

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS – CREATING A COVER LETTER



Creating a cover letter

Level: Pre-intermediate – Advanced

CEFR level: B1 to C1

Time: Approximately 90 minutes

Language objectives: Creating a cover letter. This activity is ideally intended for learners who are applying for work experience placements or internships.

Key life skills: Producing a focused letter to get a prospective employer's attention so that they then read the applicant's CV

Materials: One copy of the 'Creating a cover letter' worksheet per student, flipchart paper or large sheets of paper to write on

In many ways the cover letter is equally as or more important than a CV as it will get read first. You can do this 'Creating a cover letter' lesson plan as an extension, once learners have produced a CV. If students have already got CVs, you can teach this lesson by itself.

1. Brainstorm the purpose of a cover letter with learners. Answers may include:

The purpose of the cover letter is to introduce yourself to a company, demonstrate your interest in the company and the internship or work experience opportunity, draw attention to your CV, and motivate the reader to interview you. Often this letter is the first contact you have with a prospective employer. A neat, concise, well-written letter can entice the employer to read your CV with greater interest and will improve your chances of getting an interview.

Emphasise to learners that the purpose of the cover letter is to secure an initial interview and make the chances of the employer reading their CV stronger. A badly written cover letter will result in their CV being ignored!

2. Explain they'll be looking at what the cover letter should include. Distribute the 'Creating a cover letter' worksheet and ask learners to work in pairs and note what each section should include when answering Ex.1 of the worksheet.
3. Distribute copies of Handout 1 which provides cover letter examples. Ask learners to work in pairs or small groups to read and highlight key ideas they could use for their own cover letters. To check answers, give students a photocopy of the key overleaf or project it onto a screen / write it up on the board as feedback for them to copy.
4. Learners could start the Ex. 3 activity in class using the key, then complete their cover letter for homework which you can mark or provide feedback on. If there is time, you could also consider peer-correction as part of the homework checking.

TIPS for writing CVs and cover letters:

1. Do tell your learners to look at some samples of both good and bad CVs and cover letters. There are plenty of websites with tips on writing applications such as the ones suggested here.
2. Do discuss with learners the importance of being resilient and the impact of taking the time to carefully tailor letters and CVs to address specific requirements rather than sending out the same applications to everyone.
3. Do discuss the need for networking and word-of-mouth contacts when it comes to searching for work experience. Learners may well have to do some research and preparation here before sending off a CV and cover letter!
4. During every stage of writing and correcting, keep reminding learners that accuracy of language is vital in CVs and cover letters and even minor mistakes can result in their application being rejected.
5. Do consider setting a research task *before* the class so that learners can find out more about how to apply for internships and work experience placements by themselves, as application procedures always vary from company to company.

www.theguardian.com/careers/cv-templates

www.theguardian.com/careers/covering-letter-advice-tips

www.theguardian.com/careers/cv-graduate-skills

www.theguardian.com/careers/2016/feb/01/spring-clean-your-cv-and-cover-letter-for-job-success

www.theguardian.com/careers/2015/dec/29/the-best-cv-writing-tips-of-2015

http://offers.hubspot.com/marketing-resume-templates?_ga=1.50508969.1295782438.1450884438

www.theguardian.com/careers/covering-letter-examples

www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/applying-for-jobs/how-to-write-a-speculative-job-application

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Copy and distribute this key to learners, or show it on a projector:

Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who you are and what you are currently studying or where you are working ▪ Where you saw the job advertised ▪ Title of the job ▪ Why you are writing (to enquire about a position or to apply for a job)
Competence: What do you offer?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Highlight skills related to relevant experience ▪ Include two or three key selling points which should be relevant to the job and evidenced by the CV ▪ Generate interest <p>Use the STAR method of describing your competences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SITUATION: What was the situation at work? ▪ TASK: What task(s) were you required to do? ▪ ACTION: What actions did you take? How did you solve the problem? ▪ RESULT: What was the outcome?
Motivation: Why do you want this job?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Show focus and knowledge; refer to the main points on the job description
Job interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prove interest ▪ Demonstrate why you want to work for the organisation ▪ Explain why the job appeals ▪ Write about why the sector appeals ▪ Use proof of your interest using examples i.e. from extra study, extra-curricular activities, and jobs
Ending	Positive close and request for an interview

Teacher's notes

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HANDOUT 1: Cover letter examples:

1. Standard, conservative style

This is ideal for more traditional roles within business, law, accountancy, and retail. For more creative sectors, a letter like this might be less appealing, and could work against you. You may even want to consider something completely different like a video, but ensure you look at the way the company asks for your applications and make sure you fit your application style to them! A standard cover letter should be no more than a single page of A4 paper.

Dear [insert name if it is known],*

Please find enclosed my CV in application for the post of Market Reporter as advertised in The Guardian on 30 November.

The nature of my degree course has prepared me well for this position. It involved a great deal of independent research, requiring initiative, self-motivation, and a wide range of skills. For one course, [insert course name], an understanding of the [insert sector] industry was essential. I found this subject very stimulating.

I am a fast and accurate writer with a keen eye for detail and I should be very grateful for the opportunity to progress to market reporting. I am able to take on the responsibility of this position immediately, and have the enthusiasm and determination to ensure that I make a success of it.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this application and I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

*Yours sincerely**

(Name and surname)

2. Standard speculative letter

This may vary according to the nature of the organisation and the industry you're applying to. A standard speculative cover letter should be no more than one side of A4 paper.

Dear [insert name if it is known],*

I am writing to enquire if you have any vacancies in your company. I enclose my CV for your information.

As you can see, I have had extensive vacation work experience in office environments, the retail sector, and service industries, giving me varied skills and the ability to work with many different types of people. I believe I could fit easily into your team.

I am a conscientious person who works hard and pays attention to detail. I'm flexible, quick to pick up new skills, and eager to learn from others. I also have lots of ideas and enthusiasm. I'm keen to work for a company with a great reputation and high profile like [insert company name].

I have excellent references and would be delighted to discuss any possible vacancy with you at your convenience. If you do not have any suitable openings at the moment, I would be grateful if you would keep my CV on file for any future possibilities.

*Yours sincerely**

(Name and surname)

See more examples of speculative cover letters here:

www.careers.ox.ac.uk/making-speculative-approaches/

www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/applying-for-jobs/how-to-write-a-speculative-job-application

* It is usual that if you use the name of the person in your opening such as 'Dear Mr Black', then your sign off would be 'Yours sincerely'. If you use 'Dear Sir or Madam', then sign off with 'Yours faithfully'.

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HANDOUT 2 - Cover letter don'ts

A good covering letter introduces you to the employer and explains why you are one of the best candidates applying for the job or work placement advertised. By avoiding the following no-nos, you can create a covering letter that stands out from the crowd.

1. Forgetting to proofread your letter for errors and tone before you send it

Make sure your letter has no spelling, typing, or grammatical errors. Job applicants are frequently deselected because of such mistakes.

2. Addressing the letter to the wrong person

Call the company and find out the name and title of the person to whom you should address your letter. It shows initiative and resourcefulness, and will impress your reader that you found out a way to address them personally. Use their name and title and don't try to guess their gender.

3. Using someone else's words

Make sure that your letter sounds like you, not like something out of a book. Covering letters, as well as CVs, should be accurate reflections of your personality. Employers are looking for knowledge, enthusiasm, and focus.

4. Betraying your ignorance about the company and the industry

This is where your research comes in. Don't go overboard - just make it clear that you didn't pick this company from a random Internet search. You know who they are, what they do, and you have chosen them.

5. Being too informal

Promote yourself as a professional. Your letter should be as close to a business proposal as you can get - not a plea for an interview. What do you offer that is of value? What objectives can you help the prospective employer achieve?

6. Talking too much about yourself

Downplay 'I' and emphasise 'you'. Try to convert 'I have's' into 'you want's' for the employer. What can you do for the organisation that will create interest and arouse enthusiasm for an interview with you?

7. Being too confident

If you meet all the stated requirements for the job, spell this out in your letter - but don't be too boastful. Accentuate the good match between your skills and the employer's needs.

8. Lacking focus

Structure your letter so that each part achieves a particular goal. State the purpose of your letter in your opening paragraph. Keep the letter organised. Decide on the focus of your letter and ensure that all points reinforce the topic.

9. Boring page presentation

Draw attention to your skills and attributes by underlining them, using bold font, or indenting them in lists with bullets. You have to be careful with underlining because the line is often printed too close to the word, and reduces its readability. Use these kinds of emphasis sparingly just to make the highlights stand out when the reader gives your letter a quick skim.

10. Too long

Keep it simple and clean - not cluttered. Use no more than seven lines, and preferably five or fewer, per paragraph. Vary the sentence length. None of the sentences should be very long, but you don't want a staccato stream of very short sentences. One page is the maximum for letters.

11. Sending photocopies

Send original letters. Don't send copies that look mass-produced. Always sign your letter, even if it is being scanned and emailed.

12. Forgetting to include a copy of your CV

Remember that the one purpose for a covering letter is to get your CV into the hands of the employer and to obtain an interview.

13. Enclosing a photo

Unless you are seeking employment in modelling, acting, or other performance industries, it is not always appropriate to send a photograph with your cover letter. An employer will see what you look like when you reach the interview stage. Until then, a photo won't help you get a foot in the door. However, assess each situation individually as some industries or employers may welcome photos. Again this is where research is vital!

14. Forgetting to ask

If you don't ask, you will not get! The primary goal of your cover letter is to get an interview. Be sure to ask for one at the end of your letter. Be prepared to initiate the follow-up communication yourself and let the prospective employer know you will be doing this. This may be just enough to get them to hold onto your letter and give it more thorough attention.