

Tips for Writing Cover Letters

Language Department

Prof. Dr. Stephanie Swartz-Janat Makan



WIRTSCHAFT
FH MAINZ
UNIVERSITY OF
APPLIED SCIENCES

The Cover Letter (CL) is the document that accompanies your CV when you are applying for a job. The CL is short (200-250 words), with a quite rigid structure and has the layout of a letter. Its goal is to introduce the CV, to bring to attention aspects of your activity that can help your application and are not listed or not presented in the proper light in the CV. In short, its goal is to answer the recruiter's question: "Why should I hire this person?".

Layout. The layout is that of a formal business letter: your address and contact details come in the upper right corner of the page. Underneath, aligned left, write the name, function, organisation and address of the person you are writing to. It is a lot better to know the name of the person who is going to read your letter. You should address the letter directly to him or her. In the case you do not know the name, an email, a little digging in the net or a phone call should help you get that name, in case it is not mentioned in the official announcement. Under the sender's address, aligned right, write the date of the day when you are writing the letter. You should spell the name of the month and use four digits for the year.

If you do know the name of the addressee, start with Dear Mr (Mister), Ms (unmarried), Mrs (married), Dr (Doctor), without the full stop that you might expect to follow the abbreviation, and the surname of the addressee, followed by comma (Dear Dr Smith,). In this case, you should end the letter with the salutation Yours sincerely. If you do not know the name, start with Dear Sirs, or Dear Sir or Madam and close with Yours faithfully. In American business correspondence, Yours truly is acceptable in both cases. Begin the first sentence of the letter with a capital letter, even though there is a comma.

Structure. Ideally, a cover letter has no more than four paragraphs. The goal of the first is to specify what you are applying for and how did you find out about that opportunity. The last one outlines your availability for an interview, suggesting in this way a concrete follow-up for your application.

The second paragraph should list your skills and qualifications that make you the right person for the position you are applying for. Read carefully the announcement, identify the requirements and see how your skills match those required. Do not simply state you have them, prove it. Ideally, you should start from your experience and show how you have developed those qualifications by doing what you have been doing/learning. Same as in the case of your CV, the result should portrait you as an independent, creative person that can take initiative and deal with responsibilities, apart from the specific skills needed for the job. In short, the second paragraph should show why you are good for the job.

The third should point out why you want it. You should outline your interest for the skills you are going to learn if you get the job. The impression left should be that you can make a genuine contribution to the company's operations, while simultaneously deriving satisfaction from your work.

After the fourth paragraph leave a blank space, same as you should do in the beginning, after the salutation (Dear). Write the proper closing, as described above and your name. Do not forget to leave a blank space between the closing and your name and to sign the letter in that space.

Enclosure. It is customary for formal letters to mention whether you have enclosed any documents accompanying the letter. Simply mention enclosure, or write curriculum vitae under the heading enclosure at the end of the letter. Note that it is not common in Anglo-American applications to include copies of transcripts, references and degrees unless specifically asked for them.

Print the letter on A4 white paper same as that on which your CV was printed, and put both documents in an A4 envelope of matching color. If you are emailing it request a notification that your documents have been received. Wait at least two weeks since the day you sent your application or after the deadline before writing again in the case you did not get any answer.