

How to write a cover letter



CAREER
STUDIO

What is a cover letter?

A cover letter is a document that accompanies your CV when applying for jobs. It is your personal sales pitch to introduce yourself, to show your interest in the position and to explain in more detail how your skills and experiences match the job role. It is also an opportunity for you to showcase your passion and personality.

It is an essential part of a lot of job applications, it's your chance to stand out from the crowd and show the employer why you are interested in working for them.

A cover letter should support the information included in your CV and it should be tailored to the job you're applying for – highlighting certain areas you think makes you a suitable candidate for the role and to ultimately persuade the reader to interview you.

Keep to one side of A4 and use the same font size and style as your CV so that it gives your application a coherent and professional look.

When do I need to use a cover letter?

If an employer asks for a cover letter to accompany your CV, this will usually be specified in the job advertisement. Many companies use online job applications, in which case you probably won't need to include a cover letter unless it is asked for. Always follow the instructions, but if you feel you want to send a cover letter to support your application, there is no harm in including one. If you are sending your CV by email, attach your cover letter as a separate document.

If you are making a speculative application to enquire about a position that has not been advertised, include a cover letter explaining why you are writing to the company. It may be to enquire about any opportunities for work experience, work shadowing etc.

Tailor your cover letter to the job description, highlight keywords or requirements the company have specified. Are they looking for someone who can work within a team or have attention to detail? If so, you can refer to your academic experience, group projects and any work experience you have undertaken.

How do you structure a cover letter?

Beginning: Include your contact details which should be aligned to the right. Include your phone number, email address (which ideally should consist of your first and last name) and location (there is no need to include your complete address, just your location will do).

You can also add a link to your LinkedIn profile. If you are applying direct to a company, add their address and the date further down and on the left-hand side.

If the job advert does not state who to address your cover letter to, try to find out by contacting the company. If you know who the addressee is, use 'Dear' followed by title (Mr, Miss, Mrs or Ms, or Dr. if this is specified) and surname, and finish with 'Yours sincerely'. If you don't know the name of the person, then Dear Sir or Madam should be used and then finish with 'Yours faithfully'.

"A cover letter is an essential part of a lot of job applications, it's your chance to stand out from the crowd and show the employer why you are interested in working for them."

The First Paragraph – The Position: Your opening paragraph should include why you are writing the letter, the position you are applying for (job reference or title) and how you found out about the position/where it was advertised.

Example: "I am writing to apply for the position of as advertised in the.....and have attached a copy of my CV for your consideration."

The Second Paragraph - About You: Write a short introduction to yourself and why you are interested in the position. This should be similar to the profile at the top of your CV.

Your goal is to demonstrate what makes you an ideal candidate. Expand on the detail in your CV and provide examples of how the knowledge from your degree (key modules or projects), relevant skills and any previous experience (placement, part-time work), along with any key achievements show that you meet, or even exceed, the requirements of the position.

Always refer to the skills mentioned and mirror the words that are used in the job description. This will help the employer/recruiter to see how you match the position.

Example: "I am a final year Accounting and Finance undergraduate at Staffordshire University. Whilst studying, I worked part-time as an office assistant in a large sales company, where I gained experience in the monthly invoicing processes. I also have experience managing a budget for activities as a volunteer treasurer for the university football team. I am keen to start my career in within the finance industry following graduation."

The Third Paragraph – About the Company: This paragraph is your chance to show what interests you about the company and any projects or activities they are involved in and why you are particularly interested in working for them.

Do your research. Look on their website, social media sites and check out their company and employee LinkedIn profiles to find out more about their culture and values, their products and services, and any events they have attended.

Example: "I am impressed by your graduate recruitment information and enjoyed meeting senior staff and current graduates from your company at my University careers event. I was interested to learn about the variety of business areas the two-year graduate training programme covers, and I like how the programme is personalised to enable individual career development."

Closing: Finish by thanking them for taking time to consider your application. You could mention when you are available for interview and say how you are looking forward to hearing back from them.

Sign your cover letter with 'Yours sincerely' (if you know the name of the person), or 'Yours faithfully' (if you don't), followed by your name.

How can I get further support?

Further examples on cover letters can be found at the following websites:

<https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/job-hunting-tools-downloads>

<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/cvs-and-cover-letters/example-cvs>
<https://targetjobs.co.uk/sites/targetjobs.co.uk/files/public/general-covering-letter.pdf>

You can receive peer to peer career support from our Career Coaches who can be found in our Career Studio in the Student Hub, Science Centre on Leek Road. The Career Studio is open Monday-Thursday 10am-6pm and Friday 10am-4.30pm. You can also receive career support via email at careers@staffs.ac.uk.

Other leaflets in this series:

How to write a CV

Graduate job hunting

Networking

Available online at www.staffs.ac.uk
or from the Career Studio