
Cover Letters (English)



SchreibCenter am Sprachenzentrum

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ABOUT THIS TUTORIAL

Notice:

The explanations, notes and recommendations presented here have been prepared and checked to the best of our knowledge and belief. Nevertheless we would like to point out that we do not assume any liability for the contents. Should you find inaccuracies or errors in these writing instructions, we would be pleased to receive your feedback. Many thanks!

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INTRODUCTION

If you plan on applying for a job, you will want to make sure that your application documents are complete and as perfect as possible in order to make your first step into a successful career. A cover letter (CL) or covering letter is usually sent along with other application documents such as your résumé and/or curriculum vitae (CV) (for more information, please see the [Online Writing Lab: Schreibanleitungen: Anleitungen zu Bewerbungen: Curriculum Vitae \(English\)](#)).

A résumé is the personal summary of your professional history and qualifications, whereas the CV (Vitae or Vita) consists of a detailed listing of educational achievements, professional activities, honors, publications, etc.

So the CL functions as a job application letter and serves as an introduction to your résumé or CV. The CL is a formal, professional letter written to the prospective employer introducing yourself, expressing your interest in the positions and describing your skills and qualifications for the job.

The following pages will assist you in learning how to write cover letters.

THE BASICS

Overview – General Information

When you are applying for any type of position, the Cover Letter (CL), along with your résumé and/or CV (Curriculum Vitae), are your chances to make a first strong impression. In a very competitive market, your job will be to convince the employment manager or recruiter that you are the best candidate for the job. As recruiters go through applications differently, some will focus on the facts of your résumé or CV, while others prefer to judge on your CL. Aside from the content of your CL, it is important to be correct in language and grammar. If your CL includes grammatical errors or poor use of language, you will not make the cut.

You should also write a new CL for each new position. The CL must link to and stress your qualifications and skills with the company/position that you are applying for. Do not be too general; try to be specific by using examples and to demonstrate your good qualities in your letter instead of restating your CV or just telling the addressee what kind of person you are. The use of the right layout, proper vocabulary, sentence structure and stylistic elements will serve as cornerstones while putting together your CL.

The CL should not extend more than one page and consists usually of three to five paragraphs. Be aware that your CL should not just repeat what you have written in your CV or résumé. You will have to include specific examples of any type of training you have completed to outline your relevant work experiences or any additional skills you might have that could be relevant for the position you like to fill.

Additionally, you also have to figure out as much as possible about the firm/company and/or recruiter. It is important to do some research on the company on various matters like their philosophy, economic success, profits and assets, number of employees, etc. You will have to filter the information and to figure out what is important in your particular case and for the job that you are applying for. Therefore, it is important to know what the company expects, who they are looking for and what qualifications are required. You need to demonstrate both that you know the company well and how your knowledge and abilities will be an asset to it.

Tip: Be honest with yourself and be honest with the recruiter: If you start looking for a job and you are looking through advertisements, be realistic and sort out those job offerings where you know you cannot meet the requirements or you lack the professional experience.

Job search – Different types of Cover Letters.

Before you actually start the process of putting together a CL, you will obviously have to find the most suitable job offerings. Again here you have various options. You can search the Internet and look for job ads posted online and you might additionally look through the paper ads. Also, it is advantageous to be networking, meaning to stay connected with the people you know: friends, relatives, teachers, professors, co-workers, and former co-workers. Maybe you will learn about a job offering from someone you know, which might give you the advantage to apply before everybody else does.

As there are different ways of finding a job or job offerings there are as well different types of CLs:

The Invited Cover Letter:

A job ad will be helpful for your writing, since you will usually find the information on what they are looking for, which will give you a guideline on what you should include in your CL.

Public ads are one way, though be aware that there will be most likely hundreds of applicants for the position. This is an invited type of CL, since it is a public job offering inviting everyone to apply.

Recommendation or Referral Cover Letter:

Another type is the Referral CL, which means you have received an insider tip from someone about a job opening. In your CL you have to make clear who gave you the information on the job. It can also be helpful to talk to that person about what might be relevant for your CL. In this case, your chances are most likely higher to receive an invitation for an interview.

The Uninvited Cover Letter:

In any case, you may want to get creative on your job search and to consider the possibility of an uninvited application. This means you can send your documents to a company that you are interested in, not knowing if there are any openings.

You will have to state clearly why you are particularly interested in the company, since you have no advertisement that you can refer to. This can make things harder for you, but it also demonstrates to the company your strong interest in it particularly. So you may stay more general in your CL and focus more on your skills and qualities versus focusing on what they might be looking for.

STEP BY STEP

Responding to a public job offering – The Invited form of the Cover Letter

If you are going to apply for a job/position responding to a public ad (paper ad/ internet ad etc.), you are going to write the invited form of a CL.

Job search:

Looking for possible jobs will be your first step before you will be able to actually write your CL, unless you have already found the positions that you would like to apply for.

You will have to think through some major facts about your search options, so you can make your search easier and more effective.

Job/Position:

- In which field of work are you going to apply for a job?
- How broad or narrow do you want to make your search?
- What types of jobs do you want to apply for?
- What types of jobs are you qualified for?

Company:

- What type of company or nonprofit would you like to work for?
- What qualities in that company are important for the next step in your career?
- What are your long-term career goals?

As you are preparing your job search, you should also consider:

Location:

Will you stay local with your search? Are you willing to move? If so, how far? Do you want to work from home, in an office, or to have the possibility of both? Do you want a job with a lot of travel opportunities?

Time:

When will you start working? Would you rather be looking for a part-time position or full-time position; flexible working hours or fixed working-hours? Do you want to work regular hours during the week, evenings and weekends, or a mixture of both?)

Payments/benefits:

What are your expectations in terms of salaries, payments, and benefits? Which benefits will you consider as mandatory and what will you will you be able to do without right now?

These are just a few elements to keep in mind starting your job search. It might be helpful to come up with your own individual ranked checklist to figure out what is most important for your job search.

Analyzing the job advertisement

Take your time for this step and study advertisements carefully. The advertisement usually comprises the proper job description, a description of who the company is looking for, what type of skills and qualifications are requested and usually a salary range, working hours, and benefits. Scan all the relevant information so you can use it when putting together your CL. You can also highlight keywords and expressions in the ad so you can factor in your qualifications and skills directly reflecting what the company is looking for. In that way, your CL can then emphasize the fit between you and the company.

Formalities: Structure of the Cover Letter

- Letterhead: Sender's address

Your name and address should be placed in the top right-hand corner. Make sure to use the English name for your city or country.

e.g. fictional address:

Susanne Muster
Almhornstr. 44
39383 Cologne
Germany

- Inside address: recipient's address

The addressee, usually the name of the recruiter and the address of the company, is placed on the left-hand side of the page after your address. Make sure you use the appropriate title (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Prof., or Dr.) and of course avoid any misspelling of names. Only use Mrs. if you are certain that the woman you are addressing is married. The order should be: name of the recruiter, the department and the mailing address.

e.g. fictional address:

Ms. Jana Riley
Human Resources Department
GNB Advertisement
3580 Pine Avenue
Dallas, TX 67793

USA

Tip: In UK-style letters the title is written without a period. (e.g.: Ms Jana Riley)

- Date:

The date should be on the left-hand side, just below the recipient's address.

Writing out the date for an US application: "July 26, 2016"

Writing out the date for an UK application: "26 July 2016"

- Salutation:

Usually, you will address your letter to a specific person.

e.g. "Dear Ms. Riley":

Tip: If there is no recruiter, supervisor, or hiring manager's name listed, and you cannot find a specific person to address your letter to, you can address your letter to the "Members of the Search Committee".

- Subject Line:

The subject line includes the name of the position that you are applying for, the date the offer was opened (if available), and the reference number (if applicable).

e.g.: Application for account executive position no. 48939

In U.S.-style letters, the subject line comes before the salutation. If you choose to omit the subject line, include the information in the first paragraph of the letter.

- Complimentary Closing:

Before you sign the letter, include a complimentary close. Commonly accepted closings include "Sincerely," "Yours Sincerely," "Cordially," "Yours faithfully".

UK-style: if you know the person you are writing to, use "Yours sincerely"; if you do not, use "Yours faithfully." Do not put a comma after the complimentary close.

US-style: "Sincerely yours" or "Sincerely" with a comma afterward.

- Signature:

After your complimentary closing, type your full name and sign your name above your name on the hard copy. You can also scan your signature and attach it to your CL on your computer if you are sending off your applications digitally.

- Enclosure:

This is a short list of items after your signature, and it refers to the documents that you are sending along with the CL. (e.g.: Enclosed: CV, diplomas, transcripts).

The content of your CL – the different paragraphs

The introductory paragraph:

The CL should not be more than one page, and it consists usually of three to five paragraphs.

In your first paragraph you should make clear who you are, introducing yourself but still referring to the ad by letting the recruiter know what position you are applying for and where or how you found out about the opening. You can also start off with your academic background and qualifications. It is hard to draw an exact line between paragraphs, since there are no set rules to it. Sometimes you will have to figure out which order will make sense for the specific position and change things around.

You can keep in mind for your first paragraph:

- Who are you (professionally) and where are you applying at?
- What type of position are you applying for?
- What is your current position?
- Where did you find the ad?

The main section:

The main part of your CL is usually one or two paragraphs. It should include the following:

- What is it that I have to offer to the firm? What are my achievements to date?
- What benefits can I alone bring to the company?
- What are their requirements and what qualifications, skills and talents do I have that make me the best suitable candidate?

With those questions in your mind, you can go through the ad again highlighting those key expressions if you have not done so already.

This will help you with your next step: rephrasing them as the qualifications, skills and talents you will be able to contribute.

It is important that you emphasize the “fit” between you and the company.

The letter should highlight and briefly expand upon the most relevant aspects of your CV for the position. It should point out why these aspects of your education and experience make you the best fit for the position.

In the central paragraph, you should be specific about your academic background and your professional qualifications. You can discuss yourself and your specific skills, and highlight your achievements and how you are going to benefit the company. You want to demonstrate that you are familiar with the company and what you hope to achieve in the position. See the following website for examples from individuals applying for jobs in a variety of careers:

<https://www.livecareer.com/cover-letters/examples>

If you are applying for a position in social services, for example, you should emphasize your empathetic capacity or strong ability to work with others as your soft skills in addition to the hard facts. You can also mention skills that are not directly connected with this work field but do transfer (dedication, patience, strong work ethic, ability to work independently as well as on a team, ...).

The Closing Paragraph:

In the last paragraph you will be asking for an interview or consideration. Once more stress your interest in the company and the future prospect of you contributing your skills to the company. Show your confidence that you are the right candidate for the job.

Weak closing paragraph:

I hope you will review my résumé, and if you agree with what I have stated here, consider me for the position. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Stronger closing paragraph:

I am eager to help advance the success of your organization. I will call your office in the next few weeks to ensure this letter was received and to discuss the possibility of an interview.

LANGUAGE & STYLE

Since the CL is a document of application, it is essential to use the appropriate language. You already know what your achievements, acknowledgements, skills, talents and abilities are. Now you will have to put them into the right form and layout and also choose the right expressions and words to describe them. You should use a formal business language but avoid being too formal because it easily appears stiff and impersonal.

Working on the style of your letter will involve solid grammatical knowledge as well as using a dynamic vocabulary. One possibility is to make a list of your skills and qualifications and then match them up with verbs you could use in your letter.

You can also search websites such as the Chicago Manual of Style, MLA, and APA where you will find plenty of resources on vocabulary and grammar.

Tips

- Try to avoid using basic verbs like *have*, *make*, *do*, *use*, and *be*. Try to find substitutes that more specifically fit the skill you want to describe. For example, instead of *to do* you could use *to accomplish*, *to achieve*, *to complete*, *to execute*, or *to explicate*.
- It is best to use the long verb forms in business letters and no conjunctions: *I am* instead of *I'm*, *It is* instead of *It's*.

- Limit the number of times that you start sentences with *I*, in order to vary your sentence structure and word choice.

EXAMPLES & EXERCISES

Example of a job advertisement

Graduate Trainee in Marketing (Example Ad and Example Cover Letter from: [Jobline](#))

PRT Technologies, a leading IT enterprise, has an opening for a graduate trainee in its marketing team. In this high-potential position, you will co-ordinate marketing activities for a customer base throughout Europe. You will need experience as an analyst in a sales or marketing environment. You must also have excellent communication skills and be able to converse confidently at all levels. Salary: GBP 32,000 to GBP 35,000 p.a.

Position type: Graduate trainee

Contact: Marion Sweeney, m.sweeney@prttech.co.uk, 0118-4568034.

Quote ref. MS/01/grads.

Write to: Marion Sweeney, Human Resources Manager, PRT Technologies, 10 King Street, Norwich, NR3 26P, United Kingdom

Organising your search results

If your searching was successful so far and you found some ads that you are planning to respond to, study the ads closely and highlight important words and expressions. If you have a lot of ads to organize, you can also sort the information from all of them into categories in order to have a better overview of the major facts, e.g.:

Name of the company: PRT Technologies

Industry: IT enterprise

Position type: graduate trainee (marketing)

Duties and responsibilities/ Requirements:

- Co-ordinate marketing activities (customer base: Europe)
- Experience as an analyst in a sales or marketing environment.
- Excellent communication skills
- Confidence

The introductory paragraph

Now you're ready to start writing:

Example for the introductory paragraph from [Jobline](#):

“I am a third-year student in Economics and Business Management and am looking for an opening as a graduate trainee in marketing. I was therefore very interested to read on your website that PRT Technologies has a new position for a graduate trainee in its marketing team.”

In your first paragraph you should make clear who you are, introducing yourself but still referring to the ad by letting the recruiter know what position you are applying for and where or how you found out about the opening. You can also start off with your academic background and qualifications. (cf. [Jobline](#))

You can keep in mind this list of questions for your first paragraph:

- Who are you (professionally) and where are you applying at?
- What type of position are you applying for?
- What are you looking for?
- Where did you find the ad?

In the example above, the key expressions are highlighted. The recruiter finds information on who the applicant is and his/her academic background (*a final-year student of Economics and Business Studies*), what position s/he is applying for (*graduate trainee in marketing*) and where he found out about the opening (*on your website*). (cf. [Jobline](#))

The main section

The main part of your CL usually consists of one or two paragraphs and here the most important aspects you should focus on are:

- What is it that I have to offer to the company?
- What are the requirements?
- Do I meet these requirements?
- What qualifications, skills and talents do I have which make me the best suitable candidate?
- What does my CV look like and how can I link it to my CL?
- What have I not mentioned yet that I should highlight or emphasize that would be relevant for my application?

With these questions on your mind you can start writing the body of the letter in response to the ad, ensuring that you address each of the requirements. It is important is that you emphasize the “fit” between you and the company. (cf. [Jobline](#))

You should try to fit in details, experiences, and skills that you have not included in your CV but are relevant for the opening and so make your CV even more interesting to the recruiter.

For example, in your CV, you might have listed an international exchange year that you had during high school. Now, you can add that through this experience you became open minded toward other cultures and customs, improved your fluency in the host country's language, that you had few difficulties adapting to a new living situation, and so on. That type of information and those kinds of "soft skills" will likely serve as an advantage if you are applying for an international business operating abroad or one that has a lot of non-German customers.

Example for the main section from [Jobline](#):

"You can see from my CV that both my professional and my academic experience make me a highly suitable candidate for the graduate trainee position in PRT's marketing department. My major is marketing and I have actively used my marketing knowledge both in university projects and in a work placement at Fujitsu Siemens Computers. At Fujitsu Siemens, I have acquired valuable experience in the coordination of IT projects and setting up information systems for the strategic marketing of consumer PCs. As part of my degree, I co-founded Uni-Face, a project that promotes Augsburg University to the public. My work with Uni-Face has given me hands-on experience in developing marketing concepts and analysing customer needs as well as in public relations and advertising in general. At the same time it has provided me with the opportunity to work together with people from very diverse backgrounds.

A graduate traineeship in marketing would enable me to contribute my experience in marketing to your company while at the same time help me to develop new skills in this field. I am confident my strong communication and interpersonal skills as well as my foreign background would be a valuable asset in an international marketing environment and a sound investment for PRT."

What is the information the recruiter will find in this main part and how is it reflecting the ad? Of course you have academic and intellectual ability but do you meet the requirements of what they are looking for? Do you include a sentence or two about your interest in being a member of this company over the long-term? These are also questions that you should ask yourself when writing your CL. Try to take the recruiter's point of view and have a friend or [SchreibCenter writing tutor](#) read your CL as if they were the recruiter. See if they can identify any places in your CL where you can strengthen the connection between you and the company, or if they have additional ideas for how you can use the description of your skills and interests to benefit the company.

You should be clear about your motivation for applying to that particular job. You are focusing on your skills and qualities, but the recruiter has to see what makes this job so interesting for you and why you are a better candidate than the dozens or hundreds of others with similar qualifications who are also applying for it. So make sure to include one or two sentences describing what intrigues you about that job, stating why your knowledge, skills, and abilities set you ahead of your competition.

Im Online Writing Lab (OWL) finden Sie unsere [gesammelten Schreibtechniken und -übungen](#), mit denen Sie Ihre Schreibkompetenzen ausbauen können. Wir haben zur besseren Übersicht alle Techniken in folgende Abschnitte geteilt:

- **Selbststeuerung** | Übungen und Selbsttests, um das eigene Schreiben zu reflektieren
- **Planen** | Techniken zu Zeit- und Selbstmanagement
- **Orientieren** | Ideen & Gedanken sortieren und strukturieren, Thema finden und eingrenzen, Fragestellungen konkretisieren
- **Material sammeln & bearbeiten** | Techniken, um sich in der Flut von Informationen und Literatur besser zurecht zu finden
- **Strukturieren** | Gedanken strukturieren, Thema finden und eingrenzen, Fragestellungen konkretisieren, Strukturieren von Texten
- **Ins Schreiben kommen / Rohfassung schreiben** | Schreibschwierigkeiten bekämpfen und mit dem Schreiben beginnen
- **Wissenschaftlicher Stil** | Formulierungshilfen und Übungen, mit denen der persönliche wissenschaftliche Schreibstil weiterentwickelt werden kann
- **Überarbeiten** | Methoden für verschiedene Überarbeitungsstufen und Korrekturen

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