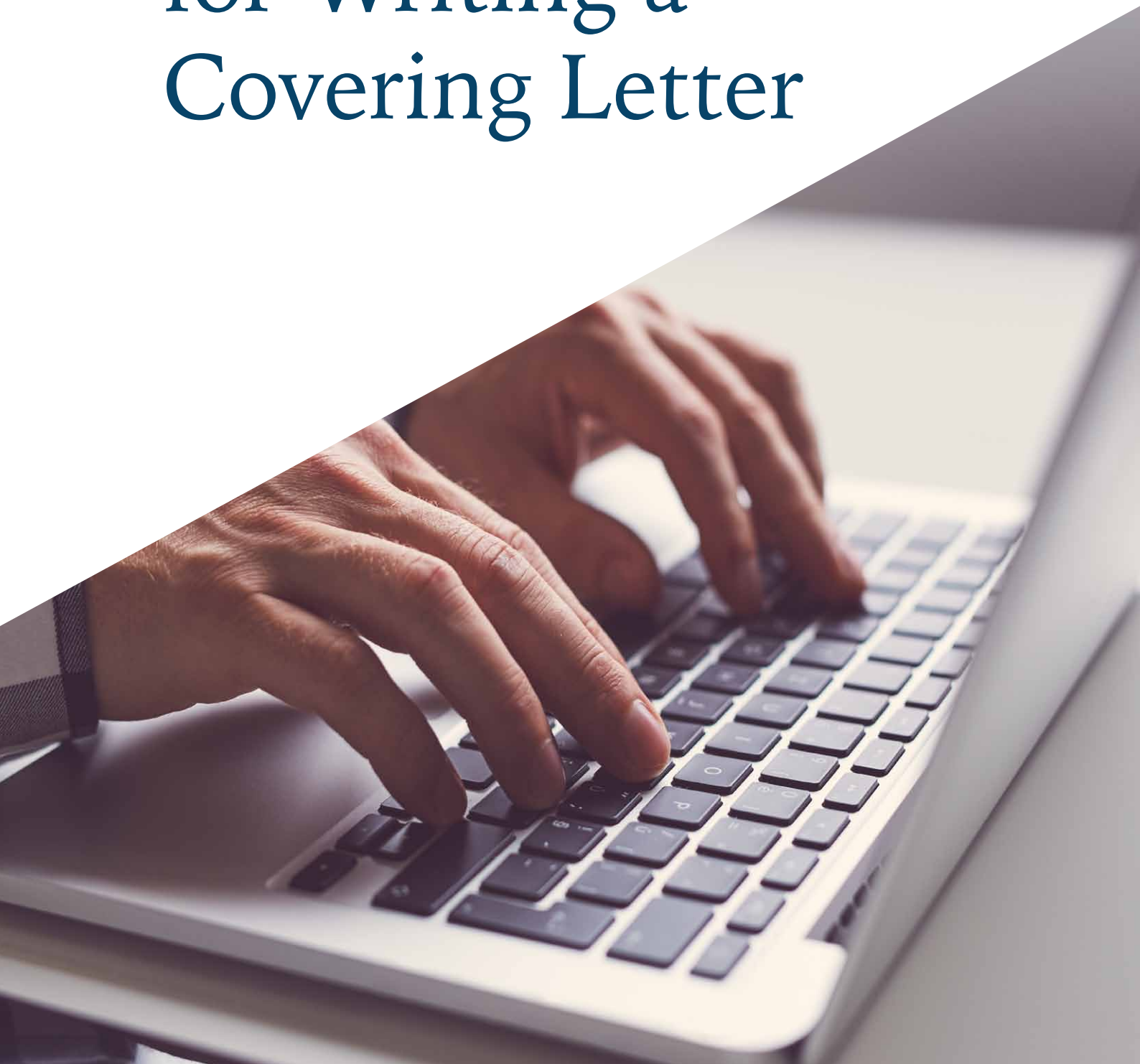


Guidelines for Writing a Covering Letter



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There is a temptation by some not to write cover letters. In the past, cover letters were often deemed to be good enough if they simply introduced you and your interest in the role advertised and then referred to your attached CV. As a result, they were often too brief, functional at best, added no additional value and for this reason, were rarely read. In a post-GFC labour market, cover letters form a crucial part of your Non Executive application process, regardless of whether you are responding to an advertisement, using a recruiter or approaching a company directly. In fact, cover letters are a valuable resource often carefully read by Chairs and recruiters alike. A strong cover letter demonstrates that you have more to offer than just what is on your CV. However, for a cover letter to be of real value, it needs to be both accessible and readable.

Accessible: Because your cover letter is important and you want it to be read, you should submit it in the body of your email application and as part of your CV document (not as a separate attachment). By doing so, it is much more likely to be read and distinguish you from other applicants.

Readable: It should never be more than a single page long and ideally shorter. To help you do this limit yourself to five paragraphs.

You might like to consider including the following paragraphs in your cover letter.

Passion For The Role: The first paragraph must grab the attention of the reader. Chairs, recruiters and appointment/nomination committees look for applicants who are intelligent, qualified and passionate about what they do. So, this paragraph is not a statement about your understanding of the company, where you saw the job advertised or what the role is that you are applying for. Instead, it must demonstrate your passion for the role. It is where your earlier research begins to pay dividends.

This kind of opening can be incredibly powerful. Firstly, it immediately captures the reader's attention. It then demonstrates, from the outset, a number of positive qualities - your enthusiasm for the role, your ability to do it, your intelligence, connectedness and that you have done more research than most other applicants. All of which demonstrates you to be a proactive and motivated applicant. It is a strong start.

Your Profile: The profile you wrote as part of your CV, that summarises your experience, your success, your achievements and your education should be inserted as your second paragraph. It is OK to duplicate this information because you do not want this paragraph overlooked. It is your answer to the question, 'Why should the company appoint me?'

Address Gaps Or Issues In Your CV: We know, having spoken to recruiters, how easy it is for companies to disregard an applicant because of a misinformed interpretation resulting from a poor CV. Try to ensure you are absolutely clear about any issues or gaps in your CV.

This paragraph should briefly allay any fears the Chair or nominations committee might have so that they do not discount your application. Ideally, this is a very short paragraph but an important one as most applicants have something to address here. It might address issues such as the belief that: you are too old, too young, over-experienced, under-experienced, it is your first role or you have a perceived conflict of interest, etc. Equally, if there is something in your past that should be addressed, address it here and explain yourself rather than have others make assumptions perhaps not based on the full facts.

Your Point of Difference: The reality is that boards want comfort and to be able to positively announce their new appointments. You need to demonstrate that you will fit in, but also give something to remember you by. It could make the difference between your appointment or not. Ask yourself the question, 'Who would you appoint if you had to make a decision between two or more equally qualified candidates?' The individual who seemed to have a personality, who would fit culturally into the board and had demonstrated their achievements outside of work (clubs, sporting achievements, languages etc) or those who could not demonstrate any interests or success outside of a work setting and seemed the same as everyone else?

Passion For The Company: This is one of the most important sections of your cover letter and is also based on your previous research. This summary demonstrates your understanding of what the company does, your connectedness, intelligence and strategic approach. Most importantly, it demonstrates your passion for the objectives or goals of the organisation. It is a strong way to finish any cover letter.