

Good cover letters and glowing references



By Juliette Attwell

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This week we advise on how to cover your bases with hints on writing a good cover letter and what to do with your glowing references.



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My name is Tumi, I am busy updating my CV at the moment and I wanted to know what are the most important things that would make my cover letter stand out. I also have a reference letter from my former manager but the letter was written in 2010, and he has changed jobs twice since he wrote me the letter. What I wanted to know is whether the reference letter is still relevant, considering that it was written in 2010, and if it is effective to include both my cover letter and reference letter in my CV. - Boitumelo

Hi Tumi,

Thank you for your very relevant question, it is often confusing what to include in your application, and there really isn't a standard answer. I can, however, suggest what I think works best for recruiters. Let's start with your cover letter. Firstly, don't let it ramble, quick and easy to read bullet points highlighting what skills and experience you could bring to the company are best. Start off with, "I would like to apply for the role of...." and then continue with, "I feel I am the right person for the role because....". Please, however, be sure to change the name of the position for each application as there is nothing worse than receiving a cover letter for the role of bookkeeper when the role advertised is for an account manager - your CV will not be taken seriously.

Once you have detailed this, conclude the paragraph with, "Thank you for your time, I look forward to hearing from you" and include your phone number and email address for easy contactability. Overall, the cover letter should be short and sweet, maximum 300 words, have the bulk of your content in your actual CV.

With regards to your reference, as it was written in 2010, some recruiters may see it as irrelevant. Rather find out that

managers current contact details and include these in your CV. When you go for an interview you can take the reference with you if you like, but your recruiter will probably want to verify it in any case by calling the referee. Try to include the name and number of a reference for every position you've been in (preferably someone that will give you a glowing reference!)

I wish you all the best and hope this has helped!

I worked for a year in the UK, where my manager no longer resides, and I haven't worked in South Africa as yet. I, therefore, don't have any suitable references that I can rely on. What do I do in this case as I am being asked for these details. - Luke

Hi Luke,

That is indeed a difficult one as most companies / recruiters will ask for reference details. In your case I would try to connect to your previous manager on LinkedIn. Send him a message to ask whether he would mind being a referee, and if yes, to please supply you with his email address. At least this way recruiters can get an email reference for you which is better than nothing.

If that doesn't work find someone objective in your life, perhaps a sports coach or pastor that could be contacted as a character reference.

I hope this helps and you are able to build up your network of references through some great jobs.

Remember to always love what you do!

Juliette

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