



# COVER LETTER

Writing a great application

## Content

<b>1. Basic information.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Fit, motivation and personality - this is what the cover letter should be about .....	3
Please observe these basic rules.....	3
<b>2. The external form: Design your letter carefully .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Give your text an official framework .....	4
Think about all the parts .....	4
Be clear in the reference .....	5
Address the recipient directly .....	5
<b>3. Introduction: Gain their interest and attention.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Answer the following: Who? What? Why?.....	5
Avoid frequently used sentences.....	5
Show interest in the job and the employer .....	6
Select your words carefully.....	6
Make use of personal contacts .....	6
<b>4. Main part: Highlight what a good match you would be.....</b>	<b>6</b>
Structure your arguments .....	6
Refer to the job and the employer .....	6
Use examples to individualizes and specialise .....	7
<b>5. Conclusion: Complete your application .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>6. Other Dos and Don'ts.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Use formulations like this .....	7
Only use other people's texts just for inspiration.....	10
Ensure everything is complete.....	10
Do not apologise for possible deficits .....	10
Don't expand unnecessarily on changes, drop outs or gaps .....	11
Emphasize your motivation behind changes in your studies or career.....	11
Do not blame anyone.....	11
“Du” or “Sie”: Select a suitable address form .....	11
Read it through several times and ask for feedback .....	12

## Appendix:

Cover letter template

Active verbs

## 1. Basic information

Many people struggle with formulating cover letters, although if they have many years of professional experience. Some employers don't demand a cover letter any more, but most (still) use them to select candidates. Thus, lots of applicants face this challenge. The following pages contain information and tips on how to master this.

### Fit, motivation and personality - this is what the cover letter should be about

Why are you the right person for the job that you are applying for? The purpose of the cover letter is to provide an answer to this question, without simply repeating your CV. In many cases, the CV is read before the cover letter. There will be a benefit of the cover letter if you point out why you are the right choice for the job advertised. Therefore, explain why you are qualified, what makes you special and what drives you. Remember, your strengths and motivation are not part of your CV.

### Please observe these basic rules

**Always precise – never general:** Show that you have taken a close look at the employer, job and yourself, and that you know your advantages in this application situation. Very general cover letters that are used for several applications indicate little interest and motivation and do not show the aspects of your profile that are decisive for the reader.

**Meaningful – without empty phrases:** Use the little space you have in the cover letter for interesting things; for instance an understandable description of how you match the job, and unique arguments based on specific examples. This is more convincing than superficial statements, convoluted language or empty superlatives that are rarely appropriate anyway.

**Also personal – not just factual:** Don't just focus on job-related points but also think about other aspects. The cover letter should not just elaborate on hard skills, e.g. academic subjects, relevant soft skills, individual strengths and your personal motivation are just as important, if not more so, because employers are also seeking personalities that match the work atmosphere as well as the company culture and fit into the team.

**Reader-friendly – not difficult to read:** Make sure that the content, the language and the layout of your cover letter make it easy on the reader. Fit all important contents, i.e. the most relevant and interesting things, onto a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -page. Structure the content clearly and the text visibly. Use comprehensible language. Design the layout carefully with a clearly legible font.

**Empathic – not self-centred:** Try to put yourself into the reader's shoes and see their advantage: What do you have to offer? Not just, what do the job and the employer offer you? It is only natural for applicants having interests. However, the objective is to create a win-win situation. Thus, do not forget to formulate the benefit for readers based on your profile.

**Individual – not uniform:** The goal of any job application is make yourself interesting, gain the reader's attention and stand out from the rest. So, don't just write the same thing all other applicants are writing. Use templates only for inspiration and write your own text using your own arguments and showing your individual profile.

**Well prepared – with no time pressure:** Even if it means spending time on the cover letter: the investment is worthwhile. Develop your arguments and write down your message before you write the actual text. Analyse the job and the matching (see manual). If you know, what it is you want to say, it is easier to develop a structure and formulations. It is also very important to plan time to make corrections.

## 2. The external form: Design your letter carefully

### Give your text an official framework

Create your cover letter like a business letter. You can base it on e.g. the DIN norm 5008. The text should be longer than half a page but shorter than one page. This does not include page numbers or birth dates, photo or a list of appendices.

Design an appealing cover letter that matches the CV. Not all layout elements can be transferred 1:1. It should be immediately clear that both documents belong to the same application. Use the same colours and fonts. The font should not be smaller than 10.5 pt and not larger than 12 pt. On the screen, readers can adjust the size of the document. Some like to print the documents, too. Review your cover letter also printed.

Avoid massive text blocks, for example full justification. Paragraphs help to separate the introduction, main part and conclusion from one another. If the main part is longer, use narrower paragraphs or sentence breaks to divide these into logical sections.

Only use (...) parenthesis, if necessary. They disturb the flow of reading. Bullet points are sometimes easier to formulate, but they take up a lot of space. Whilst abbreviations save space, they may be confusing for someone who does not know all the technical terms. This does not apply for keywords.

### Think about all the parts

- Header or footer with your name, possibly your status and sender: Your name and your postal address
- Recipient: Full name of the employer and the correct legal form, possibly the name of the contact person (possibly with their title), postal address (even if sent online)
- Place, date
- Reference line with the term 'application' and name of position as stated in the job advert
- Title, personal if possible
- Greeting + name in block letters as a signature
- Appendices (without a list)

### Be clear in the reference

State the full and correct name of the position for which you are applying. Incorporate the formulation used in the job description, including any codes or reference numbers. It must be possible to assign the cover letter clearly, especially if several positions are summarised in one vacancy posting. This can be the case e.g. for vacancy posts for theses or internships or if one position is to be filled on several locations. In this case, state your preferred area or place in the reference line, so that the reader knows immediately for which job and location you are applying.

### Address the recipient directly

Many vacancy posts name contact persons, e.g. HR people, or persons to whom the application should be addressed. In this case, address this recipient directly. This is much more personal than “Dear Sir or Madam”, and shows that you have done your homework.

## 3. Introduction: Gain their interest and attention

Use the introduction to encourage the reader to carry on reading, for instance by showing that you are what they are looking for – i.e. somebody with relevant qualifications, who is very interested and highly motivated.

### Answer the following: Who? What? Why?

The following questions may help you to draft statements for an introduction. First, gather keywords and filter out the most important aspects.

#### **Qualification/ occasion/ purpose: Who are you? What is your status?**

- e.g. profession, qualification, status ('student of...', 'prospective ...' etc.)
- e.g. occasion, like graduation, practical semester, thesis
- e.g. summary of your profile ('recently graduated engineer with initial experience...')

#### **Goal/ motivation: What do you want? What is your objective?**

- e.g. starting a position as ..., gaining experience as ..., developing into ...
- e.g. working on a topic ..., participating in a project ..., committing to the issue of ...

#### **Interest/ motivation: Why do you want that? What particularly appeals to you?**

- e.g. job description, position, subject, tasks, project
- e.g. company, sector, work area, development opportunities

### Avoid frequently used sentences

Creating interest means avoiding standard sentences like "With great interest I read your job advert..." or "I hereby apply for the position advertised by you". Instead, use this space for individual and specific details: What was it that captured your interest? What is it about this job that really interests you? You can't think of anything? How would you answer this question in an interview: Why did you apply?

### Show interest in the job and the employer

Show that you have thoroughly researched the employer and the job, and what makes both attractive to you. For instance, a vacancy offers work in an international team; is this one of the reasons why you are applying? In this case, you should mention it in a combination of your own words and words from the vacancy posting.

### Select your words carefully

Select future-oriented and positive formulations under the motto 'What attracts me to the job?'. Whilst you may be submitting your application because you 'want to get away from somewhere', or you are simply searching for an internship, your text should not create the impression that you randomly selected the employer and position, or that it is even a stopgap solution.

### Make use of personal contacts

Are you applying based on a personal contact, e.g. because you know persons who already work in the company or because they have recommended them as an employer? It may be to your advantage to mention that. If you mention any names, these people must have given their permission to appear in your application. Name the person stating their full name, title and function, if relevant. Are representatives of the company expecting your application after a conversation, e.g. at a job fair or an networking event? Mention this and create a positive reference.

## 4. Main part: Highlight what a good match you would be

At the end of the main section, the reader should know why you are suitable for the position you are applying for. It is about presenting specific arguments and show relevant facets of your profile. Therefore, explain your qualifications, experience, skills and strengths that are important.

### Structure your arguments

To avoid simply mentioning the steps of your career, it is important to structure your text. Try to develop your own 'story' that matches your arguments and your profile.

The structure of the main part could be as follows, e.g.:

- **Qualification/ hard skills/** technical-methodical/ theoretical skills, know-how and skills learned during your studies (e.g. focus, modules, study work or theses, projects) and vocational training
- **Practical experience** from internships, projects, part-time work, training (e.g. relevant tasks, activities, topics, methods, requirements, systems, processes, goals)
- **Soft skills/ key qualifications/ personal strengths** that would be beneficial for the position and that you apply/ prove e.g. in your free time, in volunteer work or similar

### Refer to the job and the employer

Making specific references to statements made in the job description or the company website shows that you have done your research with respect to the vacancy and that your profile has similarities with

the job profile. You should do this in the main part as well as in the other parts. It is not the goal simply to repeat formulations or words, but to show overlaps between your profile and the job profile. If you do this clearly, persons who are not specialists in your field or technical systems can also recognise these similarities. Bear in mind, it is not always experts in your field who read your application first.

Integrate keywords from the job description or address the described tasks and requirements (see table on the subject of language). You can also underscore your match by referring e.g. to the business model, company culture or current processes.

### Use examples to individualizes and specialise

Examples are the key to an individual and authentic cover letter. Therefore, describe specifically what you did in internships, modules, trainings or projects. This makes your cover letter unique compared to other people with a similar profile. It also makes it easier for the reader to assess your skills, experience and competences. This also applies for soft skills and personal strengths. Think about how others can recognise this and how you have already proven this. Such descriptions make your cover letter much more meaningful than simply listing suitable terms.

## 5. Conclusion: Complete your application

The last part should conclude your application and round off your self-presentation. For instance, you can emphasise the professional and cultural fit, your motivation and the value that you would bring to the company. Make sure you do unnecessarily not repeat things. Use this space for new aspects, views or insights. State the earliest date that you could start and if necessary, the required duration of your internship and your salary requirements. Finish the cover letter with a friendly, polite and confident appeal.

## 6. Other Dos and Don'ts

### Use formulations like this

Think about the following: You will impress the reader with content and your individual profile, not with eloquent but empty words. Despite this, remember that language conveys content. Take care what you write and which word you use.

Do's and Don'ts	Examples
<p>Formulate <b>comprehensible</b> and <b>easy-to-read</b> sentences – keep things shorter rather than too long and complicated.</p> <p>Avoid <b>complex sentences with lots of clauses</b>. If a sentence is three lines long, see if you can divide it into two sentences or formulate the statement more simply or clearer.</p>	
<p>Avoid <b>passive formulations</b>.</p> <p>Use <b>active sentences</b> that show what you did and achieved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “New procedures were developed in project [...].”</li> <li>▪ "In my training, I was taught [...]."</li> <li>▪ “The following topics [...] were addressed in a course”</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ „During an internship, I was involved in implementing a new concept for [...]. Here, I took over [...].“</li> <li>▪ "During my studies, I was able to develop know-how for working with [...]."</li> <li>▪ „In my thesis I analysed [...] and developed [...].“</li> </ul>
<p>Avoid <b>negative</b> formulations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ „The results of my work were not bad.“</li> <li>▪ „I don´t take long to gain new skills.“</li> <li>▪ „You will find me to be someone who does not shy away from a challenge.“</li> </ul>
<p>Formulate sentences <b>positively</b>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ „I achieved good results with my work.“</li> <li>▪ "I am able to grasp new work tasks quickly."</li> <li>▪ „You will find me to be someone who searches for challenges.“</li> </ul>
<p>If possible, use <b>keywords</b> and <b>verbs</b> from the job description and, if necessary, any other sources about the employer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ „I am able to make use of my experience from [...] in [...].“</li> <li>▪ "I would like to apply and deepen my expertise in [...] in your project [...]."</li> <li>▪ „I was able to demonstrate that I am capable of the work with [...] in [...].“</li> </ul>
<p>Avoid <b>superficial</b> and <b>general</b> statements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ „I would like to gather practical experience.“</li> <li>▪ "I am a team player and I am reliable."</li> <li>▪ "I have gathered practical experience."</li> <li>▪ „I have the necessary know-how.“</li> </ul>



Do's and Don'ts	Examples
<p>Be <b>specific</b>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ „It is now my goal to gather more experience working with [...].“</li> <li>▪ „I demonstrate my ability to work under stress and also my flexibility in my part-time job. As [...], I organise [...], often at short notice, and address customer wishes.“</li> <li>▪ „At [...] I was able to show that others can rely on my even under time pressure.“</li> </ul>
<p>Convey at least one piece of <b>new relevant information</b> in each sentence. Do <u>not</u> repeat unnecessarily. If a sentence contains information, check whether it really needs to be mentioned again.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ „As a prospective civil engineer, I would like [...] During my civil engineering degree [...]“</li> <li>▪ „I was able to prove that I am a team player as [...]. „You will find me to be a team player [...].““</li> </ul>
<p><b>Guide the reader through your text and your argumentation.</b> Use the corresponding words for transitions etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ initially, first of all, firstly, secondly</li> <li>▪ in addition, furthermore, also, likewise, at the same time,</li> <li>▪ for instance, for example</li> <li>▪ whilst, through, due to, despite this, since, thanks to</li> <li>▪ already, in doing this</li> <li>▪ recently, currently, at the moment</li> <li>▪ ultimately, to sum up, overall, therefore, consequently, accordingly, hence</li> <li>▪ also, equally, parallel</li> <li>▪ targeting, the focus being, centred on</li> </ul>
<p>Avoid <b>filler words</b> and <b>softeners</b>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ probably, perhaps, if necessary, actually, possibly</li> </ul>
<p>Describe the <b>results</b> and less about the developments or decisions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ „The choice of my major subject helped me to learn to identify [...].“</li> <li>▪ "The time I spent abroad has helped me to speak [...] fluently.“</li> <li>▪ „I changed the study program to [...] because I was looking for more [...].“</li> </ul>
<p>Don't <b>exaggerate</b>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ „It was always my dream to become XY.“</li> <li>▪ „I am an absolute expert in [...] and also a natural born leader.“</li> </ul>

Do's and Don'ts	Examples
<p>Don't make <b>references to the CV</b> or the <b>appendix</b>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ "You will find all important professional stations listed in my CV."</li> <li>▪ „As you can see in the appendices, I meet all the requirements.“</li> </ul>
<p>You can be <b>brave</b> and try things – especially if have to set you apart from many other applicants. Rhetorical questions can help you to awaken interest and stay memorable. However, be careful: Irony may be misunderstood!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Questions</li> <li>▪ Metaphors</li> <li>▪ Subtitles</li> <li>▪ ... [your ideas]</li> </ul>

### Only use other people's texts just for inspiration

Many people struggle to write texts, especially about themselves. If you are one of these people, it is worth looking at examples, for instance cover letters by people you know. In addition, the Internet or self-help literature have plenty of examples. Remember that you should only use them for inspiration. The reader may know some of the templates or they may simply not be suitable for you. Don't make their use a disadvantage for you.

### Ensure everything is complete

Integrate all requirements from the job description that you fulfil. If there are too many, select the most important aspects (see the job analysis and matching manual). Integrate all explicitly required information, e.g. salary requirements, starting date or a note stating that this is a mandatory internship. Everything must be true and clear: List all stations in the CV that you mention in your cover letter. Ensure that any examples that you mention in your cover letter can also be found in your CV.

### Do not apologise for possible deficits

It is seldom that the requirements made of the applicant as described in the job description can be met in full. This should not be your goal (see the job analysis and matching manual). However, do not draw the reader's attention to what is (still) missing. Concentrate on all the positive things you have to offer.

Do you only meet 50% of the requirements, but you still want to try your luck? Then select additional arguments that underscore your potential and your motivation – i.e. show that you are able and want to grow into a function. Describe the relevant soft skills in more detail and bring examples that underscore your ability to learn and understand new information. Emphasize why you are applying and explain your goals that you will be pursuing with the job.

You have practical experience, but it does not match the professional field? In this case, highlight the common ground of the practical experience. Organising and coordinating is a part of many different jobs. In particular, you can prove your personal-social skills, e.g. organisational talent, the ability to work under stress, communication skills, creativeness or being a team player, in different jobs.

### Don't expand unnecessarily on changes, drop outs or gaps

Does your CV contain stations that could be seen critically? Think carefully about what aspects you want to mention in your cover letter and how relevant it is for your argumentation. Potentially sensitive stations, like these, could be used to your advantage, too: If changing your study program underlines your motivation to work in a certain field; you have relevant skills from a course that you dropped out of; you used a gap for volunteer work.

The goal should be to strength your candidacy and not to excuse or justify any sensitive situations. Therefore, always ask yourself “What advantage came from this time? How important are these arguments compared to others that show me in a favourable way?”

If there are no benefits, the station can just remain part of your CV. If anyone is interested, it is much easier to explain these perhaps complex situations in an interview. In a cover letter you only have little space or opportunity to answer the reader's questions. If possible, do not draw attention unnecessarily to something that would not even be decisive for the reader, because the myth that HR decision-makers are only looking for people with a linear CV is no longer true.

### Emphasize your motivation behind changes in your studies or career

How can I justify applying for a position that does not look like the next logical step in my career? Focus on your goal, i.e. what it is you want to achieve by opting for a position, a certain employer or apprenticeship. Formulate statement true to the motto, 'It appeals to me' and not 'I want to get away from something'. This lends your cover letter a positive note and shows that you have actively chosen to take the new path without just looking for a stopgap.

### Do not blame anyone

Your cover letter is not the right place to justify times or decisions you have made in the past, nor should it be used to apportion blame on others. Even if, in some cases, organisations or persons have played a part in bad grades, difficult internships or a lack of experience, do not point it out in your cover letter.

### “Du” or “Sie”: Select a suitable address form

Some employers use “Du” in job descriptions and on their career websites. Lots of people then ask themselves the question: “Should I use 'Du' or 'Sie' in my application.” Unfortunately, there is no clear answer to this question, because even employers that are traditional use the 'Du' form to attract young candidates. The best course of action is to select your approach based on the following questions:

#### **Does the employer consistently uses „Du“?**

For instance:

- „Du“ is used for all communication on all communication channels, for instance also when addressing customers or business partners.
- The employer and management have a more informal way of presenting themselves, for instance, persons are only introduced by the first names.

- You have already been in contact with a company representative, e.g. at a career fair, a networking event or by telephone, and you conversed using the 'Du' form.

→ You can use „**Du**“, but remember not to switch to colloquial language.

#### Not sure how to address the reader?

Examples: „Dear Mara Mustermann, ...“, „Dear Company XY Team, ...“, or „Dear Mara, ...“

#### Do you not feel comfortable using 'Du'?

Try to avoid addressing the reader directly.

#### **Does the employer use “Du” for recruiting (young) applicants only, but not consistently?**

For instance:

- During the recruitment process, a mix of “Du” and “Sie” is used (e.g. career website, job description, application form, social media channels).
- “Du” is not used in all job descriptions but only in some.
- The employers website does not (consistently) use “Du” form when presenting the organisation or management.
- You have already been in contact with a company representative, e.g. at a career fair, a networking event or by telephone, and you conversed using the “Sie” form.

→ It may be better to stick with “**Sie**” and wait until they offer the “**Du**”.

#### **Read it through several times and ask for feedback**

Only few people manage to write a cover letters very quickly – at least not the final version. You will always find errors takes when you look at it again after a while. So put your draft to one side and read it through again later. It also helps having someone else to checking the content, language, format and orthography.

Markus Mustermann | Musterstr. 123 | 45678 Musterstadt  
Example company PLC  
HR department  
Mrs Maria Example  
Example street 1  
12345 Exemptown

Exemptown, DD.MM.YYYY

**Application for [...] in the department XY / as [...] | Code / reference number [...]**

Your advertisement on www.[...].de

Dear Mrs Example,

**Introduction – grab the reader's attention and interest in a few seconds:** State your strongest arguments about why you are a good fit for the job and what appeals to you about it. Show that your **qualifications / interests / motivation / goals** match the job description. If you have had personal / telephone contact with Mrs Example, mention this here in an appreciative way.

**Main part – show that you match well:** Now state precisely what it is that you have to offer for this job. Address the **technical, methodology, personal and social aspects**. State e.g. what theoretical skills and practical experience you have gained and what your strengths are. Refer to the job description and integrate keywords. Use examples to specifically explaining what you know, what you can or have done, and where you learnt or applied these skills. Focus on what is required. Don't just string sentences together, make sure they have a coherent connection to one another. Use clear, comprehensible and well-structured sentences. Ten sentences are usually enough to show the most important aspects and how well matched you are for the job.

**Conclusion – complete your application:** Emphasise e.g. your motivation with new aspects, summarise what a good match you are or address your unique personal aptitude. Important: Do not forget the benefit for the reader. State a date when you want to or can start, possibly the duration of the internship or thesis, and your salary requirements, if specified.

Finish with a friendly and self-confident request for an invitation for an interview.

With kind regards,

Markus Mustermann

Appendices

## Active verbs

accompany	enforce	program
achieve	evaluate	prolong
advise	execute	prove
analyse	expand	question
apply	help, support	realise
assist	implement	record
begin	improve	reduce
bill	increase	replace
cause	inform	report
check	initiate	research
communicate	instruct	sell
compile	invest	shorten
conceptualise	involve	strengthen
conclude	manage	structure
control	monitor	study
convince	motivate	supply
coordinate	negotiate	support
create	observe	train
design	optimise	update
develop	organise	use
document	plan	write
draft	prepare	...
edit	process	