

Helpful tips and pointers from the ICAS
Professional Development team.



How to write a Covering Letter Guide

A thick, horizontal red brushstroke underline is positioned below the word 'Guide' in the title.

First impressions count

Having tailored and perfected your CV, it's essential that it isn't let down by a poor covering letter or email. Your covering letter is your opportunity to:

1. Show how focused and enthusiastic you are about the role offered.
2. Present enough evidence of your key experience and achievements to be invited for interview.

Again, a tailored approach is called for here. This is time consuming, but likely to be much more rewarding than having a standard covering letter for all your applications.

Reread the job advert, looking carefully at the employer's essential requirements. Include these in your 'covering' letter with your relevant experience and achievements.

Where possible address the letter to the decision maker, not Sir/Madam. If you don't know who this is it might be worth contacting the company to find out who this is best addressed to.

Start strong, failure to do so will prevent people from reading on. State the role you're applying for and if there is a vacancy reference then be sure to include this. If you have taken an opportunity to make contact with the organisation previously (e.g. networking at an event or that phone call to find out who to address the letter to), make sure you reference this, as it shows you're going above and beyond to get to know the organisation.

State clearly why you are attracted to the employer and to the role on offer and how this fits into your career ambitions. What makes you want to work there? If you have done so research on the company, then this is a good time to demonstrate what you have learned and how this fits into your career plans and let them know why you have applied.

Try to rephrase content included in your CV to avoid repetition, make sure you are elaborating on the information in you CV rather than duplicating it.

Next you want to cover off the skills and experience you have for the role, what have you done previously that demonstrates you meet the requirements of this role? Then take a look at the organisation and see what they are looking for from staff, do they have core values? Or a people strategy? What are they looking for from their employees? You then have an opportunity to let them know.

Show and don't tell. Try to be illustrative with your experience/skills. Don't say 'I have strong teamwork skills' – instead – think about a time you demonstrated really strong team working and then talk about this. Give some background to the situation and task and what the outcome was.

The end of your cover letter is again an opportunity for you to have a strong finish. Think about what you want to end with and what you want the key take away to be for the person reading it.

Top Tip

Like your CV make sure you check your covering letter for spelling mistakes, typing errors.

If your CV is to be submitted online, consider making your email message into the covering letter.

Speculative Applications

Applying for a job when there isn't a vacancy? This is where you would likely submit a speculative application. Some smaller firms and organisations who do not have set recruitment practices are likely to accept speculative applications and, in some cases, it might be a bit of a right place right time.

Applying speculatively for roles can be a hard and lengthy process- often organisations might not be looking to take someone on. Getting a no (or no reply) doesn't mean you're doing anything wrong; it just means that the employer is not a position to offer you anything at that point. However, the employer might like your CV and hold on to it in case a position comes up in future, or they might know someone else who is looking to hire someone. So, it's worth putting yourself out there.

Top Tip

Get in touch with any organisation you are applying to, to find out who to address your email/covering letter to.

This way it shows you are interesting in working for the company and you have made an extra effort!

For more information regarding careers, visit <https://www.icas.com/members/careers-support>

Resources

ICAS CA Recruitment Partners

Rutherford Cross

- <https://www.icas.com/ca-jobs/rutherford-cross-specialists-in-finance-recruitment>
- <https://www.rutherfordcross.com/>

Azets

- <https://www.icas.com/ca-jobs/azets-whats-your-ambition>
- <https://www.azets.co.uk/careers/>

The following websites all have sample CVs and covering letters in addition to advice on writing these:

Skills Development Scotland

- <https://www.myworldofwork.co.uk/>
Designed with a diverse audience in mind, this has lots of useful information, sample CVs and covering letters.

UK Government

- www.direct.gov.uk
The government's website. Look under 'Work clubs, job search and CV support' for information relating to CVs and applications.

Target Jobs

- www.targetjobs.co.uk
View 'Careers advice' for top tips & career insights.

Prospects

- www.prospects.ac.uk
This website is designed primarily for graduates but has some excellent information on it for all job seekers under the 'Careers advice' tab.

Disclaimer: This help sheet is designed to assist members with an important issue of general application and is not intended to be a definitive statement covering all aspects of this area. No responsibility for any person acting or refraining to act as a result of any material in this help sheet can be accepted by ICAS.



CA House, 21 Haymarket Yards, Edinburgh, UK, EH12 5BH

+44 (0) 131 347 0100

connect@icas.com

icas.com

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