

How to write a covering letter

If you are sending your CV to apply for a job, always include a cover letter. This is where you demonstrate your motivation and ability to do the job, and is your chance to really sell yourself to the employer.

A CV gives an overview of your skills and experience and the covering letter explains how these are relevant to the job and also shows your enthusiasm for the particular role and organisation. To convince the reader that you meet their specific requirements, you will need to write a different letter for each organisation and position that you apply to.

1 Greetings

Try to find a name as it sounds more personal and can show you have done some research about the company. If the job advertisement does not specify a name it is worth contacting the company to ask the name and the title of the person you should address the letter to.

2 Introduction

The first paragraph needs to be very clear. Include who you are (e.g. current 2nd year biomedical science student at Queen Mary, University of London), why you are writing (to apply for X position / looking for work experience) and where you saw the position advertised.

3 Why them?

Tell the employer why you want this job with their organisation - show your motivation and enthusiasm. Demonstrate that you understand what the job involves and that you have researched their organisation and industry. Avoid vague statements and obvious flattery. Be specific and illustrate your opinions with examples.

4 Why you?

Really emphasise why you are just right for this job, in terms of skills, experience and character. Illustrate your unique selling points with 3 or 4 excellent examples, rather than try to cover everything. Focus on the particular skills and experience the organisation want, using their recruitment information to find this. Use positive language and action words such as 'succeeded in', 'initiated'.

This is also the chance to deal directly and positively with any gaps or weaknesses in your CV.

5 The ending

Your closing paragraph is an opportunity to restate your interest and summarise your suitability. It is also a good place to state your availability for interview and to end on an optimistic note.

Make sure you sign off in the correct way: 'Yours sincerely' if addressed to a particular person, 'Yours faithfully' if you use Dear Sir / Madam.

On the following page is an example cover letter matching the CV and job description in the CV leaflet

Include the job title and reference number if there is one.

Amanda Harper
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07390045678

Use formal business letter layout

21st February 2012

Start with who you are, why you're writing, where you saw the role advertised and if it's a speculative letter, where you heard about them.

Dear Dr Plaice

Marine Planner (Evidence and Analysis)

I am writing to apply for the above position as advertised in The Guardian on 18 February. I am a final year student from Queen Mary University of London, studying for a BSc in Biology. Please find my CV enclosed, as requested.

Show your motivation and commitment to work in the industry and awareness of what the role involves.

I have a passion for coastal issues and conservation, and have been an active Sea Champion for the Marine Conservation Society since 2007. I am very keen to pursue my interest further and this role is the perfect opportunity to do so. I would enjoy travelling for my work and my ability to quickly grasp the bigger picture means a career as a marine planner is very appealing to me.

This section tells them 'why you' would be the best candidate. Do not just list your skills - give evidence to back up your comments.

I already have some experience in the monitoring and collection of data in marine environments. During my time as a Sea Champion I have taken part in numerous beach cleans and environmental monitoring initiatives where my attention to detail have ensured the accuracy of records. I have built on these skills during my degree through fieldwork where I collected and identified marine invertebrates for which my report received a mark of 71%.

Highlight key skills from your CV to persuade the recruiter you are worth interviewing. Your abilities are an important part of this and help to build a strong argument.

As a Biology student, I have used research skills throughout my degree. In particular, I have developed strong analytical skills in order to interpret data gathered during fieldwork projects. During my laboratory practical sessions I have learned to plan my time effectively and use resources in the most efficient way to yield results.

I am a clear communicator and have presented results from relevant coursework assignments to the local branch of the Marine Conservation Society on several occasions. These skills have been added to by time spent working as a receptionist at the Holiday Inn, where good teamwork and interpersonal skills mean I have thrived in a fast-paced environment. For the past 6 months I have been given the responsibility of training new recruits, as recognition of my ability.

By mentioning any work experience you can demonstrate skills that are less well developed in your degree course.

I am keen to work in an environment which is focussed on personal development where I can make a meaningful contribution to sustainable marine development. I have attended seminars by Poseidon Planning and have always been impressed by the expertise and enthusiasm of its employees. I believe that the role at Poseidon Planning is a good match for my skills and interests and I would be thrilled to become part of the team.

Why them? Research the organisation's website, or speak to employees to find out what makes them unique and how that relates to you. This will make your application stand out.

I am available for interview at any time and look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely

End 'yours sincerely' if addressed to a named person, or 'yours faithfully' if not.

Amanda Harper

Avoid a blunt ending. Include a closing paragraph that is optimistic and polite.

Checklist

- ✓ Does it match the job requirements?
- ✓ Does the content relate specifically to that role and organisation?
- ✓ Is it well written, clear and succinct? Does it look professional?
- ✓ Have you had feedback on your CV and covering letter from the Careers team? (Please take the job description with you.)

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November 2012

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