

CONVINCING COVER LETTERS AND EFFECTIVE APPLICATION FORMS

How to write a convincing cover letter

If you've mastered the art of writing an effective CV, you might think you've nailed the job application process. However, a well-written, convincing cover letter will supplement a winning CV, and often improve your chances of being considered for a role. It might have been some time since you last had to write a cover letter, but it's always a good time to brush up on those skills!

Cover letters allow you to write much more detail than in your CV, so they provide a great opportunity to establish your writing style and speak passionately about the application and your experience. Here's a few tips to help you write a convincing cover letter:

Physical or digital?

First off, are you writing your cover letter as an email or do you plan to print it off and send a physical letter? This will significantly affect the format of your cover letter. Physical letters should feature the address of the sender in the top right of the letter, and where you're sending it to in the top left. Don't forget to include the date underneath your address. When ending a physical letter, sign it and print your name underneath the signature.

If you're sending an email cover letter, you don't need to include your address at all. Attach your CV and write the letter in the body of the email. Always include a clear subject line that includes the job reference number and/or job title. Start your email with "Dear _____" unless you have any previous email correspondence with the company and they used a different greeting. End the email with your name, followed by your contact details (phone number and email address at the very least).

Content

The aim of your cover letter is to contextualise your CV. You should always start the body of your cover letter with a sentence confirming which role you're applying for and from where/whom you found out about it. Next, mention why you're interested in the role, especially with that company in particular. The more research you're able to do, the better.

Your next paragraph should highlight your skills and achievements and what you think you can achieve in the role – with reference to the specific job requirements. Interpret your CV, don't just repeat your entire work history. Write briefly about your unique selling points (USPs), end with a thank you and state that you look forward to hearing from them soon.

Finishing touches

Overall, it's best to keep your cover letter short – between half a page and one page of A4 paper. Once you're happy with your cover letter, get a friend or family member to read it through for you to identify any errors or sections that read awkwardly. Cover letters should be tailored in exactly the same way that CVs should.

Writing a good cover letter may seem like a tedious task, but you'll become adept at it in no time. A concise, convincing cover letter will improve your job prospects and give you a great chance of getting an interview.

Writing an effective job application form

Application forms make the recruitment process more efficient and practical for both you and the recruiter. Although some business will still require a CV, certain companies may ask you to fill out an application form containing a set of questions that the employer has created in order to identify strong candidates to take through to the next stage in their recruitment process. With that in mind, here are some key steps to guide you through the process of completing a great application form:

Research and preparation

Before answering any questions, it's important that you have a clear sense of who will read your application and what you are applying for. Drawing on the information available on the company website, social media postings and any other sources you find, try to build a picture of their product offering and understand how they differentiate themselves from their competitors. This information will shape the tone and direction of your application and ensure that it's directly targeted at the employer.

Scope out the questions

Next, try to get a feel for exactly what the form involves. Read through and draft your answers to longer questions on a separate Word document. Leave them for a day or so before returning with a fresh pair of eyes; this will allow you to view your answers more critically and objectively, while helping to identify any typos.

Think about your answers

Take care over how you structure your answers just as you would at a job interview. Different questions will require different strategies, for example, strength-based questions which are increasingly used nowadays, put the emphasis on your interests and the kind of work you enjoy doing rather than your competencies, so pay attention to the focus of the question. You might be asked to give your reasons for applying and other information relevant to the job specification, including your knowledge, skills and experience. Your supporting statement should relate directly to the specifications of the job or course you are applying for. It is important that you address all the points in the job specification in the order in which they appear. Imagine this being used as a checklist by the person short-listing.

Address each point on the job specification in a clearly themed paragraph:

In your first sentence make a short statement summarising how you meet or relate to the requirement.

The next few sentences should provide a concrete example of the statement(s) you have just made.

A final sentence that shows reflection will add depth to the point you're making.

Be bold and unique...

It's not just about ticking boxes – treat the form as an opportunity to really sell yourself and let them know who you really are. Avoid generic, 'cookie cutter' answers and think about what will grab the reader's attention. Likewise, recruiters can easily spot scattergun applications that have been churned out to different employers. Draw on your initial research and ensure your answers are tailored to the employer and their specific offering.

...but honest

Don't embellish your experience or claim achievements that you can't back up at interview. Instead, look at how you can make your attributes stand out – rather than just stating the facts, think about your major achievements in every situation and what you took away from each experience.

Check, check and check again

Before pressing submit, make sure you've proofread the form for spelling and grammatical errors, making sure you've answered all the questions (as well as any sub-sections) in full. If you can, ask someone you trust to read it through after you to sense-check and spot any errors.

Perennial is working in partnership with **Renovo** who provide our Employment Support Programme. Renovo is the UK's leading specialist provider of career transition and job search support having helped tens of thousands of people return to work twice as fast as the national average.

If you require help or support please call Perennial's helpline on 0800 093 8543 and speak to one of the team, or email services@perennial.org.uk and we will get back to you. Our office hours are Monday and Wednesday 9.30am – 5pm and Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 9am – 5pm.