



Information for Trainee Solicitors on Covering Letters and Application Forms



COVERING LETTERS

A covering letter is traditionally the first document that a hiring employer looks at and it is critical to the impression you create. Understand that this is a sales document and an opportunity to personalise your application and express your enthusiasm for the job.

The covering letter should be brief and certainly contained on a single sheet of paper. It should identify who you are and record that you want to apply for the position. It should have a strong final paragraph, summing up what you can do for the company.

Never mention salary in a covering letter unless you have been specifically asked to. Your figure may be too high or too low and provide a reason to screen you out. Where you are asked to state salary, either current or expected, approach the matter carefully and seek to keep the matter as vague as possible.

Recruitment firms and many employers increasingly want applications submitted to them electronically. This allows them to circulate your details electronically among the various people involved in short listing. Submit your application electronically unless there is an instruction to post it.

General Guidelines on Writing a Covering Letter

- Ideally use the same font and style that you used on your CV to give a consistent, professional look.
- Address the letter to a specific person. You are writing to a person, not an organisation. If an advert does not give a name, ring the company and ask them who to send the letter to.
- When responding to a blind ad, address the letter to: Dear Sir/Madam; name of position advertised; P. O. Box address etc.
- Your letter should expand on your CV and complement any profile / heading statement you have used across the top.
- Use relevant achievements in your work history and refer to one or two briefly and colourfully in your letter.
- When explaining why you are interested in the organisation or position, avoid general statements like "I am impressed with your products and growth" and write specifically about what products, what growth, and why.
- Tailor your letter carefully to the key words of the advertisement. Provide key examples of your achievements that relate to the key criteria.
- Incorporate terminology the employer has used in an ad, in a written job description, or in a conversation, into your letter.
- Pay attention to details. Type the letter and use spell check but also have it carefully proofread.
- Put the job title being applied for and reference number, where applicable, on top of the main body of the letter, above the salutation.
- Do not use standardised covering letters. Each letter should be individualised. The reader should know that you did not send this letter to another employer.
- Divide text into short paragraphs. Lengthy paragraphs are overwhelming to read.
- Don't forget to match the company's needs to what you have to offer. A useful tactic is to include some of the terms used in their advert in your covering letter.

RECOMMENDED LAYOUT OF A COVERING LETTER IN RESPONSE TO AN ADVERTISED JOB

Your name
Your address line 1
Your address line 2
Your address line 3
Your Telephone numbers - including mobile
Your email address

Name of person you are writing to
Company name
Address 1
Address2

Date

Their Reference / Job Title

Dear [name of person]

Opening paragraph: State why you are writing, identify the position for which you would like to be considered, and indicate how you heard of the position. If you are sending a letter of interest which is not in response to a specific job opening, simply indicate the type of work you are seeking.

Middle paragraph(s): Your goal here is to show how you can be useful to this particular organisation. Describe what strengths you have to offer this employer by showing the relationship between your skills and experience and the vacancy. You can also describe your previous achievements and how they relate to the vacancy and identify three reasons why you should be called for interview. Refer the reader to your enclosed CV for additional information.

You can divide this information into a couple of smaller paragraphs - rather than have one large dense paragraph that people will not be inclined to read.

Closing paragraph: End your letter by clarifying what will happen next and how they can most easily reach you.

Yours sincerely,

Space for your signature
Type your name beneath your signature

Enclosed: CV

SAMPLE OF COVERING LETTER IN RESPONSE TO AN ADVERTISED JOB

*Sharon Finlay
23 Any Drive, Clonskeagh, Dublin 14
Telephone (01) 2982567 & (087) 6798056
E-mail: paulhughes@ireland.com*

Ms Sheila Jones
Finlay Chemicals
Kildare Industrial Estate
Kildare
Co. Kildare

12 January 2009

Ref: A1 – Legal Counsel

Dear Ms. Jones,

Your advertisement in the Irish Times for a Legal Counsel matches the experience I have and also should provide the kind of challenge I am now seeking within my career. I would like to apply for the position. As requested, please find enclosed a detailed CV.

I am currently working in a general practice law firm but I deal primarily with commercial clients and, as you will see from my CV, I have experience in all the areas critical to function effectively as a legal counsel within a company like yours.

You can read too, within the CV, how advice I recently provided to a company, quite like your own, resulted in a saving of circa €30,000 and enhanced their trading position.

I have watched the progress of Finlay Chemicals in recent years and admire what you are doing. I believe I could make a significant contribution to the future success of your company and look forward to the opportunity of explaining how I can do this at interview.

I look forward to hearing from you and can be contacted anytime on my mobile (087) 6798056.

Yours sincerely

Sharon Finlay

Enclosed: CV

COMPLETING APPLICATION FORMS

Always read instructions carefully and review what information is needed. Take a photocopy or two of the blank form and use a copy first for practice. Follow all instructions carefully. For example, don't use blue ink when it says complete in black.

Some questions require brief, factual answers. Others need a narrative response. The "other information" section is often the section that interviewers read most carefully. Mention your strengths, experience and achievements and state why this job interests you or why you want to work for this organisation.

When you have completed the Application Form check it very carefully. Proofread it, and get someone else to proofread it for you. Do not cram it into a small envelope. Post it in an A4 sized envelope if appropriate. Retain a copy of your completed form. This will be useful for your interview preparation.

General Guidelines on Completing Application Forms

- Keep in mind the particular requirements of the job you are applying for.
- Place information in the correct boxes.
- Keep answers short and to the point.
- Complete a fresh application form rather than cross out or use correction fluid.
- Do not just leave blanks. Write N/A (not applicable) beside any questions which do not apply to you.
- Keep your form neat and check all answers carefully before sending it.
- Use black pen unless you have been instructed otherwise.
- Try not to cram too much information into a small space.
- Answer all questions truthfully.
- Check all spelling and keep your handwriting consistent and legible.
- If the form instructs you not to send a CV with it, then don't.
- If there are gaps in your career details (time out for study, family care, travel, etc), give an account of them on your form.
- Check that your answers on the application form mirror information on any other career papers that you may have to give to the organisation.
- If you are asked for referees, make sure you ask them before providing names, and discuss with your referees what you would like them to say about you.

Important Disclaimer – Please Note

The Law Society does not give any guarantees, undertakings or warranties concerning the accuracy, completeness or up-to-date nature of information within this document. The Law Society also does not take responsibility for any dependence or reliance placed on the use of career support information provided - and cannot accept liability for any loss or damage incurred as a result.