a receptionist role in a CBD hotel you should include skills like:

- Knowledge of CBD and local attractions
- Customer service skills
- Ability to deal with multiple tasks
- Past employment that is relevant

The Letter of Introduction

2. Indicate how you identified the person you are writing to:
i.e. a friend who works there, media, personal interest
3. Contact the company to identify the appropriate person to write to i.e. the spelling of their name, title, correct spelling of their name and mailing address.
4. Be clear as to why you are writing - for example:

'I am writing to you to express my keen interest in working for your company in 2011 in a ...'

The Letter of Introduction

5. **Sell yourself!** Highlight your skills and the contribution you feel you can make to the company.
6. Be sure to include your contact details and to finish off on a **positive note**.

Activity

What skills & attributes would a HR Manager look for when reading a letter of introduction?

Example: You are searching for a co-op position in a chartered **accounting** firm.

Skills: Good academic accounting results; ability to meet tight deadlines; attention to detail; familiar with spreadsheets

Example: You are writing to a large insurance firm seeking an **IT** role in their help desk area.

Skills: Communication skills – telephone, email and in person, listening. Problem solving, customer service, time management and relevant IT knowledge.

Activity

What skills & attributes would a HR Manager look for when reading a letter of introduction?

Example: You are seeking an **event coordination** position assisting with the Brunswick Music Festival

Skills: Organisational ability, able to work to deadlines, attention to detail, and good communication.

Example: You are writing to an International (Paris based) women's fashion **retailer** role regarding a position in a sales/customer service

Skills: Customer service, sales ability, ability to work under pressure, team work, relevant language and cultural knowledge

Activity

What skills & attributes would a HR Manager look for when reading a letter of introduction?

Example: You are writing to a large manufacturing firm seeking an entry-level position in the **HR** department.

Skills: Strong administrative skills, ability to communicate with people of all levels, problem solving, appreciation of confidentiality

Example: It is your ambition to obtain a Co-op position as a **front office attendant** in a busy CBD hotel

Skills: Knowledge of CBD and local attractions; excellent communication skills; problem solving; quick thinker; ability to juggle many tasks at once, professional presentation

Activity

What skills & attributes would a HR Manager look for when reading a letter of introduction?

Example: You are searching for an entry-level customer service role with a well-known **financial services** firm.

Skills: Problem-solving, customer service skills, ability to follow procedures, good with figures, communication skills, team work.

Example: You are seeking an entry level operational position (assisting a team of reservation consultants) with a **travel** wholesaler or **tour** operator.

Skills: Understanding of itinerary construction, ability to pay close attention to detail, strong and articulate oral communication and customer service skills, ability to work in a team and if applicable, well travelled in the relevant region.

RESUME SUBMISSION & ENTRY INTERVIEW

Enter in your diary now!

2011 Schedule

Date	Action
6 May 2011	Submit resume in person to the Centre for WIL (G348, FP)
Semester 1 – from 12 April	Next Workshop – Make Your Cover Letter Count! <i>(Be sure you are registered – and know where/when!)</i>
Semester 1 - from 16 May	Interview techniques/practice Workshops <i>(mid year positions?)</i>
Fri 9 September	18 th Annual Hospitality, Tourism and Events Expo (Lvl 12, CF)

THANK YOU.

QUESTIONS?

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