

Top Ten Tips for writing cover letters

Using a cinema analogy, if your CV is a big-budget blockbuster then your covering letter should be the short and enticing movie trailer.

Your covering letter is an important document - a key part of your application to a prospective employer. It is surprising that jobseekers often pay scant attention to it. Many candidates fail even to write one and only submit their CV or application form. Craft a strong covering letter and your application could really stand out from the crowd. So if it's of such importance you'll need to know how to produce the perfect covering letter. That's where we step in.

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1. Always send one!

The covering letter's job is actually two fold. At its basic level, the standard one-page covering letter performs a simple courtesy function. It is a socially acceptable way of introducing you and explaining which vacancy you're applying for or which area you are enquiring about. It also provides the recruiter with a handy list of your contact details.

2. Don't rewrite your CV

It should provide edited, juicy highlights from your CV. But it should not merely repeat what the CV includes but rather distils the key themes into one place.

3. First Paragraph and last line

Don't waffle in your first paragraph, make the reason you're writing clear and sell yourself; writing what makes you better than others straight off. Finish with a call to action, request they contact you for a meeting or interview and let them know you will be in touch to discuss.

4. Talk about the company

Do some research into the company/ organisation and include information about them. Specifically tell them what you are impressed with and what attracts you to them.

5. Provide quality evidence of your qualities

Pick out the top 3 or 5 (max) qualities the employer is seeking in their advert or job specification if there is one. These should be qualities that you have already covered in your CV.

And they should be the 3 to 5 things that you refer to - not explain - briefly in your covering letter. Provide concrete examples and solid numbers wherever you can. For example, after you've introduced yourself in your letter you could include lines similar to these:

"You will see from my enclosed CV that I match your requirements precisely. I have worked in the Web industry for over 10 years and have led a number of development teams that have ranged in size from 5 to 20 people."

Or

"You will see from my CV that I have worked in both the USA and Canada and have worked in senior positions on aerospace contracts ranging from £15m to £180m"

Your covering letter then is an additional 'sales' document...selling you

6. Reflect your personality

Ensure the letter shows how motivated and enthusiastic you are. Do not include negative comments. Try to use dynamic acting verbs for each skill you are explaining, such as:

Research - Analysed, clarified

People skills - Collaborated, communicated

Teaching - Instilled, motivated

7. Relevant and brief

A well written letter should draw the recruiter's eye to relevant experience on your CV. It is a, admittedly brief, space in which you draw a positive pen-picture of you in the mind of the employer. Ensure it is never more than a page long.

8. Contact details

Where ever possible send your letter and CV to a named individual, particularly if it is more of an enquiry than a specific role application. Research using websites, ask friends

and colleagues if they know of anyone or ring through to reception and get yourself a name and job title. It will look a lot better than sir/ madam.

9. Sign the letter

Unless you've had to sign an application form, your covering letter is the only place where you provide your signature. This may seem old fashioned in this digital age but it's still a strong signal of your authenticity.

10. Neatness/ presentation

Finally, make sure your covering letter is clearly laid out with no typos or spelling errors. Do this and, compared to many jobseekers, you'll already stand out as an impressive candidate!