

# How Indonesian Students Write Job Application Letter

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**Abstract.** A job application letter is a document containing an applicant's skills, abilities, and experiences regarding a job opening to an employer. Writing this letter is a major determining factor for applicants to secure a job because it is the first screening process before they undergo the recruitment phase. Therefore, this study aims to determine the pattern of job application letters written by Indonesian students and the language used. Data were obtained from sixty letters written in Indonesian and English by fourth-semester students that studied at the Faculty of Economics and Business in one of the private universities in Jakarta. Furthermore, data collection was obtained by interviewing heads of human resources divisions in several companies in Jakarta. The obtained data were descriptive qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed by observing the letter's contents using the AIDA approach and calculating the percentage of model variants that appeared in the data. The results showed that students' job application letter has several variants of the AIDA model, and the languages used are still less persuasive.

**Keywords:** *Indonesian, Student, Write, Job Application*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Job application letters are an important component in applying for jobs online and offline because it provides an outline of the applicant's qualifications [1]. It is also one of the most significant means of successfully attracting the recruiters' attention. The job application letter is an introduction to the attached resume as a recruiter's 'bridge', which is a personal document that describes the applicant's skills and work history [2]. Each job application letter is unique because it is specifically written and tailored to the needs of the company [3]. A job application letter is effective when the applicant can professionally demonstrate his ability to assist the company in achieving tremendous success [3]. It contains a description of the applicant's qualities to persuade the reader, express wishes, briefly validate the information presented and express politeness. These refer to one goal of the job application letter genre, which is "to get a certain response from the reader" [3]. A job application letter can be classified as a promotion genre in a business setting because it enables applicants to describe the information contained in the resume and relate it to the qualifications expected by the recruiter [4]. Therefore, they possess the same persuasive and informative characteristics as business letters, thereby maximizing readers' benefits [5]. According to Londo, a business letter has four parts, which are formulated in AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, and

Action) [6]. The AIDA formula emphasizes the reader's interest [7] and provides adequate information on the applicant [6].

Job application letters have been observed from a cross-cultural context [8],[5],[9], [2]; language learning [10]; politeness [7], and organizational structures [4],[11],[2],[12]. These previous studies implied that writing job application letters need to be taken seriously and can be studied despite the differences and similarities in the socio-cultural conditions. Both fresh graduates and experienced job applicants have limited English vocabulary, thereby making it difficult for them to convey adequate information in their job application letters [10]. Furthermore, data obtained through observation showed that applicants and students lacked the right skills in writing job application letters that reveal their qualifications in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, they still need writing training as part of a recruiter-oriented business letter. This is supported by the research carried out by Pibal that students as prospective employees need to learn the principles of writing a good job application letter based on their desired educational background and position [13].

This study complements previous studies on how Indonesian native speakers write job application letters. However, unlike Maasum et al., which generally used college graduate respondents [11], the study used active college students and those likely

to join the labor market soon. Furthermore, this study uses the AIDA approach, which is an ideal hierarchical model commonly applied in business messages in marketing products. This approach is found in sales messages, fundraising letters, promotional documents, and job application letters [5],[14]. AIDA contains a "brief summary of applicants' qualifications and achievements as well as a specific statement of their interest in a particular company/position and how they aim to contribute uniquely"[15]. This study aims to identify a job application letter model using the AIDA approach and explain the language used.

**2. METHOD**

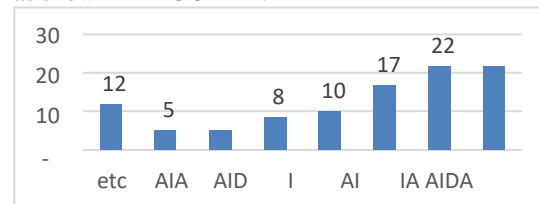
This population of the study comprises 200 active undergraduate students of the Business Communication course at a private university in Jakarta in the odd academic year 2018/2019 and even academic year 2019/2020. As many as 60 students from one class were randomly selected for this study. The respondent's age is 20-22 years. The data collection technique was carried out by writing a job application letter test in English or Indonesian for 60 minutes. The participants were not provided with verbal instructions regarding the content and structure of the writing. Apart from testing, data were also collected by interviewing five heads of human resources department (HRD) divisions in several industries in Jakarta. The interview aims to determine the facts and needs of the industry regarding a good job application letter. The data analysis technique was performed using content analysis with each divided into three parts, namely opening, body, and closing. By using semantic and pragmatic criteria following the purpose of communication, each part of the job application

letter is identified by the writing stage using the AIDA approach. The type of AIDA model identified is used to calculate the percentage of occurrence frequency, which is presented in graphical form. Furthermore, the qualitative data from the verbatim transcriptions of the interview results were used to clarify the analysis. Also, the language used at AIDA was explained at each stage.

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**3.1. Job application letter model**

This study consists of 13 and 47 job application letters briefly written in English and Indonesian, respectively. The respondents consist of 55% male and 45% female, with the AIDA model used to indicate the stages of delivering information to recruiters. This study found variants of AIDA model: AIA, AID, I, AI, IA, and IDA. The most widely used models were AIDA and IDA, each 22%, as shown in FIGURE 1.



**FIGURE 1.** Percentage of AIDA variance model

This study's findings reveal the empirical fact that the initial stage of writing a job application letter does not always start by attracting the reader's attention, rather by introducing the applicants and the type of jobs they are interested in securing. This is followed by a detailed description of the applicant's qualifications supported by evidence (named desire) and ends with a follow-up request to the recruiter (named action). TABLE 1 describes AIDA's position in the job application letter.

**TABLE 1.** AIDA model

Section	Element	Solution	Addressing
Opening		Attention (A)	
Body		Interest (I), Desire (D)	
Ending		Action (A)	
Closing		Thanking	

TABLE 1 shows that A is an introduction to entering the core of the letter to attract the attention of the reader. However, several data didn't contain A. Then, the core of the letter is staged I and D. These stages provide information to the reader on the short identity of the applicant, the job they are interested in, and the qualification that sets them apart from others. Unfortunately, section D does not provide much information regarding the applicants' biography. Part D is completed by adding supporting documents, such as identity card, certificate, transcript, and the police reference. These documents tend to be more detailed in data than the description of the applicants' competence. The last stage, A, invites readers to follow up on the letter.

### 3.2. Language in AIDA

#### 3.2.1. Attention (A)

The first part of the letter aims to grab the reader's attention. This study found that 47% of job application letters used A(attention) stage. Out of these, 64% explained the source of job information in detail, while 36% did not. A's absence was caused by an unsolicited letter written by the applicant. This research started by creating a job application letter by providing information regarding the job. Sources of information were provided in detail (1) or generalized (2), as shown in the following example.

- When I came across the job vacancies at PT ABC over the internet, I was interested in applying... (07/L/01)
- Based on the published job vacancy notification, I would like to apply ... (07/P/02)

#### 3.2.2. Interest (I)

All data (100%) were written down in the I(interest) stage. In this stage, the applicants introduce themselves (3) and state the work they are interested in securing (4) while highlighting the company's services (5). As much as 90% of the data wrote the applicant's identity and 92% mentioned the jobs they were interested in, both specifically (87%) and generally as employees (13%). Furthermore, 5% of the data indicated knowledge of the company (6), with unsubstantial data found in explaining the type of work desired (7).

- I am writing this letter to convey my interest in the position of accounting staff at.... (025/P/02)
- I was interested in the opportunity provided by PT XXXX and decided to apply for the position of accounting staff. I attached my data, such as name, date of birth, contact number, email, etc. (10/L/01)
- I am interested in applying for the position of an auditor in your company, named PT YYY. This is because I strongly believe PT YYY as a big company has tremendous future potential; therefore, I am interested in being part of your team to ensure it achieves this goal. (07/P/02)

- I am interested in this position because I am certain of my ability to provide valuable knowledge and practical experience of my auditing and assurance classes to your organization. PWC is one of the largest public accounting firms in the world, and it is undoubtedly the goal of most accounting students in your organization. (014/P/02E)
- I, the undersigned below [name, date of birth, address, and contact number], apply to be able to accept me as a prospective employee at the company (031/L/01)

To make effective job application letters, applicants do not need to state their full biodata because everything is already on the resume. Rather they need to focus on drafting a concrete statement about the expected job. Therefore, a job application letter is important and when some information is missing or unclear, it tends only to have little impact on the recruiter.

#### 3.2.3. Desire (D)

D(esire) is the core stage in writing a job application letter because it contains the applicant's convincing information, such as qualifications, interests, character, health condition, and experience. Only 48% of the data reached stage D, however, not all provided a detailed description of the applicants' competence according to the job specification. This inadequate information can be due to the applicant's lack of self-confidence, expertise, experience, and inability to write effectively. To show evidence of expertise and identity, the applicants attach supporting documents which are written before D (8) or after D (9).

- For your consideration, **I have attached my curriculum vitae and motivation letter.** I am a team player and can work under pressure.... (01/P/02)
- I am in good health condition, loyal, honest, resilient, quick to understand new ideas... For consideration, **I attached a copy of my KTP, a copy of my diploma, and 3x4 photos.** (017/L/01)

As many as 77% of the sample data referred to the job application letter as a supporting document used to convince readers of their skills and abilities. It is important to attach these documents because they provide adequate information of the applicants' responsibility as explained in stage D. The absence of this stage causes the reader not to get complete information regarding the applicant's qualifications, thereby reducing the potential of the job application letter.

In the study carried out by Wijayanti, document attachments to letters were mandatory[12]. However, this study is different because the participants were students with no writing job

application letter experience. The inability to explain self-efficacy at stage D was found in applicants with no working experience or minimal organizational experience on campus. Furthermore, their job application letters were unable to convince the recruiter of their capability in handling the job. This is one of the weaknesses of the job application letter as the HRD manager said below (10).

- ... 5% of the applicant populations were capable of conveying their abilities and strengths in the application letter. These contents are related to the information received and based on that, I want to apply because I believe I have the required competencies. Also, I fit in with what is needed because I am a hard worker - I think the language of today's applicants are more diverse (I, male).

The applicant's abilities, qualifications, and knowledge need to be described in the job application letter [16]. McDowell stated that job, career goals, and personnel information are essential in a job application letter [17]. Nahar also supported that argument by stating that an effective job application letter contains reasons for the applicant's interest, identifying their relevant abilities and experience [18]. Therefore, according to McDowell and Nahar, I and D are the stages of the 'self-selling' promotion that needs to receive full attention in writing a job application letter. HRD manager stated that he aims to see "only competence and experience" (R, male).

In a job application letter, the applicant has space to discuss achievements, skills, works, or organizational experiences that are useful for advancing the company or future career. However, it turned out that the job application letter was written briefly without detailed information on the writer's expertise, only listed identity and document attachments, as stated by the HRD manager (11):

- We only found the name and biodata, stated also education and work experience start from year to year. Nothing the scope of previous work. This is important but not to be described deeply. We usually call the applicants who describe them in detail. (M, female)

This study same to the job application letters written by students in the US, which provide detailed information on the applicant's personal and professional qualifications [5]. In this study, they highlight their personality, such as loyalty, hardworking, honest, high motivation, teamwork, adaptability, resilience, willingness to learn new things, discipline, thoroughness, responsibility, and so on. Their professional qualifications have not been exposed yet. This finding is also in line with the research carried out by Mohamed et al. (Mohamed et al., 2017) This study found that respondents of this study were unable to explore their skills in writing,

however, their ability to make sales was not explained to the recruiter, supported by one HRD manager (12):

- ... the applicant wrote, 'I had the ability to...' these words show they have something to be offered, we feel it is his selling point. But, no job application letter like that. (R, male)

Although the applicants disclosed the information on skills, abilities, and achievements, they still lacked detailed descriptions. This shows that respondents have not been able to collect concrete information, for example, regarding job descriptions from previous work experiences (13):

Not enough description, both conventionally and email job application letter. Just said where his work before and his work responsibility globally, for example, the logistics control department to manage the in-out goods supply. Therefore, it needs to provide applicants detailed duties and responsibilities (R, male)

The lack of information on elements I and D, as well as the job application letter was written by respondents, can be said to have not succeeded in influencing recruiters. Key factors such as organizational and work experience (if any), best achievements and skills, or specifications have not been explored in depth. Therefore, this study supports the research that, in general, job application letters from South Asia tend to use job application letters with attached documents and are less supported by strong arguments [5].

#### 3.2.4. Action (A)

Action is the last stage in writing a job application letter, with as much as 77% of the data used asking the recruiter to act according to the applicant's wishes. Requests for such action are expressed either directly or indirectly. From this research, approximately 87% and 13% of the data used indirect and direct strategy respectively. However, both were stated politely and not in an urgent tone to avoid appearing aggressive.

The data show that the applicants ask the recruiter for immediate action without *basa-basi* (directly). The desired actions are the job application letter considered (14), the applicant called for an interview or test (14), and the applicant accepted to get the job (15). The results of this study are similar to the research carried out by Epstein (2018). According to Epstein, job application letters are considered by recruiters, with the applicants called for interviews [19]. The action is written in direct strategy and a polite tone, using pleading related-words (Fournier, M. & Spin, 2006; Bovee & Thill, 2018; [16].

- Please consider me for any interview in any vacant position in your organization. I am

reachable at XXXX or the email address (015/P/02)

- Please Mr/Ms in the process of accepting job vacancies (02/L/01)

In contrast to requests for direct action above, the applicants use indirect speech to minimize aggressive attitude. The form of language used, such as *if...* (16), (17); *thank you...* (18), (19); providing information with declarative constructions (20), (21):

- ... If there is any additional information that Mr or Ms need to know, I am ready to be called for an interview or a test (07/L/01).
- ... If you need anything from me, you can call me any time on 99999999. (021/P/02)
- Thank you for the time you took to review my application letter. (025/P/02)
- Thank you for considering this job application letter, I would also like to hear from you (02/P/02)
- You can reach me via phone or email to provide information regarding my qualification and eligibility for this position. (035/P/01E)
- I look forward to an interview with you to further discuss my qualification (017/L/02E)

This study is similar to Dressen-Hammouda who found that job application letter in English written by French students are more indirect and maintain distant social relationships [9]. As those searching for jobs, they use a strategy of indirect speech to make it appear they do not want the recruiter to assist them. Indirect speech is used for certain considerations, such as the difference in position between the applicant and the recruiter and unfamiliarity. Furthermore, the power of social distance and the level of threat to face influence speech choice, which is shown to be positively correlated between social variables and the degree of the unsustainability of politeness [21]. The applicant used a job application letter to explain his qualifications in more detail, followed by a letter of acceptance to join the company. Besides that, stage A can be divided into applicant-oriented or recruiter-oriented. The applicant-oriented is conditional and the applicant will be doing something after having been permitted by the recruiter (22). It is recruiter-oriented, assuming the applicant asks the recruiter to take action (23). In contrast to Dressen-Hammouda's research, this study contained more recruiter-oriented (96%) than author-oriented (4%) [9].

- I am going to call you next week to determine whether you agree that my qualification matches the position (023/L/01E).
- Thank you for taking the time to consider this

job application letter, and I would like to hear from you (02/P/02).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The existence of the AIDA variants indicates that the respondents did not exceed all stages of persuasive messages. This finding implied that the job application letter has not been written completely by the applicants. The core stage of the letter, namely I and D, are among those that are still weak and need to be taught to students because these sections represent an outline of the applicant's potential and experiences. The language used in explaining the source of job information is also still not persuasive, vague, with inadequate details. Writing a job application letter is one of the skills needed by students in written communication at the college. It needs learning or assistance for students or graduates who are looking for jobs to provide the right skills and abilities in line with the position they are trying to secure.

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