

# The covering letter

Your application's secret weapon



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# Introduction

When it comes to finding a new job, covering letters are possibly the most underrated tool at your disposal. A well-written covering letter helps you set yourself apart from other candidates.

Include a covering letter with an application unless the job advert specifically instructs you differently.

When preparing your application, don't forget to refer to our [CV writing guide](#) and [CV template](#) too.



## What is a covering letter?

A covering letter accompanies your CV when you apply for a job. Think of the covering letter as your CV's front cover – and remember to always tailor it to the role you're applying for.

Whereas CVs list your skills, experience and qualifications in a structured manner, covering letters highlight the parts that make you right for the opportunity in question.

Covering letters allow you to show more personality than CVs do when you're communicating with an employer.

## When should I use a covering letter?

Unless instructed otherwise, write and submit a covering letter with your CV for every job application you make.

As well as highlighting what makes you suitable – and revealing more of your personality – covering letters show you're serious about your application.



# What should I include in my own covering letter?

Keep your covering letter relevant, clear and concise. But also make sure it reflects your character and encourages an employer to want to meet you.

## Checklist

A quick checklist of elements to include:

- Your personal details (name, address and contact details)
- The contact's name, if you have it (addressing the recipient by name adds a personal touch)
- Where you found the vacancy
- Why you're suitable for the role
- What you can do for the company
- Closing statements (to express your gratitude and your enthusiasm)

## Structure

Now that you know what to include, you can use the information from the checklist to build the letter's structure.

There aren't set rules on how to structure your covering letter. However, making sure it flows well is vital if you're going to impress, so here's a suggested format:

### 1. Address the recipient – who is the letter for?

You'll ideally have the name of the hiring manager or recruitment contact from the job advert. Use it – address the recipient 'Dear Mr Smith/Ms Jones' etc.

If you can't find a contact name, but you have got the recipient's job title, use that (e.g. Dear HR Director). Otherwise, use a general opening such as Dear Sir/Madam.

### 2. Opening statement – why are you writing?

Keep the opening paragraph to the point but explain the purpose of your letter. State the role you're applying for, where you saw it advertised (and/or who referred you) and when you're available to start.

### 3. Second paragraph – why are you suitable?

Explain why you're the right candidate for the job. Describe your relevant skills, qualifications and experience, and use real examples to evidence them. Aim to reference each required skill from the job advert.

### 4. Third paragraph – what can you do for the company?

Emphasise why you're keen to work for the company and what you can offer. Outline your career goals (making them relevant to the role) and expand on key points from your CV, including further examples to back up your claims. Add details about why you're interested in the company and use the opportunity to mention anything relevant you've found in your research.

### 5. Closing paragraph – reiterate

Summarise and round off your letter. Reiterate your interest in the role and why you're the right match for it. It's also a good point at which to say you'd like to meet with the employer for an interview and to let them know when you'd be available to do so. Finish by thanking the employer and saying how you're looking forward to receiving a response. Sign off your letter with 'Yours sincerely' if you've used a personal opening, and 'Yours faithfully' if you've used a general one. Sign and print your name.

# Top covering letter tips

- **Tailor your letter**
  - Write a new covering letter for each application, rather than reusing or copying and pasting from previous ones.
  - Use specific examples from your skills, experience and qualifications that are relevant to the role and the company.
- **Use a widely supported file format like a Word doc. or PDF**
- **Format with care. Presentation and clarity are important, so pay attention to the formatting of your covering letter:**
  - Keep the layout uncluttered.
  - Use the same font and type size as you use in your CV.
  - If you're printing your letter for posting or handing in, use good quality plain white paper.
- **Use examples. Back up any statements you make with facts and figures and use real examples to evidence your claims.**
- **Check, double check and triple check!**
  - Read your letter out loud to check it makes sense and flows.
  - Proofread your letter for spelling and grammar mistakes as well as using your software's spellcheck function.
  - Print it and check it again – you might see something you didn't on-screen.
  - Ask someone else – a friend or family member – to check it too.
  - Above all, make sure the company, the contact name and your own details are accurate!

