

How to write a covering letter

Your CV should rarely leave your desktop unless accompanied by a covering letter as they can be a major determinant of an applicant's success. Demonstrating your career interests and highlighting your most relevant strengths and experiences, a professionally set out letter can say a lot about your motivation and your attention to detail.

Well-written covering letters are also particularly effective for speculative applications outside of a recruitment cycle and for explaining any personal circumstances or anomalies in your application.

Content

The following format provides a useful overview for a letter:

- ▲ Briefly introduce yourself, state what position you are applying for and where you saw it advertised. For a speculative letter, include the type of work you are seeking.
- ▲ Explain why you are interested in this type of work, demonstrating an understanding of what it is likely to involve.
- ▲ Explain why you are interested in working for this particular organisation. Demonstrate enthusiasm and evidence of research into such aspects as their successes, involvements, values or clients.
- ▲ Highlight how you are suitable for this position. Provide evidence of your key strengths by referring to experiences on your CV. Aim for your key strengths to reflect the requirements of the employer and position.
- ▲ Take the opportunity, if necessary, to explain any anomalies in your experiences such as a gap or anywhere you do not match the selection criteria. Perhaps explain how any hurdles have developed you in a positive way.
- ▲ Indicate availability for interview.

Style

A professional business layout is important, addressed to a named individual wherever possible. Ring the organisation's switchboard to request a name if necessary.

Aim for one side of A4 with the same quality paper and font style as your CV.

A printed letter is the norm these days, although some recruiters may still specify a handwritten one to check out your handwriting.

The same rules about checking for spelling, grammar or typos still apply and probably more so on your letter.

Your writing style should be formal but try not to use words that are only really found in a thesaurus.