

Writing a Covering Letter

A covering letter is a focussed sales pitch stating clearly in simple language why a company should employ you.

Its contents should reaffirm to the reader that you are the right person for the job.

RESEARCH THE ORGANISATION

Before you sit down to write your letter do some research on the company and into the role to which you are applying. The easiest way to do this is on the Internet. Be sure you know exactly what the company does and how they are placed amongst their competitors. Carrying out research shows an employer that you have initiative and that you are genuinely interested in the company, it will also allow you to use style and terminology that is appropriate to the audience.

ADDRESSING YOUR COVERING LETTER

It is imperative that you address your letter carefully. After spending time wording it to perfection you do not want it to be directed to the wrong person or to go astray. If you are applying for an advertised vacancy there is probably a contact name on that advert, and so address your letter to that person.

If you are writing to a company for a job when they have not advertised a vacancy, the chances are that unless you have contacts on the inside you will not know the name of the person you need to write to. In this case you can address your letter to the manager of the specific departments to which you are applying, for example Marketing Manager, Sales Manager, otherwise you can send it to the Human Resources Manager or Recruitment Manager. Visit the company's website and see if you can track down the name of a relevant recipient. Alternatively give the company a call and ask for the name of the head of department to which you are applying. You should make sure that the recipient's name, department and address details on the envelope are the same as at the top of the letter.

BEGINNING THE LETTER

Dear Mr Coxon – If you know the name of the person to whom you are writing

Dear Ms Chambers – If you are not sure of the marital status of the female recipient

Dear Sir/Madam – If you are in totally in the dark as to the name of the recipient

What content to include in your cover letter

The opening paragraph should be short and hard-hitting. Begin with an arresting sentence in which you explain why it is you are writing.

THE SECOND PARAGRAPH

Why should an employer be interested in recruiting you? Briefly describe your professional and academic qualifications that are relevant to the position. If the job was advertised refer to all of the required skills written therein.

THE THIRD PARAGRAPH

Emphasise what you can do for the company. Outline a relevant career goal. Incorporate your research. Expand on the most relevant points of your CV

THE FOURTH PARAGRAPH

Request actions, for example indicate your desire for a personal interview and that you're able to meet with the employer at their convenience.

CLOSING THE LETTER

Write an enclosure line at the bottom.

IMPORTANT POINTS TO NOTE

- Avoid sounding pompous or using clichés and catch phrases, there are some statements that are used all the time such as 'I have excellent interpersonal skills', you want your letter to be unique.
- Try to avoid using 'I' too much. A page of I did this and I did that is not appealing – it says to the employer that you haven't thought about them.
- Do not use abbreviations.
- Do not exceed four paragraphs of content.
- To satisfy the skim reader, incorporate some industry sound bites and buzzwords.
- Subtly flatter the company, for example 'you are the industry leader'
- Check and then recheck your spelling, grammar and punctuation. Get someone else to read it through also.
- If you are making a speculative application you should follow up the letter with a phone call, e-mail or office visit.