



careers advice pack

9. How to write great cover letters



Unique covering letters

Each covering letter (which may also be sent by email) is a vital part of the job application. Never send a standard cover letter. Tailor the content for each job you apply for. The cover letter can make a real difference - it's the place where you can really demonstrate to the employer that you understand what they are looking for and that you are the right person for the job.

We've put together some tips for writing a cover letter and we've also included a letter template and an example.

Guide to drafting

- Address the letter to the named contact (not Dear Sir/Madam). Get this right – it should say in the job advert who to address the letter to.
- State how you came to know of the position you are applying for (e.g. newspaper name and date).
- Describe the top 2 or 3 areas of skill and/or experience that make you suitable for the role. This is not simply repeating your CV, this is **highlighting your most relevant** skills and experience. Don't just copy and paste from your CV – your letter needs to flow.
- Explain why you are interested in this job and organisation, demonstrating an understanding of what it's likely to involve and what the needs of the organisation are. You may need to do some research from the company's website to help you with this.
- Close on a positive note. e.g. I look forward to hearing from you.
- Pay attention to matching your greeting with your sign off (e.g. Dear Mrs Patel, Yours sincerely; or Dear Sir..., Yours faithfully)



Things to avoid

- Don't use a standard letter in which you just change the name of the employer and leave the rest unchanged. Your letter is a real opportunity to sell yourself – don't waste it!
- Avoid starting every paragraph with 'I' as this gets repetitive.
- Don't focus too much on what you want – instead, try to focus on what the employer needs.
- Don't give the employer your life history – what they want to know is how and why you are suitable for/interested in the role.

Example covering letter for a specific job

On the next page you'll find an example of a job advertisement, followed by a covering letter that could be sent in response. We have put these together using the following approach:

- Read the advert carefully
- Pick out the key skills and experience that the job requires (in the example below we have highlighted them in pink).
- Call the company to find out anything you need to know (e.g. in this case we needed to know if it was Mr Smith or Mrs, Ms, Ms etc).
- Write your covering letter so that it clearly shows how your skills and experience match those asked for.

The type of work you are seeking may be quite different to that described in this advert, but using this approach for preparing a covering letter will be helpful.



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Remember that there may also be a job description or person specification that describes the job in more detail. Ask if this is available and use the same approach as above.

Job advertisement (all details are fictional)

Advert seen on: Timewise Jobs, 25th September 2013

Administrative Assistant

Enthusiastic and responsible administrative assistant required to support the day to day running of a successful and growing event management company.

You will have a minimum of **2 years' experience** of administrative work including a sound **knowledge of MS Word, Excel and Outlook**. You will be used to **handling customer telephone and email** enquiries in a **friendly and efficient** way.

You will be a **strong communicator**, able to liaise with suppliers and other businesses and to communicate with others in our busy office.

Candidates must be able to demonstrate an ability to **work accurately**, to **prioritise**, meet deadlines and take **responsibility for their own workload**.

Based in our central London office, candidates will also be required to **organise meetings** and **order office supplies**.

Knowledge of the events industry is desirable.

Hours: From 21 hours per week - flexible pattern

Salary: £23,000 pro rata

To apply, send your CV and covering letter to A. Smith, Managing Director, All Events Ltd, Palace Street, Victoria, London, SW1 2AB.



Covering letter, responding to the above advert

Kate Jones
25 Bickerton Road
London N19 1VW

Mrs A. Smith
Managing Director
All Events Ltd
Palace Street
London SW1 2AB

30th September 2013

Dear Mrs Smith

**Re: Role of Administrative Assistant
(advertised on Timewise Jobs on 25th
September 2013)**

As an experienced administrator, with a track record of over five years working in busy offices, I would like to apply for the above position.

The article about your company's 'dynamic and creative approach' in last month's issue of 'Events News' also caught my eye.

The following are the main ways in which I meet the requirements of the role and can contribute to All Events Ltd's ongoing success:

Begin by stating that you are writing to apply for the job. Mention the specific job title and where you saw the advert.

Try to include the key reason why you're a good match for the job.

Somewhere in the letter, you should explain briefly why you are interested in working for this employer. If possible, reveal some knowledge of the organisation.



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- I have excellent knowledge of MS Word, Excel and Outlook; having used these packages daily in busy office administration roles e.g. Administrative Assistant to a marketing team of 7 at ABC Bank Ltd.
- In my most recent role I was responsible for handling all initial customer enquiries (by telephone, email and letter) and for dealing with other businesses. I am an effective communicator and have a friendly manner.
- Responsibility for collating monthly sales figure reports in time for monthly management meetings at XYZ Ltd required attention to detail and an ability to manage my own work. In that role I also managed office supplies (and reduced spend by 10% by negotiating discounts).

Tell the employer what you can offer him/her. Demonstrate that the skills, experience and qualifications you possess will meet his/her needs.

If you are answering an advert or have a job description, be sure to address the key requirements the employer stipulates, and use the same keywords.

Refer briefly to achievements that are relevant to the job for which you are applying. Give specific evidence where possible.

Further relevant information is given in the attached CV. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

At the end of your letter, refer your reader to the enclosed CV; invite him/her to seek out more information about you there. Open the door for an interview.

Kate Jones

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Additional tips

Keep the tone positive and focus on the ways in which you meet the requirements, rather than on any gaps (e.g. Kate Jones doesn't have events industry experience and doesn't draw Mrs Smith's attention to that).

Find your own style. The tone and style of this letter may be different from yours. Go with what you feel comfortable with. There is more scope in a covering letter than in a CV to introduce something of your personality, but keep it business like.

Finally, if you are finding it difficult to write your covering letter, ask yourself if you should really be applying for this role. If you're applying for a job you really want and you have the skills and experience to do it, your cover letter should flow.