

Cover Letters

A cover letter is your opportunity to make a positive first impression. Just as important as your CV, it is where you can explain your skills, ability and motivation for the role.

Purpose of a cover letter

The purpose of a cover letter is to convince the recruiter that you are the best candidate for the job.

It is your opportunity to show your motivation for and understanding of the role and organisation, as well as provide evidence that you meet the requirements in the person specification.

Key messages to communicate

- why you want to work in their organisation
- why you want to work in that particular role
- why your strengths, skills and experience make you the right candidate for the role

They do not need to be covered in three separate paragraphs. Instead, connect why you want this role, in this organisation, to information about yourself - showing how your interests/skills align to their work. To do this effectively you will need to tailor your letter to each role you apply for.

Your cover letter and CV may not be read together, so make sure your cover letter stands alone. Refer to key facts from the CV, highlighting areas of particular relevance to the role, but don't duplicate it.

You should always send a cover letter with your CV unless you are told otherwise. Make sure to look at our *How to write a CV* handout for further information.

Structure and content

Remember, your cover letter is an example of your written communication. Write in a clear, succinct and professional manner.

Keep to one side of A4, with a clear structure, as suggested below. The sections may vary a bit depending on the role you are applying for.

Greeting

Personalise your cover letter where possible by addressing it to a named contact. These details will usually be in the application pack, but you may also be able to find a name using the organisation's website or on LinkedIn.

Introduction

Start by explaining why you are writing -to apply for a position/looking for work experience, where you saw the position advertised or, if the application is speculative, how you know about the organisation.

Introduce yourself by briefly telling them key information – your degree subject, university and stage of study (e.g. graduate, final year).

Why them?

Employers look for candidates who are genuinely interested in working for their organisation, and who have a deep interest in the role or opportunity. Because of this, it is vital to give clear evidence of your motivation for both the role and the organisation.

Role: What particular aspects of the job are most attractive to you, and why? This is a great place to include examples of your skills and experience to convince the recruiter that you are suitable for the role.

Organisation: Why do you want to work for this organisation in particular? Research the organisation and the sector before writing this (the company's website and social media platforms are good places to start).

Always use specific examples to support your statements and avoid being too vague or using blatant flattery. If you could remove the organisation's name and replace it with that of a competitor, it's not specific enough.

Why you?

Make it easy for the employer to see why your skills, experience and attitude are right for the position by clearly linking them to the requirements of the job listed in the person specification.

Identify what it is that makes you a good fit for the organisation and evidence this by choosing specific examples. These could be from work experience, your studies or extra-curricular activities. Don't try and cover all your experiences, but focus on three or four strong examples.

If there are any circumstances you wish to explain, for example extended gaps on your CV, or changing or taking longer to finish your degree, you can do that here. Use positive language and talk about the skills you gained from that time, such as resilience or problem solving.

The ending

State that you look forward to hearing from them. If you want to say anything about your availability for interview this would be the place to do that. You can also briefly reaffirm your enthusiasm for the role but keep it simple and don't waste space repeating things you have already said.

Top tips

- Always follow any instructions given. If you are instructed to attach a cover letter, set the document out as a formal letter, with addresses at the top. But if it is a covering email rather than a separate letter, you don't need to include the addresses.
- Use positive language – Action words can illustrate your experiences in a really effective way. For example, 'initiated', 'instrumental in...', 'succeeded in...'
- Avoid copying lots of detail from your CV. You should use your cover letter to highlight relevant skills and experience in your CV without just repeating information.
- Keep your cover letter clear, well presented and visually attractive. Don't cram too much on the page. Check you've got the company name and other key details correct.
- Double check your spelling and grammar! Get it checked by someone else for any errors.

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London
AN10 1AN
agraduate@email.com
07777 123456

Graduate Employers Plc
Graduate Buildings
Central Place
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10.9.20

Dear Ms Georgiou,

Application for Graduate Trainee Position with Graduate Employers Plc

I am applying for the business stream of your management consultancy training scheme as advertised on brilliantgraduatejobs.com. My CV is enclosed with this letter.

I chose my current degree (Business Finance and Accounting) with this career in mind and I am particularly interested in the international work you do alongside your innovative use of technology. I am now in my final year and expecting to achieve a 2.1. My favourite modules on the course were on information systems, data reporting and theory of the firm in which I achieved my highest marks. They particularly developed my research, analytical and presentation skills while giving me a robust theoretical background in business.

In my second year I was course representative on the Business School academic board and contributed successfully to a review of the course assessment regulations, making assessment easier to understand for students and clarifying the appeals process.

I worked as a retail assistant part-time at Giant Retail Company while studying. This provided me with excellent insight into the day to day operations of a business. I've learned the importance of good reporting and management systems as well as developing my teamwork and customer care skills. I was awarded employee of the month in April 2018 for exceeding sales targets.

While on my study abroad semester in the USA I developed my self-confidence and ability to adapt quickly to new situations and form productive relationships. I learned about different perspectives on business which I have been able to apply in my work during my final year at University.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Anna Student

Make sure your contact details appear in the top right. Your email and mobile phone are a minimum. Postal address is optional.

The employer's address.

Don't forget the date.

Try to address your letter to a named person. If you can't, 'Dear Sir or Madam' will do.

State which role you are applying for, because the organisation might have more than one vacancy.

Your CV may be detached from your cover letter. Mentioning it gives the employer a cue to make sure they have it and have read it.

Highlight your course achievements in a way that is relevant to the role you are applying for. Be specific about what you achieved and what you learned. This shows that you have understood the job you are applying for. Also mention why you find the organisation interesting.

Talk about what you have done outside your course that is relevant to your application. Point out what you achieved and support these claims with evidence.

Again, make any experience relevant to the role and talk about what you gained from them.

You don't need a fancy ending. Something simple will do fine.

If you have addressed the letter to 'Dear Sir/Madam' you must sign off with 'Yours faithfully'.

This resource is available in alternative formats.

Please contact your careers service or email careersgroup@careers.lon.ac.uk