

Covering letters

Your covering letter personalises your CV by showing your enthusiasm for the role, and by telling employers why their job interests you and what you can offer. You can also use the cover letter to raise issues such as the need for workplace adaptations if you have a disability. A compelling and well-written cover letter can make you stand out from other applicants so it is worth making the effort to get it right.

Format

- You should always write to a named person. If you don't have a name, try to find one by phoning the company switchboard, and make sure you get the details (name, title and job title) right. Include 3-4 reasonably short paragraphs on a single A4 sheet.
- Use standard business layout with your address top right and the name and address of the recipient at the left margin below. The date goes below that. Insert the job reference number (if any) after 'Dear xxx' and before the main text.
- Covering emails for electronic applications are different – if unsure seek help from the Careers Consultants in the Professional Development Centre (PDC).

Style

- Write in plain English and short sentences, using lively language and active verbs. A thesaurus can help with new ways to express similar ideas. Try to avoid stereotyped phrases and over-generalisations. Don't be one of the thousands of students who say they want to work in a multi-national organisation with good training opportunities.

Main sections/paragraphs

- **Introduction** - Tell them about yourself and your reason for writing – whether it's a speculative approach or response to an advertised vacancy. If it is an advertised post, give the job title and say where you saw it.
- **Why them – why do you really want to work for this organisation?** - Popular employers get many applicants who just fancy working for a 'big name'. Show a deeper interest and your battle is half won. Briefly indicate how you've researched the organisation eg through the PDC or personal contacts, at careers fairs and from the business press. Show them what interests you. This might be specific aspects of the training scheme, the opportunity to apply specialist knowledge, the organisation's culture or expansion into new business areas.
- **Why you - what can you offer?** – Highlight relevant work experience, course modules, projects, grades etc. Refer to your CV but don't just repeat points; expand on them by making a match between your specific skills and the job requirements. Aim to show that you are focused but flexible.
- **Specific issues** - Use this section to address issues such as gaps in CV or low exam grades which don't reflect your ability. You could also highlight particular strengths you have gained through coping with a disability or learning difficulty, or address any possible concerns the employer might have. Be positive, but don't let these issues dominate the whole letter.
- **Close** - Avoid standard phrases such as 'I look forward to hearing from you', instead say that you will phone to follow up a speculative application – and do so within two weeks. You could also include practical details, eg availability for interview or for work experience. Finally, close the letter with 'Yours sincerely' if it has been addressed to a named individual.

⇐TURN OVER FOR A SAMPLE COVERING LETTER

6 March 2016

The introduction should show you are serious and have already done a lot to help strengthen your application. – Your introduction should say why you are writing to the company. If you're applying for a particular post mention it. Write in a straightforward and positive manner without sounding over the top. The more personalised you can make your introduction, the better your chances of getting a response.

Dear Mr Millard

Display recent knowledge of the company and awareness of the industry and commercial pressures. Sound keen and enthused. Have you researched their work and found a specific case or area interesting? Do not make vague and general comments or cut and paste information from the website. Try and show you have carried out research.

I am writing to enquire about the possibility of work experience in your marketing team. You will see from my CV that I am starting the second year of my Business degree at Brunel University and have already worked hard to gain relevant skills and research my chosen career through networking. I am strongly committed to marketing and especially to the challenges of gaining my qualification of Chartered Institute of Marketing, having extensively researched the course and the related career options.

I talked to your representatives at the Brunel careers fair in May and was impressed by Century's rapid growth which far outstrips that of competitors. Since then I notice that you have launched still more products for the healthcare and leisure markets. This is a sector I have developed a good understanding of as a result of my work as a Receptionist at my local leisure centre. I was particularly impressed with your new range of diet supplements and the recently launched online marketing campaigns targeting gym members.

My introduction to marketing was during my school work experience at the local swimming pool and this helped me to understand a variety of marketing campaigns and to monitor their effectiveness. Following this I became a regular contributor to the marketing at the leisure centre where I work part time. I now also contribute to the university newspaper and have also taken a short course in copy writing. My skills and ability have developed considerably through my experience and I'm certain that I could be a productive member of your marketing team. I can supply examples of my work if required.

I am available at any time after June as I would have completed my exams and hope very much that you can provide me with further experience. Thank you for taking the time to consider my request and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely
Anita Patel (Ms)

Sum up experience skills and successes. State how you can help them and offer concrete evidence of your ability. Support what you say about your particular strengths and skills by referring to highlights from your CV.

Know what you want but be flexible about timing and length of experience. A follow up phone call makes it harder to ignore the request. Tone of the final paragraph is courteous but assertive. End on a polite and optimistic note - something simple but positive.

