The purpose of an application letter is to get you a job interview and is often the first contact an employer has with you. It accompanies your resume and should entice the employer to read your resume for further information so that you will be short-listed for a job interview.

An application letter is also commonly referred to as a cover letter.

If the employer indicates that candidates need to clearly address all criteria then you may need to also complete a formal response to the key selection criteria. See Quick tip on Selection Criteria for further information on how to do this.

Before you can write a letter of application you need to undertake the following preparation.

**Obtain Details of the Position**

- If a position is advertised, you need to obtain a position description. Most jobs have downloadable position descriptions or you may ring to ask for a job description, even if it is not mentioned in the advertisement.
- Most job advertisements and job descriptions contain two sections. The first describes the duties you would be expected to carry out. The second describes the job requirements and outlines the skills, experience and qualifications that are required to do the job.
- If you lack a preferred quality you may still be able to apply for the position, providing that you can persuade the employer that your experience is relevant.

**Unadvertised Positions**

- Where positions are not advertised you may have to write an unsolicited letter to an employer. For example, students requiring fieldwork experience or course related vacation work will often need to write directly to employers who may be able to offer placements.
- In cases where you are writing an unsolicited letter, you must still target your letter to the needs of employers. Check job advertisements in the same or similar field to identify common qualities/abilities that are sought after.

**Find Out About the Organisation You Are Applying To**

- Your letter will stand out if you target your application to the employing organisation. Information that is likely to be useful includes company background and history, client profile and services.
- Details of the activities of companies/organisations can be found on their website, in annual reports, publicity material and employer directories. Other sources are the stock exchange, internet, relevant human resource departments, state or local libraries, professional associations, business magazines or trade journals.

**Identify What You Have to Offer**

- Consider your skills and experience gained through study, paid or voluntary work, sport and leisure activities. After compiling a thorough listing of examples, carefully select those that are most relevant to the job and the organisation.

**The Look**

A letter of application is a business letter and should adhere to that style and format. Your application letter should be:

- one page—from start to finish
- typed on plain white paper if being sent via mail
- blocked on the left-hand margin, without indenting
- contain structured paragraphs with a double space between all paragraphs
- in a word document or PDF format and attached as a separate document if sent via email; not in the body of the email.

**The Contents**

The letter should flow in a way that takes the reader from one point to another naturally. Avoid long, complicated sentences where points can get lost.

- Avoid starting every sentence with “I”.
- Use concise and simple language.
- Use a conversational style of speech.
— Avoid impersonal phrases, such as: as per your advertisement.
— Use active verbs.
— Make the first paragraph interesting to read.
— Try to be enthusiastic.
— Give the employer an insight into your personality.
— Check your spelling and grammar.

The Next Step

— If you need assistance with writing an application, undertake the online tutorial Application Express and then have it checked by the Career Development and Employment team.

   www.rmit.edu.au/careers/applicationexpress

Further information

Visit the Careers Toolkit for links, videos and more.

www.rmit.edu.au/careers/toolkit