



Crafting a Cover Letter

Your cover letter, which used in conjunction with your CV, can help you make a great first impression on a recruiter or potential employer. Here are some key points to keep in mind.

Introduction

Your cover letter is an opportunity to sell yourself outside of the formality of a CV. Often it can mean the difference between being shortlisted for a role or not.

It's the chance to tell the recruiter or a potential employer who you are, what your values are, and how this makes you the perfect candidate for both the company and the job role.

The Basics

- Address the letter to a specific person or “to whom it may concern” but never to the company name.
- Reference the job title and your interest in it at the start.
- Read the job description. Understand the requirements and reference the same language and keywords throughout your cover letter.
- Do your research. What does the company do, what are their values, have they published any recent news? Include a mention to anything relevant.
- Highlight your relevant experience and relate it to the job role and requirements.
- Be sure your reason for applying is clear.
- Keep it simple. Outline your personality, enthusiasm, and experience, but keep it under 2 x A4 pages.
- Sign off with your name, contact details and availability for interview.
- Use a professional and clear font in size 10 or 11.
- Check it in terms of spelling, grammar, and tone of voice. Read it aloud and have someone else read it too.

The Layout

The Introductory Paragraph

This needs to strike the right note to introduce you in a way that fits the job, the company, and you. Its tone will depend on the job and the sector. It could read:

“Please find attached my CV in application for the job of [insert job title], advertised in/on [publication or website]. I believe that my combination of skills and experience [and particularly my experience at x, or my ability to do y] make me the ideal candidate for this role.”

Alternatively, if you're applying for a very unlikely career change, then you might want to acknowledge this with your first paragraph, and say something like:

"You may be wondering why I'm applying for this job when, on the face of it, my skills and experience are likely to be very different from most other candidates. However, I believe that this would be a great job for me, and my unique approach to it, bringing as it does [skill x] and [experience y] would be a great benefit to your company."

The Main Section

The main section of your cover letter should be structured around the job description and the specific requirements of the role. You should describe what you have done and the skills that make you suitable for the job.

Use examples to show how you have previously demonstrated the requirements of the job. Use the same language as the job advert.

- Copying/pasting the job advert in a Word document and highlighting the keywords that are used is a good way to ensure you use the same language in your cover letter.
- Matching the language shows the recruiter, at a glance, that you understand the role and are a relevant candidate.

Other useful phrases include:

"My ability to manage/run/achieve [x] speaks for itself. I have [list of achievements in x]."

"I hope it goes without saying from my list of previous jobs that I am [extremely flexible/good at timekeeping/whatever you want to demonstrate]."

"I first developed [skill y] in [job x], but have honed it since working in [mention jobs]."

When you've finished writing everything, go back over it and make sure that you have mentioned every skill or piece of experience that is described as "essential" on the person specification, and as many as possible of the "desirable" ones. If you haven't, your application will probably be rejected automatically.

You'll probably find that your cover letter is now too long. Edit and polish it until you have said everything that you need to say within two pages of paper (if a separate document) or approximately that if sending as a covering email.

The Closing Paragraph

This needs to wrap up your letter or statement neatly, and make clear what action the reader will be taking as a result of reading it, but without sounding arrogant.

So it might say, for example:

"I hope this convinces you that I have the necessary skills and experience to achieve as [insert job title]. I look forward to hearing from you."

If this is a letter and you have addressed it to someone by name, sign off with "Yours sincerely". If you started with "Dear Sir/Madam", sign off with "Yours faithfully".

Check and Send

When you've finished your cover letter, read it over thoroughly. Then get someone you trust, who has a good eye for detail, to read it over for you, looking for typos, grammatical errors, and inconsistencies.

It is also helpful if you can get somebody who knows something about the sector and/or job to check your letter. They may spot potential problems or suggest ways that you could tweak your letter for maximum effect.