The Application Cover Letter

A job application letter is usually written in response to a specific job advertisement. Its purpose is to convince an employer to read your resume and call you for an interview. The letter shows an employer how your training and experience meet the requirements of a particular position. If prepared well, it can create many employment opportunities for you.

Components

The application cover letter contains five basic sections: the heading, inside address, salutation, body, and closing.

- The **heading** includes your complete home address, contact information, and the date.

- The **inside address** is the address to which the letter will be sent. Always address your letter to a specific individual with his or her correct title. In most cases, the job advertisement will list a contact person, along with the appropriate title. If a person's name is the only information given, call the company and ask what the person's title is. If no name is listed, call and ask for the name of the department head or personnel director who will be receiving applications.

- For the **salutation**, use only the name of the contact person. (Sometimes, the identities of the hiring committee member(s) will remain confidential, in which case you can simply address the letter to "members of the hiring committee." Your goal is to use something more specific than "to whom it may concern" whenever possible).

- The **body** is the most important section of the letter. Before you begin writing this section, analyze the job ad closely and identify the specific qualifications the position requires. Compile a list of the training and/or experience you have had which fulfills these job requirements. Group your strongest qualifications into one or two general topics (i.e., experience, personal interests, education, etc.) which best demonstrate your suitability for this job.

  - The body usually consists of four paragraphs. In the **first paragraph**, identify the job you are applying for and your source of information about the job (i.e., newspaper, placement agency, company newsletter, campus placement office, etc.). In addition, introduce the general topics you came up with as recommended above (much like a thesis statement in an academic essay).

  - In the **second paragraph**, explain why you are suited for the job by expanding on your topics. Briefly describe your training and experience, focusing on your strongest qualifications. Be sure to give specific, concrete details about your knowledge of equipment, languages, software, office procedures, strategies etc. In addition, refer the reader to your enclosed resume.

  - In the **third paragraph**, connect yourself to the employer. Explain why you want to work for this particular company and what you can do for it. *Be specific.*
In the final paragraph, politely state that you would appreciate the opportunity to be interviewed. Also thank the reader for his or her time and consideration.

- In general, use phrases such as “Sincerely” or “Sincerely yours” for the closing. After such a closing line, space down four lines and type your full name. You should sign your name by hand in the blank space left by those lines if mailing the letter in print form. If you are enclosing material with your application letter, space down two more lines. Type “Enc.:” and briefly state what you are enclosing (i.e., resume).

**General Writing Guidelines**

Make sure your letter is formal and professional, yet warm, positive, and sincere. Follow the standard writing rules of being concise, varying sentence structure, using active verbs, and avoiding jargon and slang. Remember to include only information which will be useful to the employer, and incorporate real life examples whenever possible. Do not discuss hobbies, reasons for leaving past employers, or training and experience not related to the position you are seeking. Above all, focus your letter on the needs of the employer and emphasize the ways in which you can help them.

**Format**

Limit your letter to one page in length, unless otherwise instructed by the potential employer. Single space your information, using double spacing between sections and paragraphs. For the format, you may use a block style, in which all sections and paragraphs begin at the left margin, or a modified block style, in which the inside address, salutation, and body start at the left margin, the heading and closing begin at the center of the page, and paragraphs may be indented.

**Printing**

Type your letter on white or off-white, quality stationery (usually 8 ½” x 11” bond). Do not use stationery that belongs to your current employer. Make sure your final copy is neat, clean, and error-free. (Note: Use the same color and type of stationery for your letter, resume, and envelope.)
Dear Mr./Ms. So-and-so,

I am writing in application to the Handy Man job posting listed on your company’s website. I am happy to be applying for a job that will allow me to utilize the mechanical expertise I have acquired through schooling and training over the course of 15 years. I am especially well versed in such skills as welding and electrical engineering, and I also have excellent people skills that would suit the listed position well.

I studied welding, electrical work, and other basic mechanical skills while attending XYZ Trade School, and I have been the resident welder at 1234 Company for 12 years. During my employment there, I worked on such projects as X, Y, and Z. I also received my electrician’s certification in 2008 and have since handled such electrical issues as A, B, and C. Although I have a high level of mechanical training, however, I am also able to relate to the average clientele base. My previous experiences working at TGIF Hardware Supply have given me the people skills I need to maintain a friendly and engaging environment when interacting with customers and fellow colleagues. I am proud of my ability to be both efficient and personable.

Your Company’s Name, with both its high level of quality assurance and commitment to friendly service, presents the perfect opportunity for me to work in an environment that values my strengths. If offered the position, I would bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the company that could specifically help elevate the welding and electrician services currently provided.

I look forward to discussing this opportunity further in person, and I thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your Signature]

Your Name

Enc: Resume