

# RACC

Richmond Adult Community College

## How to...

### write a covering letter



## **Introduction**

The covering letter is an important part of any application that you make. The purpose of this letter is to personalise your approach to an employer. By doing this you can demonstrate that you have taken the time to research the opportunity and the organisation and put some real thought into your application. Your covering letter also provides you with another opportunity to establish your suitability for the job and to emphasise your key 'selling points'.

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### **When should I send a covering letter?**

You should always send a covering letter to accompany a curriculum vitae (CV). This could be when an employer specifically asks for a CV or when an advertisement says “apply in writing”.

‘Speculative’ applications also require covering letters, i.e. when you are not applying for an advertised vacancy but are asking to be considered for such vacancies should they arise in the future. Your application may be kept on file or the employer might invite you for an interview or an informal chat. In this instance your covering letter can be crucial in explaining why you are sending your CV and highlighting what you have to offer the company.

It is sometimes necessary to send a covering letter to accompany an application form. If you have had very little space or opportunity to sell yourself on the form, or there is something that you particularly want to emphasise, the covering letter can help you to do this.

### **Why send a covering letter?**

- To encourage an employer to read the accompanying CV or application form
- To draw together relevant facts from your CV or application form and shape them to the needs of the employer
- To explain why you are sending a speculative CV.

### **What should a covering letter include?**

It should provide a logical sequence of information designed to capture the reader’s attention. You can also use it to explain special circumstances or draw attention to a particular aspect of your experience. The following guidelines will help you to construct your letter, but remember the examples given are for guidance only.

### **Tell the employer:**

- Who you are and what you are applying for and where you saw it advertised. For example: “I am writing in response to your recent advertisement in the Job Centre Plus vacancy bulletin, ‘Careers News,’ for an administrative trainee. I am currently in the final year of a Business HND ...”;
- Why you want the job or opportunity and why you are attracted to the organisation;
- How you feel that your qualifications and experience make you a suitable candidate. For example: “Your firm is of particular interest to me because it is of medium size and will, therefore, provide me with opportunities to learn from colleagues and become involved quickly as a team member... As you will see from my CV, my work experience has involved both direct contacts with people and problem solving in a commercial setting...”;

- What you want them to do for you. For example: ask about the possibility of arranging an interview or a visit;
- What you hope will happen next.

E.g. a polite, positive closing statement, saying you will telephone to follow up your letter or that you look forward to hearing from them.

E.g. “I would be very keen to find out more about your IT opportunities and would welcome the opportunity to discuss my application further at an interview. I hope you will consider my application favourably and I look forward to hearing from you.”

By the end of the letter the employer should be really impressed by what you have to offer and be encouraged to find out more from your CV or application form.

### **What are the main points to remember?**

- Covering letters are not easy to write. Try brainstorming some ideas first before trying to construct full paragraphs.
- Try to come up with three or four key points that you wish to get across and focus on those.
- It is worth spending some time experimenting with different versions before adopting a style that suits both you and the organisation you are writing to.
- Try to keep your letter to one side of A4 word processed text, printed on good quality plain paper, ensuring that the layout looks balanced.
- If you are asked for a handwritten letter, write as clearly and neatly as possible. Presentation is very important so it is a good idea to practice first.
- Use positive and active words where possible, e.g. achieved, organised and negotiated.
- Sell yourself and emphasise your enthusiasm for, and commitment to, the opportunity or profession.
- If possible get someone else to check your letters before you send them off.
- If you would like some help from a careers adviser, it is a good idea to bring some ideas with you or, ideally, bring a draft version that the adviser can work through with you.

## Covering Letter Example

Your address  
Postcode  
Phone number

Westons  
100 High Street  
London  
W14 4AA

Date

Dear Mr Knight,

I would like to apply for the job of reception clerk/telephonist with Westons. My present job involves general reception duties in person and by phone. I can also

- operate the switchboard;
- deal with telephone enquiries;
- deal with post;
- send fax messages;
- type and word process.

Before this job I was a Youth Trainee with Brightsons Solicitors in North Street, Inverness and completed RSA 1 and II in Business Administration with RSA II in Word Processing.

I have always enjoyed working with people and my previous experience will enable me to work as part of a team and to be an effective representative of your company.

I am prepared to work on Saturdays on a rota basis and I have my own transport.

I am available for interview at any time and could start work immediately.

Please find enclosed a copy of my CV for further information. (References are available from my present and previous employers).

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

## How should a covering letter be laid out?

Your letter should usually adhere to the following layout:

- Your address and contact details in the top right hand corner
- The employer's name and address underneath on the left hand side
- The date
- 'Dear Mr or Ms *Employer*' (or, if you don't know who you are writing to, 'Dear Sir or Madam')
- The reference number for the job (if you know it) or a suitable heading
- The main body of the letter, flush to the left hand margin, with a line space between paragraphs
- 'Yours sincerely,' if you know who you are writing to, or 'yours faithfully,' if you don't. (To remember this, never put two S's together – i.e. Sir and sincerely)
- A space for you to sign
- Your own name typed and signature.

## Writing on the 'off chance'

Not all letters of application need to be sent in response to a specific job advert. You may want to write to an employer to see if they have any intention of recruiting staff in the near future. It is a good idea to include a CV too, outlining your qualifications, experience and career to date. Ask them if they would care to note your name and address in order to contact you should a vacancy arise.

## Sending a CV

A CV should be presented on a separate sheet of paper and be typed or word-processed. It is worth getting your CV photocopied so that you have enough copies available for applying for jobs. Always keep a master copy.

See our guide *How to Write and Develop a CV* for help.

## Sample speculative covering letter with accompanying CV

Your address  
Postcode  
Phone number

Mr T Smith  
Wheelie (Motor Division)  
Crewe  
Cheshire  
CW1 1SZ

10 December 2000

Dear Mr Smith,

I would welcome the opportunity to be part of a new business and I was wondering if you were ready to take on new staff at present. I would be grateful if you would consider me for a position of storekeeper.

I enclose a copy of my CV. As you can see I have a long experience in storekeeping work, in electrical engineering. I have recent experience of computerised store keeping, dealing with export orders and stock control. I also have supervisory experience and was responsible for a team of five in my last job.

My last two employers, Mr Jones and Mr Wong, have both said they would be happy to provide references for me.

I would be available to work full-time including evenings and weekends if required. I am available for interview at your convenience and can be contacted or a message left on my home telephone number.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours sincerely

For further information contact the RACC Learner Advice and Recruitment Team:

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Tel: 020 8891 5907 ext. 4025/4003