

# COVERING LETTERS

## What are they for?

A well written covering letter will sell you to a potential employer and encourage them to read your CV. It is your initial introduction to an employer, so it must be concise and look professional.

A covering letter needs to be tailored to demonstrate your motivation and suitability to do a specific job with a specific employer. You need to give enough information to spotlight the important and relevant details on your CV; the letter is not simply a list of your academic qualifications and skills. Finally, you must show that you have done your research about an employer and job role to demonstrate your motivation.

## What does a covering letter look like?

A covering letter has a standard format. Remember to make your paragraphs concise and well organised, ensuring that each paragraph addresses only one important factor e.g. your motivation or suitability.

### Structuring a cover letter

#### 1. Introduction

Tell them who you are, what you are studying and where. Explain why you are writing (e.g. for work experience or to apply for a specific vacancy; if the latter, give the job title and where you saw it advertised). Establish any links with the individual or the company to whom you are writing, if relevant, e.g. 'I spoke with Jane Smith, a consultant at Deloitte, at a careers evening and she suggested I apply for this role'.

#### 2. Why this job role?

You need to show that you have an understanding of what the job involves and why it's of interest to you. Look at the information in the job advertisement which explains what the employer is looking for. Make sure to mention these requirements and provide evidence of how you match to them. Tell the employer if you have gained relevant skills and experience. Remember that it is also valid to talk about relevant skills you have gained in a context which isn't directly related, e.g. internship with another organisation, work shadowing, course work, or a role within a club or society.

#### 3. Why this organisation?

Show that you know something about the organisation and why you would like to work for them. Never just repeat what is on their website. Perhaps you met someone from the company at a careers event or attended a presentation? Consider what motivates you to work in this sector, what you know about it and what's happening currently. This is your chance to show you have researched their organisation, the industry, and know who their customers and clients are.

#### 4. Finishing the letter (one or two brief paragraphs)

If you need to, you can briefly mention any additional factors e.g. why your degree result/A-level grades weren't as good as expected, or when vacation dates are if requesting work experience. Always finish on a positive note.

## Letter format guidelines

- **Layout:** use a formal business letter layout with your address in the top right-hand corner and the name and address of the person and organisation you are applying to below, on the left-hand side. Include the date and any job reference below this. Make sure all names are spelled correctly.
- **Length:** one side of A4. If sending a hardcopy by post, use good quality plain paper.
- **Contact:** always try and write to a specific, named person. Use their correct title e.g. 'Dear Mr Jones' or 'Dear Ms Smith'.
- **Four or five paragraphs:** highlight and demonstrate, with evidence and examples, how your experience and skills meet the employer's requirements.
- **End the letter correctly:** if you address the letter to a named person i.e. 'Dear Ms Smith,' sign off with 'Yours sincerely'. Use 'Yours faithfully' if the letter is addressed to 'Dear Sir/Madam'. Then leave a few lines and type your name in full, leaving space for your signature.

## Applying by email

Make sure that whatever you are sending out is professionally presented and error free. Use the same font type and size in both covering letter and CV. If you have been asked to send your application by email, you can attach both letter and CV to a brief email. Alternatively, you can use the covering letter as the text of the email and attach your CV. Make sure you follow any instructions the employer has given.

## Speculative letters

A speculative application is sent to an organisation to see if they have any opportunities which have not yet been advertised. It can be a good way of sourcing work experience or work shadowing. Writing a good speculative letter requires you to:

**Do your research:** good research and careful thinking around the employer/organisation will help you to suggest the roles/areas you are interested in. Employers like to receive suggestions as to the type of work you can do.

**Think about the employer's point of view:** do explain what you can bring to the organisation, whether this is relevant experience, or an interest in this area of work and lots of enthusiasm.

## Top tips for a winning cover letter:

- Proofread the letter before sending it. Grammar and spelling mistakes may result in your application being rejected
- Make it clear what you are looking for i.e. a meeting to discuss your CV further, an interview or work shadowing. If it is a speculative letter, explain that you will follow it up with a phone call in the near future
- Always keep a copy of the job advert together with the covering letter and CV which you sent in response to it

## Remember: we can help!

Book a Quick Query via [MyJobsOnline](#) and bring in your draft CV and covering letter to be checked by a Careers Consultant before you send it off.

# COVERING LETTER – EXAMPLE

46 Lincoln New Rd  
Southgate  
Reading  
RG1 1AA

Ms Karen Gold  
Market Research Director  
The Independent Travel Company  
London  
SW9 XTS

13 March 2019

Dear Ms Gold

I am currently in my second year at the University of Reading where I am studying History and Politics. I am writing to you to explore the possibility of gaining work experience over the summer with The Independent Travel Company, and in particular within your market research department.

Last summer I successfully completed an eight-week project through the University of Reading Internship Scheme. I gained work experience working for a local theatre and developed a number of digital marketing skills that you are looking for. As an intern in the marketing department I worked on a project looking at the theatre's social media engagement. I interviewed small groups of people, gathered data and wrote a report, which included recommendations for both improving the theatre's social media feed on Facebook and Instagram and increasing its following.

As part of my degree course, I was awarded a score of 80% for the module on research methods. I enjoy analysing data and can produce accurate written reports of my findings. I have also given a presentation to students in my seminar group, which increased my confidence in communicating complex material to my peers. This summer, I will be using my research skills to carry out a literature review for my final year dissertation.

I am drawn to The Independent Travel Company because I have some insight into the tourism industry: Before university I spent a summer working as a holiday representative for 18-25 year olds in a busy resort. I would meet and greet customers as they arrived and was responsible for organising various social events. I particularly enjoyed designing appropriate marketing materials to attract new customers. I am keen to apply what I have learned in the bespoke tourism sector which The Independent Travel Company serves.

I would now like to acquire more in-depth experience in market research to complement the experience I have already gained, as my longer-term career aims are to work in a marketing role within the bespoke tourism sector.

Thank you for considering my CV and request for work experience. I will follow this letter up with a phone call to you in two weeks' time, if I may.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Tom Walker

# COVERING LETTER CHECKLIST

**Have you:**

## **Made a good opening?**

- Started your letter with a concise introduction to who you are and why you are writing

## **Shown why you are suitable for the job?**

- Identified the key requirements for the role and provided evidence of having used these skills and knowledge
- Used appropriate vocabulary that is convincing and persuasive, and shows your motivation and enthusiasm

## **Explained why this job role is attractive to you?**

- Conveyed what you would find particularly rewarding about working in the role
- Showed that you have a good understanding of what the job involves
- Used appropriate vocabulary that is convincing and persuasive and shows your motivation and enthusiasm
- Achieved a good balance between what you will get from the role and what you can offer
- Written a concise and focused two- or three-point summary

## **Outlined why their organisation appeals?**

- Conveyed what you think is attractive and rewarding to you about working for that organisation and in that sector
- Showed your understanding of what the organisation can and does offer
- Achieved a good balance between what you will get from working for the organisation and what you can offer
- Written concisely and focused on two or three key points

## **Written a concluding paragraph?**

- Rounded off your letter in an optimistic way and outlined what you would like to happen next, without sounding either arrogant or as though you have low expectations

## **General points**

- Write in a confident and optimistic tone: Does it sound as if you want the job?
- Keep it to one side of A4
- Proofread it and ask someone else to check it for you