

What is a cover letter?

A cover or covering letter is a short business letter that you send with your CV. Always send a cover letter with your CV, unless the employer asks you not to.

What is its purpose?

Its purpose is to:

- make it clear which vacancy you are applying for
- describe, briefly, why you are interested in applying for the job
- highlight your most relevant skills and experiences
- add relevant information that's not in your CV, for example you were ill during an exam and your result is being reviewed because of this
- make the employer interested in reading your CV.

When would I use one?

When you are:

- applying for an advertised job vacancy
- writing to employers to ask if they have any vacancies (making speculative applications)
- sending an application form to an employer by post – shorten the letter by taking out the vacancy details as these are already on the form.

You can also use your cover letter, with a few changes, to create a cover email when you are emailing your CV to an employer.

How long should the letter be?

It should be no more than one page long, with just three or four short paragraphs. Aim for around 300 to 350 words long (not including the addresses).

How should I set the letter out?

As it's a formal business letter there are specific 'rules' about how you should set your letter out, for example where your address should be located on the page.

This is why we developed **Cover Letter Creator**. It sets your letter out in the correct format for you.

It's also why we added in a downloadable **Example Cover Letter**, which shows you how a completed cover letter should look.

How should I end my letter?

The 'closing greeting' you use at the end of your letter will depend on whether or not you know the name of the person you are sending the letter to. The rule is that:

- A If you start your letter with 'Dear Mr Jones' you should end it with 'Yours sincerely'
- B If you start your letter with 'Dear Sir or Madam' you should end it with 'Yours faithfully'.

Top Tips for Cover Letters

- Address your letter to a named person, if possible.
- Tailor each cover letter to the job you are applying for.
- Use the job advert or description to home in on key words you can use.
- Keep the letter clear and concise – make every word count.
- Word-process it on good quality white paper.
- Only send a hand-written letter if the employers ask you to.
- Use the same font type you used in your CV.
- Spellcheck it, and check it again yourself.
- Keep the tone of your letter business-like but friendly.
- Avoid starting every sentence with 'I'.
- If you use bullet points, don't use them in every paragraph.
- Don't forget to sign the letter, it's a common mistake.
- Don't forget to attach it to your CV!

Finally

Cover letters are often full of tired old phrases people have picked up online. We recommend that you use these sparingly. It is hard to avoid them completely.

Here are some examples

Standard opening phrases

- I am writing to apply for...
- I am writing to enquire if...
- I am currently looking for a part-time job as/in...
- I wish to apply for...
- I am writing in response to your advertisement for...

Standard closing phrases

- Thank you for considering my application.
- Thank you for taking the time to read my CV.
- If you would like further information please contact me.
- I have enclosed (or attached) my CV as requested.
- I look forward to hearing from you...
- I am available for interview at any time.