

COVERING LETTER GUIDE

Placement Office
Faculty of Design & Technology

COVERING LETTERS – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

“With an in-tray full of applications an employer will spend approximately 20 seconds casting an eye over each one. You have to be sure that in those 20 seconds your cover letter has sufficient impact to make the reader want to know more about you”
(www.jobsite.co.uk/articles/candidate/c1/s232/a365.html accessed 16/10/2006)

Therefore, a covering letter is your opportunity to make a statement about yourself and your suitability for the placement or job opportunity. It should give the personal touch that your CV will, to a certain extent lack while at the same time it should build on what you have said in your CV.

A covering letter is your first introduction to the potential employer and a well written covering letter can say a lot about you, your motivation and your attention to detail.

A covering letter should be specifically targeted to the opportunity and the same letter should not be sent out to 10 different companies. A standard letter can be detected and will put the employer off before they even look at your CV. Researching the potential employer is crucial, as is highlighting your key skills in relation to the potential employer and the particular opportunity. Use your covering letter as a marketing tool, but avoid focusing on your own needs and focus on the potential employer's needs and what you can bring to meet their need.

It should be brief and to the point. Some organisations may only go as far as the covering letter therefore, you need to get your point across as succinctly as possible.

PRESENTATION

A covering letter is a formal document, which should:

- Be word processed unless told otherwise.
- Be typed in the same font as your CV and printed on good quality A4 white paper.
- Be well presented and spaced out so that it makes a positive impact and not a negative one.
- Be no more than one A4 page.
- NOT contain spelling, grammar or punctuation mistakes.
- NOT contain abbreviated words.
- Include your name, address and date and the name and address of the potential employer. Your name and date will appear on the right hand side of the letter and the recipient details will appear on the left hand side of the letter one line below the date.
- Be addressed to the name given in the job advert. If you are unsure if the recipient is a Mrs or Miss, use Ms.

CONTENT and STRUCTURE

A covering letter should contain no more than 4 paragraphs.

Opening Paragraph

State what you are applying for and where you saw the advert. If you are applying for a placement opportunity give dates of the placement period.

Second Paragraph

Briefly describe your qualifications and where your interests lie in relation to this particular company. Demonstrate that you have researched the company

Third Paragraph

In this paragraph you want to address the specific needs of the employer and relate your skills and experiences to the opportunity/vacancy. Look at the job description and requirements and bring out the skills, strengths and experiences that you have mentioned in your CV, which will show the company exactly what you can bring to the opportunity/vacancy. This is your chance to sell yourself and to highlight your USPs (unique selling points).

Use 'power words' such as designed; identified; performed; increased; assisted; trained; improved.

This paragraph should not be about what the company can do for you, but what you can do for the company.

Fourth and Final Paragraph

Finish on a positive and confident note! Thank the employer for taking the time to read your letter and say that you look forward to hearing from them soon. Tell them when you are available for interview or, when you are not available for interview.

Closure

Finish your letter with 'Yours sincerely' and do not forget to sign it.

Example of Covering Letter Layout

John Smith
123 Abc Street
Another Town
WX45 6YZ

Date

Mr. Firstname Surname
Title
Company
Address
Post code

Dear Mr Surname,

Opening Paragraph

Second paragraph

Third paragraph

Fourth & final paragraph

Yours sincerely

John Smith

John Smith

Important Points to Note

- Avoid sounding pompous or using clichés and catch phrases.
- Try to avoid using 'I' too much. A page of 'I did this' and 'I did that' shows that you are only interested in yourself.
- To satisfy the skim reader, incorporate some industry buzzwords.
- A covering letter should never be sent out without a CV.
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Checklist

Before sending out your covering letter, ensure that you have:

- Done your research.
- Included both address.
- Addressed the covering letter to the right person.
- Used good quality plain paper and an easy-to-read font.
- Stated what the job is and if appropriate, where you saw it advertised.
- Made it clear why you want to work for the company and why your skills match the job description.
- Made yourself sound positive and enthusiastic.
- Kept it clear, brief and well presented.
- Signed your name and typed it underneath.
- Checked, checked and checked again for errors.
- Enclosed your CV. Paper clip it to your covering letter.
- Correctly addressed the envelope.
- The correct postage on the envelope.

And Finally

"A covering letter is one of the single most important factors affecting whether or not your CV will be chosen from amongst potentially hundreds which may apply for particular vacancies. Employers can be inundated with CVs and it is time consuming and difficult to look through all of these, particularly if they all look similar. Remember, make yourself stand out from the crowd!"

(http://www.graduatelink.com/resources/qg_covlet.htm
16/10/2006)

accessed