

WRITING GOOD COVERING LETTERS

YOUR COVERING LETTER IS LIKE A SALES PITCH – A CHANCE TO TELL THE EMPLOYER WHY YOU REALLY WANT TO WORK FOR THEM AND FOCUS THEIR ATTENTION ON THE KEY SKILLS YOU HAVE TO OFFER.



Not all job applications require a covering letter but many do. Get it right and the covering letter will grab the reader's interest and stick in their mind in a good way. Get it wrong and the reader may decide that the rest of your application is not worth bothering with. It is worth taking the time to draft letters that are tailored to each opportunity and reflect who you are as an individual, so that you stand out from the crowd. Remember: you can bring draft letters in for comments at a Job Search Advice appointment and we can advise you on possible improvements.

Show that you know your stuff

So where do you start? It is crucial that you spend time researching the employer, the sector and the role so that you 'connect with your audience'. The employer will be impressed if you can show that you have looked beyond the front page of their organisation's website for aspects of the firm that appeal directly to you. Check news feeds, think back to conversations you may have had at employer events and build up a working knowledge using industry information and publications. In the example opposite, you can see that the candidate has mentioned a specific client who benefitted from the company's services. You can also discuss here your motivation for wanting to work in a specific job sector. But remember: keep things concise, avoid long rambling sentences and 'lecturing' the employer about their business.

Apply your skills base to the job requirements

The second purpose of the covering letter is to demonstrate how you have used some of the key skills the employer is looking for. You will need to read through the role description carefully, identifying the most important skills and qualities the employer is looking for. Then think about activities that prove you have demonstrated some (not all) of these. You will see in our example that the candidate is specific about activities and avoids a vague list of skills gained.

Finally... the 'wow' factor

How do you ensure that your letter leaves a lasting (good) impression? Here are a few tips.

- Get the basics right – formatting, grammar, spelling, concise sentences and a friendly but professional style. Check employer websites and follow their instructions for what to focus on in the letter.
- Be as honest as you can about your true reasons for wanting the job role, rather than what you think the employer would want to hear. If you clearly and specifically identify what is important to you, the employer will appreciate this.
- Try to communicate the enthusiasm you feel, but avoid sycophantic phrases such as 'It would be a great honour to...' or 'I am in awe of the outstanding performance of your...'
- Try to find a named contact you can send your letter to and check the spelling of their name. A call to the company's HR team may give you some valuable information on what appeals to them.
- Be specific about the activities that demonstrate the skills you have to offer. Show the employer how these skills would benefit their team or the challenges their business might be facing. If you look at our example, the candidate has identified how he could support the firm's operations with his creative skills.
- Remember, the covering letter should not be a shorter list of experiences that are on your CV, but a presentation of a few experiences (or activities) that are your key selling points.
- Although your final paragraphs may be a summary of what you have written, think about how you can leave a lasting impression. Note how the candidate opposite has done this. **W**

Employers say...

“ I prefer covering letters to include what attracted the applicant to the company and the roles they are applying for. They should also highlight anything in their CV that particularly fits the vacancy profile. It's always good to see some enthusiasm for their subject too.

Jo Chester, Graduate Recruitment Support Manager, Cummins UK

“ When reading a covering letter I need to see evidence that you understand our business. Cut out the extraneous detail and let us know how you can help us achieve our goals as an organisation.

Jimmy Buckland, Director of Strategy, UTV Media plc

You may want to contact the company to check who you can address the letter to (a named contact.) Check spellings of names as you don't want to get this wrong.

Alex Smart
Rootes Residence
University of Warwick
Coventry
CV4 7AL

5th January 2017

Ms Fiona Grant
Emerald Fortuna Bank
London
EC1M 6DG

Dear Ms Grant,

I am a second year student at the University of Warwick studying for a BSc Hons in Economics and would like to apply for the Summer Internship Programme with Emerald Fortuna Bank as advertised on your website. I became interested in working in finance when studying for my A-Levels in Economics and Business Studies. I attended Warwick's Investment Banking Uncovered careers event in my first year and also completed an insight day with DTR Bank. These events convinced me that I would like to pursue a career in banking and I am seeking an internship to develop my understanding of the industry and to gain experience.

Having researched EFB, there are several key reasons why I would like to complete an internship with you. I am attracted to EFB because of the emphasis placed on individuals taking early responsibility for their learning and development. This was very evident when I spoke with EFB trainee Alicia Green at your employer presentation on the Warwick campus. She described how she had been given the opportunity as a new trainee to play a key role in a technical project which has had a considerable impact on EFB's clients. I also enjoy taking personal responsibility for achieving results, as is demonstrated in my role as a Badminton Coach, where I was responsible for motivating the University's Second team to get to the finals of the British Universities and Colleges League. Secondly, I particularly value EFB's focus on providing excellent client services. Given your recent award of 'Best global investment bank' in EuroFinancial's Awards for Excellence 2016, I would welcome the opportunity to intern with you and learn from the experts who have been providing advice and financing to clients for some of the most high-profile deals of the past 12 months. Another reason why working for EFB appeals is because of your global outlook and appreciation of diversity. I was fascinated to read the recent post on EFB's LinkedIn Companies page by VP Clive VanderLinde about valuing people from different backgrounds within your organisation.

My skills and experience closely match your internship profile and organisational values. As a member of the University's Emerging Markets Society, I worked in a team of five to grow membership by 18% this year. Collaboration and teamwork were key to our success. My part-time role on the Street Team for my local radio station Buzz 303 requires me to talk to the general public and demonstrates my ability to adapt my verbal communication style and my potential to build client relationships with diverse clients. I use an analytical approach and work with great attention to detail when completing my Economics assignments. Your support for primary literacy programmes in under-achieving London schools appeals, as it closely matches my work for Warwick Volunteers where I am relishing being a volunteer on the Write to Read Programme, supporting children to improve their reading ability.

I hope that you consider me a good candidate for this role. I am available for interview at any time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Alex Smart

Format your covering letter as a letter with addresses and date.

Warwick graduates are highly regarded by employers so it is a good idea to mention your current situation.

Make it clear why working for an organisation appeals to you.

Having identified a specific motivation for wanting to work for an employer, make your application more convincing by including a personal example of how this relates to you.

This paragraph demonstrates the research the candidate has done to find out more about the organisation. Always check whether an organisation you are applying to has a LinkedIn presence.

Demonstrate to the employer that you have identified some aspect of the organisation's activities, values or ambition that you admire or have something in common with.

If you do not have a named contact to write to, then write 'Yours faithfully,' instead of 'Yours sincerely,'.

Make sure you address it correctly. If you are writing to a woman, address her as Ms unless you know for certain if she uses the titles Miss or Mrs.

Make it clear what role you are applying for and where you saw it advertised.

You can highlight commitment and interest by referring to a conversation with an employee.

Using qualifying statements such as 'I particularly value...' ensures you avoid 'lecturing' the employer about their own business.

An employer will be impressed if you can identify how you can add value to their organisation using your skills and experience. In this instance the candidate has researched what skills the role is looking for and has used specific examples as to when they have developed those skills.

End simply and positively.

You can scan in your signature but this is not essential.

