



Your guide to writing a perfect cover letter

In most cases, your cover letter will be the first thing a recruiter or employer sees; execute it poorly, and they won't even look at your CV. This guide provides simple and effective ways of making your cover letter the best possible introduction to your application.

Synchronise Your Cover Letter with your CV

Firstly, you need to ensure that your cover letter doesn't simply repeat what's on your CV, or worse, contradict it. Anything claimed on your cover letter should be backed up by your CV. You should format your cover letter in exactly the same way as your CV, and use the same font. It will also be advantageous to use the same tone and language in both – any inconsistency will reflect badly on you.

Make it Personal

A recruiter or employer will be looking for generic cover letters, so, make it immediately clear that yours is personalised.

Where possible, address the letter to a specific person. Consider the kind of employer you're writing to and customise the language and tone appropriately.

Research the business

There's no company in the world that isn't encouraged by an applicant who's taken an active interest in what they do; the key is doing it in a meaningful way.

If you're going to write about why you're interested in an aspect of their business, be specific and show that you've actually learnt about it. Saying 'I'm a big fan of what you do' illustrates nothing, and suggests you're rushing through multiple applications.

Identify a project they've worked on and explain why you liked it, and how it related to your own interests, skills or experiences.

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Why you?

Every sentence and paragraph should communicate why you're the right person for this job.

No matter how good or punchy a sentence might seem, if it doesn't directly address how and why you're the ideal candidate, it doesn't belong there.

Focus on the specification

You undoubtedly possess many talents, but those that don't match the job specification directly shouldn't be included in your cover letter.

Recruiters will know the job specification inside out; it's the template they'll use to assess you. If you match your skills and knowledge to the requirements of the job, you'll show that you're not only suitable but that you understand the role.

Don't Be Boring

It can be difficult to find a balance between writing an appropriate letter that meets expectations, and not being too dull and predictable.

The obvious problem is that the recruiter will be reading many covering letters and CVs besides yours. If yours reads like all the others, it may be overlooked. So, as much as possible, try to show a bit of your character – because that's something that can't be replicated by anyone else. Of course, you'll need to consider the kind of company you're applying to, and the sort of tone and approach they might expect. But above all, you have to make them take notice.

When in doubt keep it simple

The underlying reality is that recruiters don't spend much time looking at cover letters. Your aim should simply be to make them want to learn more about you. If you briefly show how your skills and experience match the job specification, and why you're interested in their business, they'll probably look at your CV. So, don't repeat things that they'll find there. It's very common for candidates to be appropriate for a job but to spoil their chances by emphasising it too much – repeating their strengths and dwelling on how good they are. If you know you're right, be confident and show them in the simplest way possible.

Don't Rush

Take your time when writing your cover letter – and take even more time editing it. Cover letters that are rushed look rushed, and why would someone employ a candidate that sacrifices quality for speed? More to the point, rushed cover letters suggest you're applying for many jobs at once – another pet hate of recruiters.