

How much information should you include in your cover letter?

Include enough to convince the recruiter that you more than qualify for the position, but not too much to cause boredom.

There is no reason why you can't include four or five well structured paragraphs, each with a qualification example.

To find your unique 'selling' point, ask yourself one more question:

Why should the recruiter hire me rather than the other 50 applicants?



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JOB APPLICATION LETTER: How to SELL yourself

The job application cover letter is probably the most important sales letter you'll write. It is the first point of contact with a potential employer, and an opportunity for you to make a good first impression – and everyone knows how important it is to make a good first impression!

Use these questions, and learn to write a cover letter that 'sells'.

Q1: What skills, experience and competencies are most important to the recruiter?

You do not want to bore recruiters by telling them as much about you as possible. Recruiters are interested in what you can do for them – and they want you to do it quickly! You need to pinpoint the areas 'they' will be interested in.

If you do not impress the recruiters with the cover letter, they probably won't look at your resume. And if they don't look at your resume, they probably won't call you in for an interview...

The advertisement

Begin by highlighting the skills, competencies and experience referred to in the advertisement. These will give you what the recruiter is looking for, and the areas you need to concentrate on in your letter. Ask yourself:

- what are the most important skills, experience and competencies outlined in the advert, and
- what is the apparent order of importance?

Research

Do some research to find out more about what the recruiter

'could' be looking for that isn't necessarily in the advert. Ask yourself:

- what is the organisation's vision for the future, past performance, goals and culture, and

- what other skills/competencies are required for this type of position?

Use the internet for research, and other adverts for relevant job descriptions. Look for one piece of 'gold' that will help you write an specific introduction that will catch the reader's attention and compel him/her to read on.

Q2: What should be included in the cover letter's introduction?

The introduction should clearly state the position you are applying for and the advert source. Include a brief summary of why you are a top candidate for the position, without actually 'saying' you are a top candidate. Do so by using the 'gold' mentioned before, and specific details that prove the point. Specifics are always more compelling than generalities, and the objective is to get the reader eager to learn more about YOU.

The introductory paragraph is a preview of the rest of the letter (which itself is a preview of your resume). You may want to write the body of the document first, and then write the introduction. That way, you will be sure that you include vital details mentioned in the body, and that it is done in the correct order.

Q3: What should be included in the cover letter's body?

This is the area that is your 'sales pitch'. You want to provide an image of yourself as

someone worth hiring. Do that by demonstrating how your track record, skills and competencies meet their requirements. Use specific examples, real experiences and achievements. Do not leave a claim unsubstantiated, and avoid making sweeping statements.

To help you gather the information you'll need to write the cover letter, for each requirement ask yourself:

- what have I done in the past to indicate past performance in this skill/competency;
- what position was I in at the time, for how long and in what industry;
- how did my performance and achievements benefit my employer; and
- how was success measured?

On a more general note, ask yourself:

- how could I help achieve the employing organisation's vision or goals,
- what are the four reasons I am a perfect candidate for the job,
- what have been the highlights of my career to date, and
- what are my key strengths for the position?

By the end of this activity, you'll have a good idea of what to include in the body of your cover letter. It is now a matter of prioritising the requirements, and carefully wording the material to provide the 'image' you want to portray.

Q4: What should be included in the cover letter's closing?

The closing should express your strong interest in the position, a direct request for an interview and specific details on how the recruiter can contact you.