

Cover Letters

What is a Cover Letter?

A *Cover Letter* is a short and to-the-point document of up to ½ a page of A4, which accompanies your CV. It is an often overlooked but essential part successful job hunting. Today's job market is highly competitive. Employers and recruiters typically receive a huge volume of applications for every vacancy. Taking the time to write a well-crafted *Cover Letter* is a great way to stand out from the crowd and give employers another reason to interview you instead of the competition!

The Purpose of a Cover Letter

The purpose of a *Cover Letter* is to help *sell* your application for a specific job vacancy. It should include the following points:

- ✓ Introduces you as a candidate.
- ✓ Says *why* you're interested in the job.
- ✓ Highlights your skills, experience, qualifications and strengths that match the job being advertised.
- ✓ Encourages the employer to read your CV and invite you to interview.
- ✓ Expresses your enthusiasm to interview for the job.
- ✓ States your availability for work / notice period.
- ✓ Gives your contact details (mobile / email).

Writing a Cover Letter

A good *Cover Letter* is written with a specific job in mind. Every *Cover Letter* should be different and individually tailored to the company you're applying to. Don't be tempted to copy and paste the same format for every job application. Employers will spot this a mile away and it will make you look lazy. Not the first impression you're hoping to make!

Your *Cover Letter* needs to demonstrate that you've read the Job Description, understand the key requirements of the job, and that you've made the effort to get to grips with what the company looks for in a new employee. Here are a few *do's* and *don'ts* to give your *Cover Letter* the edge:

Do's

- **Make it Personal** – avoid generic and outdated phrases like “to whom it may concern”. If possible, try to find out the name of the person dealing with the application and address your *Cover Letter* to them directly. Job adverts often name a specific person somewhere on the ad. You're more likely to get a response if you address your letter to the right person.
- **Contact Details** – make sure your *Cover Letter* includes your name and contact mobile / email. Use a professional email address that will make a positive impression. You could create a new email address exclusively for job hunting with a free web-mail provider (Gmail, Hotmail etc). Make sure the phone number you give out is one that you can answer. There's no point using a land-line number if you're never home!
- **Reference the Job** – make sure your *Cover Letter* includes the job title, location and reference number of the specific job you're applying for. You could also mention *where* you saw the job advertised. For example:

Re: Application for – Java Developer (Derby) – Job Ref: 12345

- **Research the Company** – do your homework on the company you're applying to. Research their website and look out for recent company news / blog articles. There may be clues about new projects, team events or charity work that align with your experience and values. This will make it easier to tailor your *Cover Letter* and make it more relevant.
- **Say Why You're Suitable** – your *Cover Letter* should demonstrate *how* your skills, experience, achievements and personal qualities match those of the job description and the company. Include a bullet-pointed list of the top 5 reasons why you're a great fit for the job. A good job advert will list 'essential' and 'desirable' skills and experience. Make sure your *Cover Letter* addresses as many of these as possible. You need to highlight to employers *why* they should consider you and *what* you can offer.
- **Show Enthusiasm** – mention *why* you're interested in working for the company and what attracts you to the job and the organisation. Do you have a great working environment? Do they offer great products or services? Be specific. Tell them why you'd love to work for them.
- **Specific Examples** – back up any claims made in your *Cover Letter* with specific facts and figures. Avoid empty statements and give concrete examples. This will give your letter more credibility.
- **Be Concise** – ideally, a good *Cover Letter* shouldn't be longer than ½ a page of A4. Try not to repeat yourself or waste valuable space with generalisations. Stay on point and write clearly and concisely.
- **Presentation** – take care to format your *Cover Letter* clearly. Include plenty of white space and make it as easy to read and uncluttered as possible. Use a consistent, professional-looking font throughout, such as *Arial*.
- **Terminology** – in your *Cover Letter* try to mirror the language used by the employer in their Job Description. Speak their language and use their terminology to create a connection.

- **Closing Statement** – finish up your *Cover Letter* with an upbeat ‘call to action’, encouraging the employer to read your CV and invite you to interview. Be confident but not arrogant. For example:

“As you can see from my CV, I am a strong match to your position. I’d welcome the chance to meet with you face-to-face to demonstrate how I can be of value to ABC Ltd. I look forward to hearing from you.”

Dont’s

- **Don’t Go Overboard** – keep your *Cover Letter* short and sweet. Its purpose is simply to encourage the employer to read your CV and invite you to interview. Don’t fall into the trap of repeating your CV in full. Let your CV elaborate on the details. Your *Cover Letter* should complement your CV, not duplicate it.
- **Typos** – always proof-read your *Cover Letter* for spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. Pay particular attention to people’s names, company names, job titles etc. Ask a friend or relative to sanity-check your letter before you finally send it out.
- **Keep it Professional** – try not to be overfamiliar or use slang. Keep the tone of your *Cover Letter* friendly and enthusiastic, but professional at all times.
- **Email Attachments** – don’t email your *Cover Letter* as a separate attachment. Include it in the body of your email. This should help to avoid your letter being caught by email spam-filters.

Any questions? Give us a call. We’re happy to help.

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Good Luck!