

# Writing compelling letters

Letters, whether they are accompanying CVs in response to ads or pitches to potential employers to hire you, provide the “big picture” of your special talents in words that speak directly to the employer’s needs. Craft your correspondence with intelligence and care.

In your search you will be writing three kinds of correspondence: covering letters, pitch letters, and networking letters. The first two are described next.

## Covering letters

Grab the reader’s attention. Write a letter that says, “Look at my CV. I am uniquely qualified to meet your needs. You want to meet me”.

The cover lettering is first and foremost a marketing tool to sell yourself. It is often more important than your CV. It shows higher-level thinking skills – that you can capture, in summary form, the essence of what the employer is really looking for. Spend the necessary time on this part of the process. This is your chance to make general statements about yourself that show how you can add value. Covering letters give the employer the big picture of your career highlights and allow you to tailor your application to a particular position or employer.

Keep your letter brief – three to five short paragraphs. Use “power words” to pack as much punch as you can in one page. Think back to your networking sound bite or pitch that you developed in the previous chapter (see pages 181–182). Rework that material.

What is the purpose of your letter? Many letter writers make the mistake of failing to ask for what they want. Do you want to set up a meeting to discuss how your skills are a perfect match for an employer’s needs? Do you want to talk to them about industry trends? Do you want an interview? As you did with your CV, follow the Master principle of work search (see page 175) and think about what the employer would want from you. Show that you have it.

*Write a letter that says, “Look at my CV. I am uniquely qualified to meet your needs. You want to meet me”.*

**Parts of a covering letter**

Personal co-ordinates: Name, address, and contact information.  
The employer's information: Name and title of employer contact, organization, address.

**Opening line:** Grab your reader's attention and get to the point quickly.

- "Ten years as a management trainer in accounting and legal firms make me an ideal candidate for your management-consulting role."
- "As an accomplished gardener with proven marketing and leadership skills, I am uniquely qualified to be your Marketing Manager, Outdoor Products."

**Be tone sensitive**

*Consider what the employer is looking for. Add a personal touch. Present a compelling value proposition by adding something novel or unconventional that captures their attention.*

**Body:** Highlight important accomplishments, skills, personal traits, and relevant experience. Use words different from those in your CV.

**Summarize:** If applying to a job ad, repeat key words that it lists as requirements. Show how you meet the criteria and your understanding of the issues or industry. If you are applying for work in a new sector, note the key words and concepts related to that industry (see *pages 96–111*) and cast

your experience in that light. The covering letter opposite shows how a woman translated her experience in an NGO into relevant concepts for the hospitality industry.

**Closing:** Close the deal and have the employer take action to invite you to an interview or let them know what your next step will be. For example, "I know my background in \_\_\_\_\_ (and/or) knowledge of \_\_\_\_\_ (and/or) enthusiasm for \_\_\_\_\_ would make me an important asset to the success of \_\_\_\_\_. I will take the initiative to call you next Wednesday to set up a time to meet with you and discuss how my skills and experience would be an asset".



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## Sample covering letter

Sheila Kane  
5 Main Street  
Any Town  
A11 2BB  
01234 567 8901

Diane Coutts  
Paradise Hotels  
Main Square  
Any Town  
B23 4CC

Dear Ms. Coutts,

As a long-time admirer of Paradise Hotels, I was extremely excited when I saw the advertised opportunity for People Resources Manager (Ref. no. 12p). After hearing your Vice-President of Human Resources speak at a conference on work-life balance, I knew Paradise had become the employer I would most like to work for.

I am an enthusiastic human resources manager sensitive to the needs of the new worker. I thrive in fast-paced, diverse environments and enjoy rising to the challenge of responding to multiple demands from many people. My customer-service dedication to meeting the needs of management, employees, and volunteers – our customers – has been recognized in three years of outstanding performance reviews. These attributes, combined with proven skills in all aspects of human resources, including employee relations, salary, and benefits, would make me a great asset to Paradise.

My experience in the non-profit-making world has been a wonderful training ground for working in hospitality. Imagine the skills and resourcefulness I developed in providing what has been described as “best in class” people strategies and programmes while working to demanding deadlines with few or no resources.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet you to demonstrate how my experiences and education would fit Paradise’s mission of being a top employer. I can be reached during the day on 01234 567 8901.

Yours sincerely



Sheila Kane

*This letter writer demonstrates her serious interest in and enthusiasm for the company. She has cast her experience in hospitality-specific language. She ends with a request.*

# Covering letter dos and don'ts

Your covering letter is even more important than your CV. After you have written your letters, check the content against the following.

## Do:

- Gather intelligence about the employer, the job, and the organization's culture. If you are responding to an ad, consider calling HR or the recruiter to get the job description.
- Show understanding of the industry based on your research.
- Show your enthusiasm for the position and employer. Flattery does work.
- Address the letter personally and double-check the spelling of the person's name. Make sure you have the correct address.
- Use a formal tone and address the recipient with Mr./Ms./Dr., etc., and their last name.
- Mention any job reference number if directed to in an advertisement.
- Omit pronouns and articles (I, you, he, it, they, etc.). It eliminates the need to begin sentences with "I", allowing you to brag without seeming boastful.

## Don't:

- Begin by saying, "Enclosed is my CV in response to your job ad . . ."
- Address the letter to To Whom It May Concern. If you do not know the person's name or title, call the employer to find out to whom it should be addressed. If the name is not released, address it to Human Resources Manager.
- Forget to include your contact information.
- Overlook addressing the stated needs of the position.
- State reasons for leaving a job until you are given an interview.