The purpose of a covering letter is to encourage the employer to read your CV. Covering letters are important, as a well written letter will ‘sell’ you to a potential employer. The covering letter is your initial introduction to your potential employer, so it must look professional and be concise.

The purpose is to give enough information to encourage them to really notice the important details on your CV. Sometimes it can feel like you are repeating yourself, but it shouldn’t read as a list of your academic qualifications and skills. It is about sounding really keen and enthusiastic whilst showing them you can apply your academic skills and work experience to that job role.

What does a covering letter look like?

A covering letter has a standard format. Remember to make your paragraphs concise and well organised, ensuring each paragraph is describing one topic.

Structuring a covering letter

1. Introduction
Tell them who you are, and where and what you are studying. Explain why you are writing to them (e.g. for work experience or to apply for a specific vacancy; if the latter, give the job title and where you saw it advertised). Establish any links with the individual or the company to whom you are writing, if relevant e.g.: “I spoke with Jane Smith, a consultant at Deloitte, who suggested I apply for the role.”

2. Why this job role?
You need to show that you have an understanding of the job role, and say why it is of interest to you. Look at the information in the vacancy which explains what the employer is looking for. Make sure to mention these requirements, and show how you match them. Have you already gained any relevant study or experience? If so, tell the employer! Maybe you don’t have directly relevant experience but have gained the skills they are looking for in another context – again, tell them!

3. Why this organisation?
Show that you know something about the organisation and why you would like to work for them. Don’t just repeat what is on their website! Have you met someone from the company at an event? Have you attended a presentation? What motivates you to work in this sector? What do you know about it, and what’s happening currently? This is your chance to show them you have researched their organisation, the industry and know who their clients and competitors are.

4. Finishing the letter
If you need to, you can briefly mention any additional factors e.g. why your ‘A’ level grades/degree results weren’t as good as expected, or when the vacation dates are, if requesting work experience. Always finish on a positive note.
Letter format guidelines:

- **Layout:** Use a formal business layout, with your address in the top right hand corner, and the name and address of the person and organisation you are applying to below, on the left hand side. Include the date and any job reference (if applicable) below. Make sure all names are spelt correctly.
- **Length:** Usually one side of A4. If sending a hardcopy by post use good quality, plain paper.
- **Contact:** Always try and write to a specific, named person. Use their correct title i.e. ‘Dear Mr Jones’ or ‘Dear Ms Smith’.
- **Paragraphs:** Highlight and demonstrate - with evidence and examples - how your experience and skills meet the employer’s requirements.
- **End the letter correctly:** If you address the letter to a named person i.e. ‘Dear Ms Smith’ sign off with ‘Yours sincerely’. Use ‘Yours faithfully’ if the letter is addressed to ‘Dear Sir/Madam’. Then leave a few lines and type your name in full, leaving space for your signature.

**Applying by email**

Make sure that whatever you are sending out is professionally presented and error free. Use the same font type and size in both documents. If you have been asked to send your application via email, you can either attach the covering letter and CV to a brief email. Alternatively, you can use the covering letter as the text of the email and explain attach the CV. Make sure you follow instructions and do what the employer requests.

**Speculative Letters**

A speculative application is sent to an organisation to see if they have any opportunities which have not been advertised. It can be a good way of sourcing work experience or work shadowing. Writing a good speculative letter requires you to:

- **Do your research:** Good research and careful thinking around the organisation/employer will help you to suggest the roles/areas you are interested in. Employers like to receive suggestions as to the type of work you can do.
- **Think about the employers’ point of view:** Do explain what you can bring to the organisation, whether this is relevant experience, or an interest in this area of work and lots of enthusiasm.

**How we can help?**

Book a Quick Query via [MyJobsOnline](http://bit.ly/completecareers) and bring your draft CV and covering letter in to be checked by a Careers Consultant.

**Top Tips for a top CV**

- Proofread the letter before sending it in. Spelling and grammatical mistakes may result in your application being rejected.
- Make it clear what you are looking for i.e. a meeting to discuss your CV further, or when you are available for interview or work. If it is a speculative letter, explain that you will follow it up with a phone call in the near future.
- Always keep a copy of the job advert, covering letter and CV that you sent in.

Dear Ms. Gold

I am currently in my second year at the University of Reading where I am studying History and Politics. I am writing to you to explore the possibility of gaining work experience over the summer with The Independent Travel Company, and in particular within the market research department.

Last summer, I successfully completed an 8 week project through the University of Reading Internship Scheme. I gained experience working for a local theatre, and developed a number of skills that you are looking for. As an intern in the marketing department I worked on a project looking at the social media channels used by the theatre. I interviewed small groups of people, gathered data and wrote a report, which included proposals for the future use of social media.

As part of my degree course, I have studied research methods and enjoy analysing data. I have also given a presentation to students in my seminar group, which helped to develop my confidence communicating complex material to my peers. Prior to my final year, I will be using my research skills to carry out a literature review for my dissertation.

I am interested in The Independent Travel Company, because I have some insight into the tourism industry. Before university I spent a summer working as a holiday representative for 18-25 year olds, in a busy resort. I would meet and greet customers as they arrived, was responsible for organising various social events and designed appropriate marketing materials to attract new customers.

I would now like to acquire more in depth experience in market research, to complement the experience I have already gained, as my longer term career aims are to work in this sector.

Thank you for considering my request for work experience. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Tom Walker
Covering Letter Checklist

Have you.....
- Started your letter with a concise introduction to who you are and why you are writing?

Why should they want you?
- Identified the key requirements for the job and demonstrated that you have evidence of using these skills and knowledge?
- Used appropriate vocabulary that is convincing and persuasive, and shows your motivation and enthusiasm?
- Written concisely and focused on 3 or 4 key points? (You may need to cover more points if you have been asked to do so)

Why this job role?
- Conveyed what it is that you would find particularly rewarding about working in the role?
- Shown that you have a good understanding of what the job involves?
- Used appropriate vocabulary that is convincing and persuasive, and shows your motivation and enthusiasm?
- Achieved a good balance between what you will get from the role and what you can offer?
- Written concisely and focused on 2 or 3 key point summary?

Why this organisation?
- Conveyed what you think is attractive and rewarding about working for that organisation and in that sector?
- Shown your understanding of what the organisation does and can offer?
- Achieved a good balance between what you will get from working for the organisation and what you can offer?
- Written concisely and focused on 2 or 3 key points?

Conclusions
- Ended your letter in an optimistic way about what you would like to happen next, without sounding either arrogant or as though your expectations are too low?

In general
- Written in a confident and optimistic tone? Does it sound as though you want the job?
- Kept to one side of A4?
- Proofread it and ask someone else to check it for you.