

# Format for a covering letter, Tips [1-2]

## References:

1. YDI340 Business English Ders Notları (2007)
2. Akar N. Z., Özkan Y., Tarhan Ş. (2005) "Language and Communication Skills After Graduation"

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When you apply for a job, most employers ask for 2 important documents:

1. A CV or resume
2. A covering letter

Your CV and letter are usually the first impression that an employer has of you. And because an employer may have hundreds of job applications to consider, you have about 15 seconds to make sure that first impression is a good one. ...» [18, 1]

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## WHY YOU NEED A GOOD COVERING LETTER

Your covering letter must sell your CV.

Before looking at your CV, an employer usually reads your covering letter. If it is badly-written, or untidy, or difficult to read, your CV will probably go into the nearest bin. If it is well-written, attractive, easy to read and persuasive, the employer will turn to your CV. ...» [18, 1]

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Your covering letter is a sales letter.

When you send your CV to apply for a position, you should also include a short letter. This letter is called a covering letter or cover letter. A covering letter sent with a CV/resume is known as a letter of application.

Your letter of application is a sales letter. The product it is selling is your CV.

...» [18, 1]

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The reader of your letter does not want to waste time on unnecessary details. You should therefore design your letter to be easy to read. It should be short, concise and relevant. It should not be too formal or complicated. Your letter should:

1. confirm that you are applying for the job
2. say where you learned about the job
3. say why you want the job
4. say why you would be a benefit to the company
5. request an interview

...» [18, 1]

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In the English-speaking world, an employer would usually prefer to receive a letter of application that is word-processed (that is, produced on a computer and printed). A hand-written letter could be considered unprofessional.

...» [18, 1]

Here is the typical format for your covering letter:

1. Your address - telephone - fax - email  
Put your address and telephone number, fax and/or email address at the top in the centre OR on the right.
2. Date
3. Destination name and address  
This is the name of the person to whom you are writing, his/her job title, the company name and address. This should be the same as on the envelope.
4. Reference  
Any reference number or code given by the employer in their advertisement or previous letter.
5. Salutation (Dear . . .)  
A letter in English always begins with "Dear...", even if you do not know the person.
6. Subject  
The subject of your letter, which for a job application is normally the Job Title (for example "Sales Manager").
7. Body  
The letter itself, in 3 to 6 paragraphs
8. Ending (Yours . . .)  
Yours sincerely, Yours faithfully, Yours truly
9. Your signature
10. Your name  
Your first name and surname, for example: Mary Smith, James Kennedy
11. (Your title)  
If you are using company headed paper, write your Job Title here. If you are using personal paper, write nothing here.
12. Enclosures

...» [18, 1]

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Your CV must get you an interview.

CV stands for the Latin words Curriculum Vitae, which mean: the course of one's life. A CV is also called a résumé, resumé or resume (especially in American English). Your CV is a summary of your professional/academic life until now, and it usually concentrates on your personal details, education and work experience.

Your CV's job is very simple: to get you a job interview.

To do this, your CV must be:

- clear
- well-organised
- easy to read
- concise
- relevant to the job offered

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You should include everything that is relevant to your employment or career and nothing that is irrelevant. There are usually 5 general headings of information to include:

**Personal details:** name, address, email and telephone number (and sometimes nationality, age/date of birth and marital status)

**Objective:** a headline that summarises the job opportunity you are seeking

**Work experience:** your previous employment in reverse chronological order - with most detail for your present or most recent job

**Education:** details of secondary and university education - including the establishments and qualifications

**Personal interests:** demonstrating that you are a balanced, responsible member of society with an interesting life outside work

Sometimes, you may need to give additional information for a particular job or because you have special qualifications.

....»[18, 1]

[18]

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Your CV should be word-processed, for several reasons. Firstly, in the English-speaking world a hand-written CV would be considered unprofessional. Secondly, many recruitment agencies and some employers like to electronically scan CVs. Thirdly, it will be much easier for you to update and modify your CV to target it to a specific employer.

How many pages?

It is usually best to limit your CV to a maximum of 2 pages. You can usually put everything you need to get an interview on 1 or 2 pages. If you put more than this, the employer has too much to read. In addition, if you put everything in the CV, you will have nothing new to say at the interview. ...»[18, 1]

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If you want people to read your CV, your language must be simple and clear:

Use short words and short sentences.

Do not use technical vocabulary, unless you are sure that the reader will understand it.

Talk about concrete facts ("I increased sales by 50%"), not abstract ideas ("I was responsible for a considerable improvement in our market position").

Use verbs in the active voice ("I organised this exhibition"), not passive voice ("This exhibition was organised by me").

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Certain words are used frequently by recruiters in their job descriptions. You can study recruiters' advertisements and job descriptions and try to use these words in your CV and covering letter.

The most powerful words are verbs. And the most powerful verbs are action verbs. (Action verbs describe dynamic activity, not state).

So you should use plenty of action verbs matched to your skills, and use them in the active form, not the passive form. Which of these two sentences do you think is the more powerful?

Active form: I increased sales by 100%.

Passive form: Sales were increased by 100%. ...» [18, 1]

## Tips

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**tip 1: Use design that attracts attention**

Employers don't have time to read through each of your job descriptions to see if you have the skills they need. The design of your CV must do it for them. ...»[18, 1]

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**tip 2: Match your headings to the job**

Use a job title and skill headings that match the job you want. If you use unrelated job titles or skills, employers will automatically think that you are not right for the job in question. ...»[18, 1]

**tip 3: Write convincing content**

Good design will get an employer's attention. But after that, you must concentrate on the content of your CV, the actual descriptions of your skills and abilities.

**tip 4: Use "power words"**

To control the image that an employer has of you, use power words that match the position you want. If, for example, you are applying for a financial post, you should use as many financial skills power words as possible.

**tip 5: Use 0123456789**

People react to numbers! Numbers are dynamic and powerful. They create vivid images in our minds. General statements are easy to ignore. Be specific and use numbers when describing your duties and achievements. Don't talk about "managing a major turnover". Talk about "managing a \$27,000,000 turnover".

**tip 6: Put important information first**

List important information at the beginning of your job description. Put statements in your CV in order of importance, impressiveness and relevance to the job you want. A powerful statement with numbers and power words influences every statement that follows.

**tip 7: Find key words from the job description**

Let an employer do your work for you! Employers spend much time and money writing job advertisements and descriptions that contain key words for the position offered. Read these descriptions carefully to find the key words. Then use the same key words in your CV and cover letter.

**tip 8: Sell benefits, not skills**

Holiday companies do not sell holidays. They sell relaxation, adventure, sun, sea and sand (the benefits of a holiday)! You should not sell your skills (many other people have the same skills). You should sell the benefits of your skills. When you write your skills and past duties, be careful to explain their benefits to the employer.

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**tip 9: Create the right image for the salary**

Use language that creates the right image for the level of job and salary you want. Position yourself at the appropriate level. The language you use will immediately influence an employer's perception of you.

**tip 10: Target the job**

You will have more success if you adjust your CV and cover letter for the specific skills an employer is seeking. This means that you would write one CV for one particular job and a different, modified, CV for another job. You "re-package" yourself. In that way, an employer will see immediately that you correspond to the job description. It is not dishonest to "re-package" yourself. You are simply presenting yourself and your skills in the best light for a particular employer.

**tip 11: Solve your employer's (hidden) needs**

Your CV and cover letter should show how you can solve the employer's problems and needs. And in addition to the skills or needs shown in a job advertisement, an employer may have other needs. You should identify these additional needs and show how you can satisfy them too. But concentrate first on the needs listed in the job description. ...» [18, 2]