

Writing a cover letter

This resource focuses on writing a cover letter. It begins by challenging you to scrutinise graduate opportunities, to reflect on your own skills and attributes and then to consider the World Economic Forum's '10 top skills for 2020'. Once you have completed these tasks, you can take a look at the creation of group cover letters.

Rethinking the cover letter

Read Leonardo da Vinci's cover letter (page 3). Now place yourself in the position he did: how might your skills, knowledge and experience be used in multiple contexts? Think big, think creatively and think about multiple possible futures. Leonardo's cover letter illustrates the flexibility, creative thinking and broad skill base that is very attractive in the labour market.

Attached are examples of work you could apply for as a graduate.

Identify different skills and attributes for which employers and clients are looking. If you are interested in a company or role, research the business (to find, for example, a mission statement, current projects and so on).

As an extension, find the name of the person to whom you should address your letter. Personalised letters are received more favourably by potential employers or clients.

As per the '[Plotting your preferences and strengths](#)' resource, categorise the skills and capabilities required by the advertised role as either:

- a. Things I like and do well
- b. Things I don't like but do well
- c. Things I like but find difficult to do
- d. Things I don't like and struggle to do

Refer to the [10 top skills for 2020](#) identified by the World Economic Forum (below) and reflect on how might you demonstrate your abilities for each one:

- Complex problem solving
- Critical thinking
- Creativity
- People Management
- Coordinating with others
- Emotional intelligence
- Judgement and decision making
- Service orientation
- Negotiation
- Cognitive flexibility

As well as considering your study related skills and attributes, consider your voluntary and paid work, sporting and music activities and extracurricular university roles. To help with this, [find out how much you know already](#).

Write a cover letter as part of an application for the advertised role. If you need extra help, refer to the resources listed below and consult your careers professionals or advisors.

Show a friend, colleague, university tutor or family member your draft cover letter and ask for feedback.

Finally, visit the careers centre for advice with applications for work. Remember to consider areas in which you need more experience.

Digital literacy

Think about the physical process of producing the cover letter. When preparing the document, use the functionality in your word processor to ensure that all spelling mistakes and grammatical errors are eliminated. Do not assume that the software will pick the correct word or grammatical construct for you; you must proof-read your work thoroughly to ensure it says what you want it to say. It is useful to ask a friend or family member to read any work-related documents before you send them, as it is all too easy to overlook mistakes when you are the author!

Leonardo da Vinci's cover letter

Below is a copy of Leonardo da Vinci's cover letter.

Leonardo da Vinci was writing a 'speculative' cover letter: a letter written to someone who might be able to offer work rather than one that responds to an advertisement.

The letter gives a wonderful insight into what he deemed his best attributes and how he framed these for multiple circumstances, including times of war and peace.

- 1. I have an assortment of portable bridges which will enable you to pursue and at any time flee from the enemy. I also have methods of burning and destroying those of the enemy.*
- 2. I know how, when a place is besieged, to take the water out of trenches.*
- 3. If it is impossible, when besieging a place, to avail oneself of the plan of bombardment, I have methods for destroying every rock or other fortress.*
- 4. I have many kinds of convenient and portable mortars with which to cause great terror to the enemy.*
- 5. And if the fight should be at sea I have kinds of many machines most efficient for offense and defence.*
- 6. I have means by which, without noise, to reach a designated spot, even if it were needed to pass under a trench or a river.*
- 7. I can make covered, safe chariots which will withstand enemy artillery fire.*
- 8. I can create big guns, mortars and light ordnance forms out of the common type.*
- 9. I can contrive catapults, mangonels, trabocchi and other machines of marvellous efficacy.*
- 10. In times of peace I can give perfect satisfaction and to the equal of any other in architecture and in guiding water from one place to another.*
- 11. I can create sculpture in marble, bronze, or clay and also I can do in painting whatever may be done.*

Cover letters (adapted from Curtin Career Hub, Curtin University)

A cover letter is a formal letter introducing you and your application for work to a potential employer or client. It explains why you have sent the application and highlights your relevant and transferable skills, knowledge and experience in relation to the position requirements.

Cover Letter Template

Dear *Mr or Mrs, ... or 'Dear Sir or Madam' if unknown.*

Re: *Position title and reference number if applicable*

Paragraph one is your introduction. In this section, you need to assert your interest and restate the title of the work, exactly as it was advertised, as well as the reference number if provided. You should also tell the reader where you found the advertisement and the date on which it was advertised.

Paragraph two is where you highlight why you are interested in the role and what interests you about working with that organisation or person. Additionally, you should show how you can contribute, rather than what you can gain. This is where your initial research on the employer or client's values, mission statement and current projects is very useful. It also shows the reader your enthusiasm and commitment as you have taken the time to research the company.

Paragraph three is where you can describe your relevant experience. This includes your education and training, practical/industry placements and relevant employment and volunteer experiences as well as your technical skills – those that are specific to the position. Finish this paragraph by providing relevant examples of where and how you have developed your skills.

Paragraph four should outline your transferable/personal skills. Whether a position is in science, health, business, or the arts, you will require a certain set of characteristics or attributes. For example, an artist will need to display creativity and initiative whilst a social worker will need to possess effective interpersonal and organisational skills. Additional skills employers will look for include the '10 top skills for 2020.'

Paragraph five is where you thank the reader for their time and consideration and express your interest in further discussing your application and how you can contribute. Provide your contact details and mention any attachments such as your résumé, selection criteria and academic transcript if required.

Yours sincerely, if you know the contact name; Yours faithfully if not. Your name (in a formal business letter, always leave a gap between the closing salutation and your name).

Plot your preferences and strengths

Plotting your preferences is a simple activity that helps you pinpoint strengths, identify possible future directions, and perhaps learn a bit more about yourself. The activities listed in each square may be related to your field of study or they may be more general in nature. Starting with general examples (eating, sleeping) is a great ice breaker!

There are two activities in this resource. In the first, for the lower right square titled: *Things I struggle to do and don't like*, consider things you must do, even if these are not an especially good fit for you (not just things you could avoid entirely). Write two examples in all four squares before moving on to the analysis process.

Revisit these answers regularly.

If you are looking for a similar resource for use in teams, use the resource, '[How to form an effective group](#).'

Plotting your preferences

Things I like and do well:	Things I don't like but do well:
Things I like but find difficult to do:	Things I don't like and struggle to do:

Analysing the results

Things I like and do well

The upper left quadrant, *Things I like and do well*, identifies activities in life that are a very good fit. Ideally, these could be the focus of future career activities.

- Can these activities generate sufficient income to sustain you?
- How can you move in that direction, and how will you fill in the gaps in the meantime?

Things I don't like but do well

The upper right, *Things I don't like but do well*, is one of life's interesting conundrums. Perhaps you are very good at organising events, but not that interested in doing so. Perhaps you got excellent grades in maths, but you are not that intrigued by the subject. You could, however, consider items in this square when thinking about a possible 'day-job' to make money. Activities you are adept at tend not to be energy drains and may be tasks that others are willing to pay you to do. Bingo! You can work, make some money, and still have energy left to pursue your true passions.

Things I like but find difficult to do

The lower left box can be more problematic. *Things I like, but find difficult to do* can present real challenges in our lives—something to strive toward and improve on, or perhaps something you just find frustrating. What will you do with the items in that box? Which items are necessary for your career?

Things I don't like and struggle to do

Finally, the lower right, *Things I don't like and don't do well*. The activities in this box can take up considerable time and energy in our lives. One solution? There may be tasks on this list that you can hire others to do for you. It could be worthwhile to hire someone to clean your apartment, do your taxes, or mow the lawn. Some of those skills may be another person's upper right square, after all. You may even be able to trade or barter services, using your skills to help someone else.

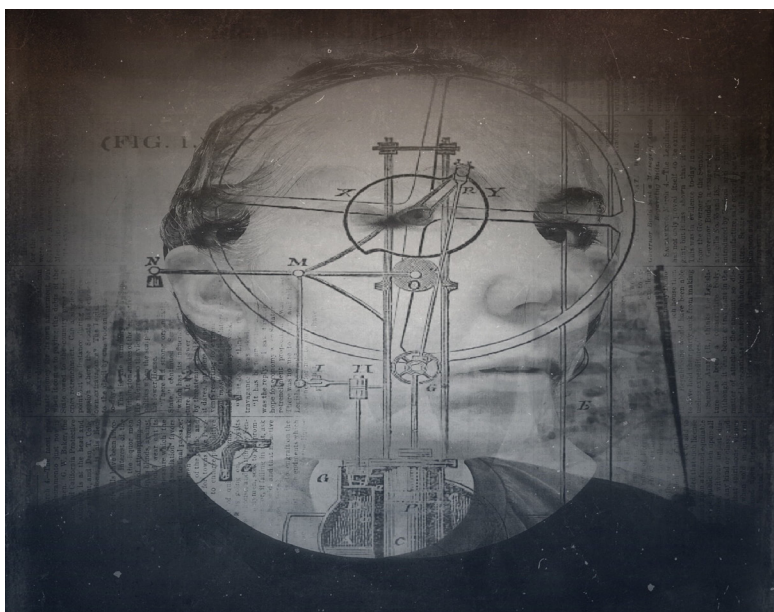
Highlight in the two lower boxes any items you need to develop for your career. Look for opportunities to develop for your career. Look for opportunities to develop these, and ask for help.

Make it count!

Keywords in the top quadrants represent your strengths. Are these listed in your CV? If not, add them and use the reflection template on your personal employability profile to create statements ready for applications and interviews.

Top skills for 2020

Have you wondered what employers are looking for? The World Economic Forum lists these as the [10 top skills for 2020](#).



Acknowledgment: Flickr

Discussion questions

What does each skill mean?

1. How might each skill be relevant in an application: for example, how might negotiation skills be useful if you are a graduate doctor?
2. What can you use to demonstrate your abilities for each skill? For example, could you demonstrate leadership through your experiences in music or sports? Can you think of a time when you came up with a creative solution to make something work or to solve a problem, perhaps for someone else? When have you had to take the lead and make decisions in a team situation?
3. In your field of study, what other skills or experience might you need to succeed as a graduate? How will you develop these skills?

This resource was developed by Dawn Bennett.