

Covering Letters/Covering Emails

What are these and why do I need one?

When you apply for a job, work placement or voluntary opportunity, this will usually be via a CV or an application form. Employers won't always ask for a covering letter but when you submit your application, including this or a covering email can really make a difference, particularly if there has not been an opportunity as part of the application to explain your interest in the employer and the role.

Your covering letter/email gives you the opportunity to demonstrate to the employer that you understand the job, their company and the industry. It should introduce and compliment your CV by providing evidence of your skills and experience, highlighting how they make you a suitable match for the role. As a covering letter/email should be tailored towards the opportunity you are applying for, no two should look the same.

What is the difference between a covering letter and a covering email?

A covering letter is sent to the employer as a separate attachment e.g. Word or pdf document. It is a formal letter that includes your name and address on the top right and the employer's name and address underneath on the left (see example overleaf), both of which aren't necessary in a covering email. All other content is the same for both.

If the employer specifically asks for a covering letter, you will need to present it as a formal letter. Otherwise you can just have the content in the main body of your email.

Use your covering letter/email to:

- Explain why you are applying for the role
- Explain why you are interested in the organisation
- Highlight any particular selling points within your CV
- Explain any additional factors that do not fit easily into your CV
- Mention any specific circumstances you think they need to be aware of

Remember the following:

- Do not exceed one side of A4 for covering letters, a covering email should also be concise, but with clear paragraphs and sufficient detail to successfully market you for the opportunity
- Use an easy to read font (11 or 12 point) and make sure it is in the same font and format as your CV
- Avoid using the exact same words and phrases that you use in your CV
- Double-check your spelling, punctuation and grammar. Get someone you know to read it through
- Always try and address it to the appropriate named person responsible for reviewing your application. This is much more personal and professional than writing "Dear Sir/Madam" and ensures that it gets seen by the right person, a quick phone call to the company or search on their LinkedIn page should help you find out who to send it to

Responding to an advert?

Start with the basics: make sure you state the role for which you are applying, the job reference number, and where you saw the advert. You should explain why you are suitable for the role, making sure that you highlight any particular skills or competencies that are mentioned in the advert. Remember, an employer will be looking to check your skills against the job specification, and if you don't mention your strengths, then the employer will never know about them! Use the template on the back of this page as a guide.

Applying speculatively?

As well as highlighting your suitability for the job, and any technical competencies, it is vital that you highlight what interests you about this organisation and your reasons why. You may have done some specific research into the organisation and the job sector which has led you to wanting to apply to this employer.

Cover Letter Template

Your name
Your Address
Postcode
Telephone number
Email address

Recruiter's name
Organisation address
Postcode

Date e.g. 13th September 2019

Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms Surname

Your first paragraph is your introduction. In this paragraph you should explain why you are writing to them. It may be that you are replying to a specific advert, in which case where did you see the advert? If there is a job reference number, mention this here.

Your second paragraph should explain why this company appeals to you. You can research the organisation by looking at their website, an article, their company brochure and by speaking to their representatives at a recruitment fair. Take a look at the 'about us section' on the website or the company's 'vision and values section' and then outline how the company matches your own values and vision. It will impress the company that you have taken the time to research them and identified how you would be a good fit within the team. It is important not to waffle but to be clear and precise in what you say.

Your third paragraph should explain why the role appeals to you and why you believe you are suitable for it. How exactly do you match the employer's criteria in their advert or their website? Or, if this is a speculative approach, you should be stating what you believe they would be interested in (take a look at the job profiles on prospects.ac.uk to identify the skills and responsibilities you are likely to have in a certain type of job role). Refer to specific elements of your CV, highlighting skills you have that would be relevant to the job along with evidence that demonstrates the extent of these skills.

Your fourth paragraph is where you need to conclude, sum up and end the letter. You should include a suggestion to meet to discuss your suitability for a role within the company.

Yours sincerely, (if you have put a name after "Dear...")

Yours faithfully, (if you haven't)

Sign here

Your name typed here

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