

Writing the main body of the letter

Demonstrating your key skills and experience

In the main body of the letter you need to show why you are the right person for the job, by highlighting your most relevant experiences and skills as they relate to the position you are applying for. It is important to demonstrate evidence of your skills clearly. It is not enough to claim that you are 'a hard-working, flexible team player, with excellent IT skills'; you need to be able to provide evidence.

3 a In pairs, discuss the following questions.

- 1 How long should the main body of the letter be?
- 2 How many specific points should you make?
- 3 How will this section change depending on the job you are applying for?

b Read the following extracts from cover letters. For each extract underline the two main skills the applicants demonstrate.

1 My past experience of working overseas has brought me a greater understanding of international cultures and traditions, as well as a better appreciation of my own culture. These insights would certainly benefit a multinational corporation, such as yours.

Skills: intercultural awareness / dependability / flexibility / self-awareness

2 Within my role as a project manager, I am responsible for leading a team of five people. We often have to work unsociable hours under difficult conditions. I ensure that team morale is maintained by regularly counselling team members to check they are coping with the demands of the job.

Skills: flexibility / lateral thinking skills / language skills / interpersonal skills

3 Although I do not possess any experience in the hotel industry, I was a Holiday Representative for Xtreme Holidays for two consecutive summers, where I learned that customer satisfaction is the key to success in the service industry. I implemented a new way for customer feedback to be recorded, which helped Xtreme Holidays develop the service that they provide by identifying areas needing improvement. I believe I can apply the skills obtained from my previous employment to this position.

Skills: IT skills / customer service skills / communication skills / initiative

4 This summer I worked at Alton Towers Themepark, where I was initially responsible for operating various rides. However, as I can speak both Italian and English fluently I was quickly moved into the gift shop to deal with customers. Working in the shop helped me to learn the importance of dealing with customers in a friendly and efficient way. During this month I suggested changing the layout of some of the gift displays. These changes led to a significant increase in the sales of souvenirs.

Skills: customer service skills / entrepreneurial skills / leadership skills / numerical skills

5 I have a strong history of staff management, working closely with my current team on their personal development plans, and understand my role assisting and promoting staff member success. I regularly seek feedback on my performance from my superiors and colleagues to identify areas I need to improve in.

Skills: reliability / leadership skills / self-awareness / technical skills

c Underline useful phrases from the extracts which you could use in your own cover letter. For example in extract 1, My past experience of ... has brought me a greater understanding of ..., as well as ...

d Identify three skills that you use on a regular basis and write three sentences that demonstrate these skills in action. Use the phrases in Exercise 3c to help you.

Matching your skills and experience to the position

In the body of your cover letter it is essential that you are able to demonstrate how your work experience and skills match the specific position you are applying for. To do this you need to:

- read the job description carefully;
- identify the skills and experience the company is particularly interested in;
- show any parallels with previous posts you have held or other experience.

4 a In pairs, discuss the following questions.

- 1 How will your cover letter change with each position you apply for?
- 2 How will you know which skills and experience to highlight?
- 3 Should you highlight skills and experience even if they are not obviously relevant to the job you are applying for?

b Read the letter written by Hanna Ahigren, who is applying for a job at the Australian Embassy in Sweden, and answer the following questions. At this stage, ignore the gaps in the text.

- 1 What position is Hanna applying for?
- 2 What is her current job?
- 3 What subject does she have a degree in?
- 4 What skills and experience does she have?

Dear Ms Tisdall,

I am writing in response to your advertisement for the position of Public Relations Officer and enclose my curriculum vitae for your consideration.

I am currently working as a Press Officer for the Swedish Ministry of Industry.

(1) This experience has enabled me to gain a broad understanding of the media and public relations. (2) _____ monitoring the Swedish and foreign media, and establishing and maintaining key media contacts. I also write press releases and organise media events. Through the successful undertaking of these responsibilities (3) _____ the Swedish political system. (4) _____ theoretical knowledge attained as part of my university degree in Political Science, and put this knowledge into practical application.

Previous experience at the Swedish Embassy in Warsaw gave me an opportunity to work with the diplomatic services. During my time there I learnt to promote the strengths of Sweden through public relations events, as part of a team. Poland's entry to the European Union was the main focus of the Embassy at the time, which significantly influenced my work there. (5) _____ writing reports, organising official visits to Poland, and developing various internal and external projects.

(6) _____ considerable experience in the area of public relations from my years at university and subsequent jobs. I am confident that the combination of my political science background and relevant skills makes me an ideal candidate for the position available. (7) _____ ideas and enthusiasm to the job.

(8) _____ I am very suited to Embassy work and feel this move would be a logical career step. The role of Public Relations Officer would allow me to develop my existing skills in an environment in which my political, linguistic and diplomatic skills could be utilised to their greatest potential.

I would be available for interview at your convenience. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Hanna Ahigren

Ms Hanna Ahigren

C Complete the letter in Exercise 4b using the following phrases.

- a I feel I have significantly strengthened my knowledge and understanding of
- b ~~This experience has enabled me to~~
- c My employment experience leads me to the conclusion that
- d My employment experience has enabled me to build on
- e I think that I could bring
- f My responsibilities included
- g Within my position at work I am responsible for
- h As you can see from my CV I have

d Here is the advertisement that Hanna responded to. In pairs, identify the main skills and experience they are looking for.

e Match the requirements listed in the advertisement (a–i) to sentences from Hanna's cover letter (1–6). Some sentences illustrate more than one requirement.

- 1 This experience has enabled me to gain a broad understanding of the media and public relations. i
- 2 Within my position at work I am responsible for monitoring the Swedish and foreign media, and establishing and maintaining key media contacts.
 / /
- 3 Through the successful undertaking of these responsibilities I feel I have significantly strengthened my knowledge and understanding of the Swedish political system.
- 4 Previous experience at the Swedish Embassy in Warsaw gave me an opportunity to work with the diplomatic services. During my time there I learnt to promote the strengths of Sweden through public relations events, as part of a team. /
- 5 My responsibilities included writing reports, organising official visits to Poland, and developing various internal and external projects. /
- 6 The role of Public Relations Officer would allow me to develop my existing skills in an environment in which my political, linguistic and diplomatic skills could be utilised to their greatest potential.

Australian Embassy: Public Relations Officer

Department: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Immediate Supervisor: First Secretary
Salary: SEK 18,000 per month (Tax free)

DUTY STATEMENT:

- a Monitor the Swedish, Finnish, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian media (including printed and electronic) each day; prepare a summary of key international and domestic news items.
- b Monitor and prepare reports on international and domestic issues in Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.
- c Organise programmes for visitors from Australia, and provide support to Australian-based staff in relation to high-level visits.
- d Assist in the management and implementation of the Embassy's public affairs function and cultural affairs programme.

SELECTION CRITERIA AND SKILLS REQUIRED:

- e Bilingual Swedish/English language and translation skills – both written and spoken
- f High-level understanding of Swedish government, economy, business and EU processes
- g Ability to prioritise, manage time effectively and work both independently and as part of a team
- h Personal contacts in the media (desirable)
- i Experience in a public relations and/or a media-related field (desirable)

Please note that to be considered, applicants must address the selection criteria when making their applications and all applications must be in English.

f Underline useful phrases from Hanna's letter which you could use in your own cover letter. For example, I am confident that the combination of my ... and ... makes me an ideal candidate for the position.

g Complete the following sentences using the phrases in the box from Hanna's letter.

As a result As part of my During my period of employment at During my time having
In the course of my current job Since I work with where I gained
While I was a

1 While I was a team leader at Global Computers, I introduced new quality control procedures resulting in a 50% fall in customer complaints.

2 _____ at Legal Solutions, I was responsible for marketing software services.

3 _____ degree course in Business Studies, I worked for three months in the Data Processing department of a large computer corporation, _____ experience in IT solutions.

4 _____ Star Enterprises I gained some knowledge of accounting, _____ assisted their bookkeeper for three months.

5 _____ I have been responsible for the organisation of conferences. _____ my knowledge and experience in this field have grown considerably and I now feel capable of managing events independently.

6 _____ people every day in a business setting, I have developed strong interpersonal and communicative skills.

h Complete the following sentences so they are true for you.

1 While I was _____ I was in charge of _____

2 During _____ I was responsible for _____

3 As part of my degree course in _____ at _____ I _____

4 During my period of employment at _____ I gained _____

5 At present I am responsible for _____. As a result _____

6 Since I _____

i In pairs, discuss your recent work experience, or time at university. Highlight the skills you feel you have developed through these experiences. What are the main skills you have that make you more employable?