

HOT TIPS II - Covering Letters

Who needs it?

A well worded covering letter is a key part of your 'sales' strategy. It should enhance your application and encourage recruiters to take you seriously. It is also your opportunity to express your individuality - to 'stand out from the crowd'. Above all, it should convey two very important messages:

- why you are interested in the job
- why you are a suitable candidate

Better get writing then?

Before beginning to write the letter, do some initial research into the company to whom you are applying so that your letter becomes as relevant as possible to them.

Next, have the job description/advert in front of you and go through the skills, experiences and attributes the employer is looking for. You should plan your covering letter around this, matching it closely to the requirements and referring to your CV for further detail.

Make sure the overall tone of the letter emphasises your potential contribution to the organisation more than the benefits of the position to you.

On Spec?

If you are sending a speculative letter, make clear what you are applying for (permanent position, industrial placement, work experience) and be as specific as you can. For example, stating that you really want to become an account executive or media planner is more likely to elicit a response than 'I'd love to work in advertising'.

You should see my handwriting...

If it is anything like mine, I'd rather not! A word processed letter is the acceptable format in business today. It is usually easier to read than a handwritten one, looks more businesslike and you can get more on the page.

How do I start?

Overleaf, you will find a guide to a covering letter layout. Examples of covering letters can be found in the AgCAS Booklet: 'Making Applications' and we have a number of good examples from previous students available to view

in the Careers Centre. Once you have written the masterpiece, do not hesitate to bring it to a Careers Counsellor for that final check.

Guidelines - but remember, it is YOUR letter, so feel free to adapt A4 paper. Good quality - if attaching a CV then the paper should be the same. As with a CV, think about layout on the page ('print preview' is useful for this).

- Start with your address in top right hand corner, then below this on the left put the employer's name and address. Leave a space and then put the date.
- Always try to find the name of someone to address your letter to. Use their title but, if in doubt do Mr/Ms ...
- Mention the job title, reference and where advertised (if appropriate)
- First paragraph - say something about your background, that is, your degree subject, second year student/finalist, and why you are writing. 'Hoping to secure relevant work experience' or 'Very interested in this position and believe I have the necessary skills and abilities to be successful in brand marketing/biomedical research', for example.
- Next paragraph - explain why you are interested in the position and the company. Convey your enthusiasm for the job and demonstrate all that research by showing you have an understanding of what they are looking for as well as what they are offering to you.
- Now get to the relevance of your experience. Refer them to the CV for more detail, but outline the skills and abilities you can offer **IN RELATION TO THEIR NEEDS**. For example: 'I have developed my communication skills during my time as a customer service assistant at Marks and Spencer, which I feel will be helpful when I am liaising with customers in ---'. Not too much detail though. Keep it concise.
- Finish off by saying how you hope to hear from them. If it is a speculative enquiry, let them know you will follow up with a 'phone call.
- Sign off with 'Yours sincerely' if the letter is to a named person, 'Yours faithfully' if letter addressed to 'Dear Sir/Madam'. Then leave a few lines and type your name in full, leaving space for your signature.
- **FINALLY**, check the grammar, spelling, clarity and logic. Keep a copy.

Email?

Most of the above also applies if you are sending a CV or Application form as an attachment. Apart from the addresses bit, structure the email as a letter - but keep it brief.