

APPLICATIONS GUIDE

COVERING LETTERS



Introducing your application

You have seen the vacancy and want to apply - but should you send a 'covering letter/email' with it? And what is that all about?

For the most part, employers really expect to see this and are surprised if you don't provide one. Very occasionally an advert specifically states that a covering letter is not required or desired - but in most cases, recruiters do expect to see this even if they have not suggested you provide one.

A covering letter is very important because it introduces your application and is an opportunity to convey a number of important things:

1. **Explain why you are interested in their company.** Be specific here. Where did you hear about them? What do you like about them as a company? If you do lots of research into the company from its website and other sources, think about what has struck you about this employer. Employers want to read about what you have noticed. Don't just list facts here, but show your thoughts, observations and appreciation. Tailor it - make what you write relevant to this particular employer. Show you've done some research and reflection.

2.

Top Tip

If you could remove the name of the employer from your covering letter and it would still work for another employer's vacancy, you have not tailored your application. See '*Ways to do your research*'

3. **Describe why the role interests you** - refer to particular aspects of the role that draw upon strengths and things that motivate you. Show a clear understanding of what is involved in the role.
4. **Explain how you match the key competencies they are requesting** - in this section, consider using a couple of examples of situations where you have demonstrated a few of the key competencies that they hope to see. While your CV provides a factual summary of your experiences, the covering letter gives you space to be more reflective and to describe how you have demonstrated your suitability in a few key occasions in more detail. Giving this insight helps the employer to see whether they would like to talk further in person about your application!

End with a polite closing statement in a final paragraph, for example: ‘Thank you very much for considering this application. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my interest in person.’

Ways to do your research

There are many clues - most company websites have a section called ‘About Us’, and may have sections on their history, products and services, locations, and client testimonials. They may have an ‘In the news’ section - many applicants forget to look at these - and if you do that and reflect positively and intelligently on what you’ve seen, this will make you stand out. You may be able to find out more about the company in staff or company LinkedIn pages, in the press or sector news websites. You may also be able to talk to people about the role before you apply. If you are lucky enough to have contacts that work there, do also talk with them.

Activity

1. Spend a few minutes looking through the company website - Ask yourself what they want customers to think about them as an organisation. What are their values?
2. What are the company’s goals? What is it aiming to achieve? Who are its potential customers and what particular types of customers is the company trying to reach? Does the company have a mission statement? Read it and notice any overall message being presented.
3. Find the company’s ‘News’ section if it has this and read 3 articles. What points are made that you find interesting? What could you note down and refer to in your covering letter to show you have gained insights from finding out about the company?

Covering letter example

Ground Floor Flat
Kinn Road
Oxford

Sam Jones
Oxford Universal Publishers
Great Clarendon Street
Oxford
OX2 6DP

1/9/20

Dear Ms Jones,

Re: Marketing Assistant (W07/076)

I am writing to apply for the position of Marketing Assistant as advertised on the Oxford Universal Publishers website. Enclosed is my CV for your consideration. I am not only drawn to OUP because of its development into digital publishing, but also because of its focus on education targeting all age groups. My recent experience as an undergraduate and “end user” of academic journals such as Essays in Criticism and The Review of English Studies has sparked an interest in a marketing role at Oxford University Publishers.

My current position as UK Marketing assistant at Publishing Co. together with my role as Concert Manager at Oxford Brookes University has given me a strong interest in a marketing career. As a Marketing assistant my duties include designing print material such as posters, booklets and leaflets using Adobe InDesign and Photoshop. The designing process requires high level of attention to detail, taking into account marks and bleeds, image resolutions and ink coverage to ensure the end product is of the highest quality. Liaising with suppliers regarding our events and the materials we need has allowed me to develop networking and account management skills. Discussing the most appropriate products for the work we produce and estimated delivery times allowed me to forge a stronger relationship with our suppliers. In addition, managing the company’s database has developed my account management skills, ensuring all contact addresses and invoicing details are up to date.

As a concert manager, my duties included managing our social media pages such as Facebook, twitter and Instagram. This involved uploading images and promotional offers for current and upcoming events. I also developed my oral communication skills liaising with musicians about time slots and equipment requirements. Writing reviews for Oxford’s “Daily Info” has enhanced my copywriting and written communications skills, ensuring all work has the correct spelling and grammar.

As a result of my experience to date both professionally and academically, I believe that I could make a valuable contribution to OUP as a Marketing Assistant. I look forward to hearing from you. I am available for interview at any time.

Yours sincerely
Jane Schiller

Your letter needs to fit one side of A4, written in a sensible font no smaller than 11 and formatted as a professional letter

Wherever possible, address your letter to a named person. Contact the company to find out who to send it to

Highlighting the job title and reference number makes it easier for the recruiter to immediately see which role you are applying for

Introduce yourself, your reason for writing and where you saw the advert

State your motivation for applying, what attracts you to the company and the role. Why them? Try to show you have done your research

Using the person specification as a guide, show why you are suitable by highlighting key skills and experiences, state what you can bring to the role and why they should consider you

Positive ending. Finish the letter with a strong paragraph

If you addressed the letter to a named person it should end with “Yours sincerely”, if you started with “Dear Sir or Madam” it should end with “Yours faithfully”

Covering letter checklist

If you are including your covering letter as an attachment or by post:

- I have made sure that I included: my address, the employer's address, date of my letter and the job reference number
- I have saved my covering letter with the job reference number / job title and your name

Introducing your letter:

- I have written to 'Dear (Named Person) or Sir / Madam if it was not possible to find out who to write to.

Concluding your letter:

- I have signed off with 'Yours sincerely' (for a named person) or 'Yours faithfully' (if you do not have the names of the recipients.) 'Kind regards' is also acceptable, particularly in an email.

I have structured my covering letter to cover the following three main areas:

1. Why this Employer interests me:

Preparation:

- I have taken time to research the company so that I can show some awareness of how it operates and what I think about it.
- I have found out about its history, culture, values, products and services and any latest news and developments.

Reflection:

- I have articulated the aspects which I found most interesting.

Motivation:

- I have said why the company appeals to me, showing enthusiasm and motivation.
- I have chosen reasons that the company would also find admirable.

2. Why this Role interest me:

- I have explained why the role interests me, giving reasons would be meaningful to the employer.
- I have indicated which competencies I would particularly enjoy and are my strengths.

3. How I have relevant experience for the competencies which the employer requires:

-
- I have provided specific examples of how I have demonstrated competencies (refer to exercise you have completed and see Hot Tips - Describing My Skills leaflet for further ideas)
 - I have given more space to providing examples that can demonstrate more than one competency (giving details of the context, actions, results and my evaluation (e.g. what I learnt, how I might do things differently if faced with a similar situation)).

If I'm writing to express interest in an advertised position:

- I have included the job reference number and job title at the start of my letter.

If I'm writing speculatively:

- I have identified specific contacts that might be interested in my application.
- I have kept the letter short and focused.
- I have attached a CV and ensured that I have presented relevant skills the employer is likely to value.

If I'm writing to make a contact:

- I have referred to any mutual contact we may have in common.
- I have explained why I am interested in their company and sector.
- I have shown my desire to learn more and asked for a short amount of time to have a conversation (whether that is in person or over the phone or through an online meeting).

Proofreading and checking your covering letter

- I have kept my covering letter to one side A4.
- I have checked my letter is clear and logical.
- I have proofread to check for spelling and grammatical mistakes.

Covering letter FAQs

Do I attach my cover letter as a separate document or do I write it in the body of the email?

It is usually fine to incorporate your covering letter into an email rather than having it as a separate document - unless you have been asked to upload or attach a covering letter.

If I am attaching as a separate document, do I have to convert it to a PDF file first?

It is fine to convert your covering letter into a PDF file (to preserve formatting) unless you have been asked to upload it as a Word document.

How to address someone e.g. Mr, Mrs, Ms, Mx, first name or full name? Or Sir/Madam?

Try to find out the name of the hiring manager, if possible - it looks good to address your letter to a named person. You could use titles e.g. Mr, Mrs, Ms or Mx (Surname). If you don't know their title or are unsure about assigning one, you could write 'Dear Firstname Surname'. It is best to avoid 'Dear (Firstname)' in case this is considered too familiar. If you don't know who to address the letter to, 'Dear Sir or Madam' is acceptable.

What font do I use?

Fonts such as Arial are popular and widely considered to be acceptable. It is wise to avoid fonts such as Comic Sans, which can be seen as unprofessional. Font size of 11 or 12 points is considered to be ideal.

I have no previous work experience, what do I write in the skills section?

You can refer to any other experience e.g. volunteering, student societies, acting as a course representative, sports, and experience gained in your academic studies (e.g. group presentations). For further advice, check out our [Hot Tips leaflet on Work Experience](#) and speak with Careers.

I am an international student, do I mention it in the cover letter and ask for visa sponsorship?

Before considering your visa request, employers normally want to be persuaded that you meet their selection criteria. For that reason, it is best to first show your interest in the company, the role and how you meet their requirements. After this you could insert a short sentence e.g. 'I am an international student and able to work in the UK under the terms of my visa for X hours.' or 'I am an international

student currently able to work in the UK under the terms of my visa for X hours and believe my experience could be useful to your company - and would therefore like to ask if I could be considered for visa sponsorship.'

Do I sign off with 'Yours sincerely' or 'Yours faithfully'? How do I sign off in the email?

If you are writing to a named person, end with 'Yours sincerely'. If you don't have the names of the recipients, use 'Yours faithfully'. 'Kind regards' is acceptable as an ending within an email.

Do I need to put my address and the company's address if I write my letter in the body of the email?

No, this is not usually expected by employers within an email. If you haven't provided your own address elsewhere in your application, you may wish to include it here.