

Career break

There are many reasons why you might need to take some time away from your career.

But whatever the reason you decided to take a step back, re-entering the workforce and getting your career back on track can seem like a challenge. Remember the cover letter is often the first impression a recruiter will get of your application and a valuable tool to help get your personality across and put your career break into context. Place precedence on the positives and assure the employer that you're ready to return to work, and your career gap shouldn't prove to be as much of a hindrance as you may think

Here's a cover letter template specifically designed for people looking to return from a career break.

1. Opening the letter

Always play it safe when it comes to the opening paragraph. Quite simply, the best way to start is with a brief explanation of the position you're applying for and where you found the vacancy. Name-dropping is fine.

Keep it relevant and to the point. Remember: it should be a short sentence introduction, not a prolonged paragraph.

Example:

I am an accomplished personal assistant with three years experience in the field with excellent references. I wish to apply for the role of Executive PA, currently being advertised on bizcommunity.co.za.

2. Second paragraph - Why are you suitable for the job?

After the introductions are out of the way, it's time to go on the offensive.

Ignore your career gap at this stage and use your previous achievements and/or specific academic or vocational qualifications to help sell your suitability. This will demonstrate that, regardless of the break you've taken, you still possess the capability and mindset to undertake the role.

Always make sure your examples are as quantifiable as possible. 'Increased revenue by x%', for instance, sounds a lot more impressive than simply stating you 'Increased revenue'.

Leading with the positives will help show what you can do for the company and ensure your contributions are front of mind before moving on.

Example:

As you can see from my attached CV, I have over four years' experience as a PA, as well as experience in office management. In my previous role as an Executive PA, I worked closely with the managing director, providing administrative support and representing her in any meetings she could not attend. My role also included full diary management, working with a budget of R20,000 and organising training events for upwards of 50 members of staff.

3. Third paragraph – Explain the gap

The third paragraph is your opportunity to briefly explain the reason for your career break.

However, more important than explaining the gap, you need to define the reason you feel this is the right role for you to return to work.

One of the main objections you'll face is that recruiters may worry you're not ready to return. Alleviating these fears will be key for your application to be a success.

Example:

At the start of 2008, I had my daughter and took some time out to be with my family. However, she has now started school full-time, and I am ready and determined to resume my career and take up a new challenge.

4. Fourth/Fifth paragraph – What can you do for the company?

Once you've addressed your career gap, use practical examples of how you've tried to keep your skills relevant during your time out.

This could include volunteering, work experience or any events you may have attended to broaden your knowledge of the subject. You may also want to include any books you've read, courses you've undertaken or any other qualifications or experience relevant to the role.

Reinforce your credentials and show you can hit the ground running, and your gap can easily be overcome.

Example:

During my professional break I have done my best to refresh my skills and keep up-to-date with the latest industry developments. For example, I've recently been working as a voluntary Administrator at a local charity, which has really helped me re-acquaint myself with the sector.

I have also completed a great amount of independent study, in particular completing my Executive PA Diploma, allowing me to expand my knowledge of the subject beyond my previous work experience.

5. Fifth paragraph – Reiterate

Here's where you reiterate your interest in the role and why you would be the right fit for the company.

Example:

I am confident that I can bring this level of expertise with me to your organisation and help Well Known Company LTD build upon their reputation as one of the brands in the UK. I am available to start immediately.

6. Closing the letter

To finish the letter, always thank the employer.

Sign off your cover letter with 'Yours sincerely' (if you know the name of the hiring manager)/'Yours faithfully' (if you do not), and your name.

Example:

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to meeting with you to discuss my application further.

Yours sincerely,

[Your name]

Final thoughts

Remember: this is a template, not a ready-made cover letter. Without tailoring what you write to the role in question, you'll run the risk of looking underprepared and disinterested, whilst also passing up a key opportunity to really sell yourself.

Never be tempted to try and hide your career gap. Even if you make it to the interview stage, you'll often easily be found out and run the risk of undermining your entire application.

Remember: taking time out from your career to concentrate on other things is nothing to be ashamed of. It is not a reflection of your work, and many employers are often incredibly understanding when it comes to gaps in employment history.

Example 1

Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms **[Hiring managers name – if not known, simply Sir/Madam]**

I wish to apply for the role of **[Job Title]**, currently being advertised on reed.co.uk. Please find enclosed my CV for your consideration.

As you can see from my attached CV, I have over **[time period]** experience in the **[sector]** industry. In my previous role as a **[job title]** at **[employer name]**, I was responsible for **[Insert quantifiable and notable achievements - e.g. an x% increase in revenue]**, which when coupled with my enthusiasm and dedication **[insert skills relevant to the role – usually found in the job description]**, helped the business to **[measure of success]**.

In **[month/year you left the company]** I took some time out from my career to **[reason for career break]**. However, I have now **[reason why now is the right time to return]** and am ready and determined to resume my career and take up a new challenge.

During my professional break I have done my best to refresh my skills and keep up-to-date with the latest industry developments. Recently, I have **[volunteered/completed work experience/attended an event]**, which has really helped me re-acquaint myself with the sector.

I have also completed a great amount of independent study, in particular **[reading books such as X, Y & Z/completing X course/teaching myself X skill]**, allowing me to expand my knowledge of the subject beyond my previous work experience.

I am confident that this knowledge, coupled with my proven track-record of success in the industry, make me the perfect candidate to help **[company name]** build upon their reputation as **[state their position in market – learned through your research]**.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to meeting with you to discuss my application further.

Yours sincerely

[Your name]
[contact phone number]
[Signature - if desired]

Example 2

Dear [title and surname of hiring manager],

I am writing to express my interest in the role of [job title or job reference number] as advertised on Totaljobs. As you can see from my attached CV, I have [time period] experience as a successful [job role].

I am looking to return to work after a career break while I [travelled/cared for a family member/studied/valid reason] and now wish to find the right job. With my work track record and recently updated skills, I believe I would bring the advertised requirements and more to this role.

In my previous employment I achieved a number of successes, including: [give an example such as: regular high customer satisfaction ratings/praise from my manager for my contribution to the team/a new window display that increased footfall.] During my time away from the workplace I have kept abreast of [sector/professional] developments through [home study/training/networking].

I am confident I have the attributes that [recruiting company] is looking for and would very much welcome the opportunity to discuss my application in person.

Yours sincerely,

Your name

Your phone number