Cover letter facts

A cover letter (US), covering letter (UK), and sometimes called an application letter, is a one-page letter that accompanies your CV.

First impressions always count

You've heard the saying, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression". Many people spend a lot of time on their CV and then rush through their cover letter. This is a mistake because your cover letter is often the employer's or admissions officer's first impression of you.

What your cover letter needs to do:

- Introduce you
- Demonstrate you know something about the company and the position
- Provide two or three solid examples of how your skills and experience match the job requirements
- Share your enthusiasm for working for this particular company or attending this particular university
- Provide a little insight into your personality
- And you need to do it in one page!

Likability outweighs skills

In international surveys, hiring managers repeatedly report that likability is more important in hiring decisions than skill level. Employers hire people they like – people they think will fit into their company culture and be easy to work with. Your cover letter is your first chance to show your personality and demonstrate that you are someone they would like to see at work every day.

One way to do this is to be aware of the tone of your cover letter. You want to show that you understand business letter formality and conventions but also that there is a human behind the letter. Here are some examples of wooden, old-fashioned phrasing. Instead, use natural language and speak directly to the recruiter

Impersonal	More natural
	'My CV is enclosed'
Enclosed please find my resume for further reference	'Encl.: CV' at the bottom of the letter is also sufficient
Pursuant to our conversation of 3 March at The University Career Fair in Munich	We met last week at the University Career Fair in Munich and you mentioned that ...

One page isn't much space to do all of the things a cover letter needs to do. Don't waste space with meaningless words such as herewith, therein and aforementioned.

Watch for clichés that no longer serve a real purpose. 'Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information.' Why would they hesitate? Isn't it safe to assume you'll give them more information if they request it?

9 common cover letter mistakes

1. Only writing about how the job will benefit you

Writing about your plans and what this job will do for you instead of why your educational background, skills, experience and personal qualities will bring value to the company – write with the reader in mind. The exception is internships where everyone understands the object is to gain experience.

2. Not customising your application

Sending the same CV and cover letter for all your job applications gives the impression that you haven't given much thought to your application. Make sure you show in your application that you have read up about the company/organisation you are applying to.

3. Failing to understand the company, their industry and the requirements of the position

You can't target your letter to their needs if you don't know what those needs are. Make sure you read the company's website carefully and incorporate details to show you did your homework.

4. Using vague claims and tired language

"I have excellent interpersonal skills"

"I'm detail oriented"

Don't tell them - show them through specific, relevant examples.

5. Including unnecessary phrases

"As you can see from my CV, ..."

Show you understand that business writing is brief and to the point. Edit, edit and edit some more to make every word count.

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6. Underselling or overselling your skills

'I've never worked in advertising, but ...'

They don't want to know what you haven't done - tell them what you have done and how it applies to this job.

'With my combination of skills and experience, I am the ideal candidate for the job.'

Guess what? They are wading through 476 cover letters that make the same claim. Besides, they get to decide who is the ideal candidate. Employers place high value on self-confidence, so show them why you are confident that you would be a valid contribution to the company.

7. Including a photo (US and UK applications) or other personal information

Companies must not appear to discriminate based on age, gender, ethnicity or race, marital status, health issues, religion etc. so not having your personal information helps them stay in compliance with employment laws. For legal, discrimination reasons, they can't keep your documents or consider you. What they do need to know is your nationality and your visa status. Can you work or live in their country?

8. Failing to proofread

Employers may be tolerant of minor grammatical errors from a non-native speaker because they know your English will improve quickly once you are working in an English-speaking company. BUT, they will eliminate you for typographical and spelling errors that a combination of spell checking and careful proofreading would have caught. They are looking for reasons to eliminate applicants to reduce the number of candidates to a manageable size. Being careless makes you an easy target!

9. Sending off your application on the day of writing

Print out your cover letter and set it aside for at least one day. Then proofread the printed copy. Waiting a short time before proofreading, as well as working from the printed copy, will allow you to catch easily overlooked mistakes that even spellcheck won't find. Ask a native speaker to read your letter and give you feedback.

This list will help you:

- understand what recruiters are looking for in job advertisements
- identify your own skills
- talk or write about your skills, achievements and responsibilities with a wide selection of interesting adjectives and action verbs

Main **skills and qualities** employers look for	This means **you can**	**Adjectives** and **nouns** that describe people with these skills	**Verbs** you can use to write or talk about these skills
communication skills (oral and written)	- speak effectively - ask meaningful questions - express ideas and opinions persuasively - interpret different points of view - write good English - provide suitable feedback to verbal and written communications	accurate articulate communicative expressive persuasive	address articulate author communicate compose consult contact convince correspond draft edit explain express formulate influence interpret negotiate outline persuade present promote propose respond
interpersonal skills	- relate to and deal with other people - resolve conflict	troubleshooter supportive	counsel encourage guide listen mediate motivate resolve negotiate perceive (feelings, emotions) support

teamwork skills	- work with other people productively - share information - support and represent other team members - be open to colleagues' ideas - shoulder your fair share of the work	team player enthusiastic supportive co-operative constructive motivated	aid assist collaborate contribute co-operate participate (in) represent stand in (for) support take part (in)
organisation, management and leadership skills	- supervise, direct and guide other people - follow a plan through - lead a team towards goals - do more than one thing at a time	assertive creative detailed thinker goal-oriented leading managerial methodical multitasking (well-)organised responsible results-oriented	administer appoint arrange assign attend to details authorise brainstorm chair (meetings, discussions) consolidate co-ordinate decide (on) define delegate develop direct encourage establish execute follow through (on) follow up (on) handle (details or questions) implement (decisions) judge lead manage (other people) meet (goals, deadlines) monitor motivate multitask

			obtain
			order
			organise
			oversee
			plan
			prepare
			prioritise
			share
			run (meetings)
			schedule
			streamline
			supervise
			verify
			work together
			work collaboratively
initiative	• see what needs doing without being told • do something beyond your job description • make decisions on your own • be spontaneous	dynamic independent pro-active quick learner quick thinker self-accountable self-aware self-managing self-motivated self-starter spontaneous	decide (for yourself) found initiate manage (your own time) prioritise seize (opportunities) take (the initiative) think on your feet work on your own
adaptability	• learn new methods • learn new skills • be open to new ideas • not feel threatened by change • be prepared to relocate	adaptable adjustable flexible mobile open-minded willing (to adapt)	accept adapt (to) adjust (to) change learn relocate
analytical, research and planning skills	• conceptualise future needs • identify problems and their causes • find solutions • look at a situation from different angles • deal with information • collect and record data	accurate analytical resourceful thoughtful	appraise analyse calculate check clarify classify collate compare compile define (needs and goals) detect

| numeric, computer and technical skills | • prepare information
• process data present findings | innovative
numerate
number-literate
computer-literate | determine
develop
diagnose
evaluate
examine
extract (information)
explore
forecast
identify (problems)
gather (information)
imagine alternatives
inspect
interpret
investigate
keep record (of)
predict
process
research
retrieve information
set goals
solve (problems)
test
adapt
adjust (figures)
apply
budget
calculate
collate
compile (statistics)
compute
construct
design
engineer
implement
install
operate
produce
program
repair
simulate
upgrade
utilise
transmit |

Talking about experience

- I have a degree in English from Ludwig Maximilians University (LMU) (Spell out the name of your university the first time you use it)
- I expect to obtain my degree in February 20XX.
- I am in my fourth semester at LMU and I am studying Chemistry.
- My major is English and my minor is Economics.
- I am fluent in English and I have a good working knowledge of Spanish.
- I have been studying English for eight years and have now aquired fluency.
- I lived in the United States for three years and my English is close to native speaker level.
- I have completed three internships in publishing companies where I gained a great deal of experience in writing under deadline.
- My interests include ...
- I have been playing for my local football team for the past five years.
- I enjoy active sports, particularly hiking and mountain biking. I am an outdoor person and have spent the last three summer holidays working at a camp for children.
- One of my main interests is ...
- I worked as an intern in the Munich office of PWC.
- In addition to my studies, I work 14 hours a week as an assistant at a veterinary clinic.
- The experience has taught me the value of time management.
- I have a basic understanding of project management software.
- My role was to design, develop and market ...
- My main areas of responsibility were ...
- My responsibilities include:
- I report to the marketing director.
- During my current internship at PWC, I have been involved in three major international projects.
- I have been able to broaden my knowledge of ...
- After graduation I hope to/plan to ...