

Graduate letter

So you've just spent three years or more completing your degree...

Teaming your shiny new CV with a half-hearted attempt at writing a cover letter (or worse, not including one at all) could count against you more than you anticipate.

A cover letter is often the first thing a hiring manager looks at so it's crucial to get it right. As well as letting your personality shine, it's also an opportunity to stand out from all the other graduate applicants. And remember, first impressions count.

Here's a step-by-step guide to help write that letter.

1. Opening the letter

The opening paragraph should be short, informative and to the point. Explain what job it is you're applying for, and where you found the vacancy.

Feel free to mention the website by name (e.g. as advertised on bizcommunity.com) or, if someone referred you to the contact, mention their name in this section.

Example:

I wish to apply for the role of Graduate Commercial Analyst, currently being advertised on bizcommunity.com. Please find enclosed my CV for your consideration.

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

Briefly describe your professional and academic qualifications that are relevant to the role and ensure you refer to some of the skills listed in the job description.

Stating your degree classification and the name of your university is optional, but will help to build a more comprehensive background for the reader. And, if any specific qualifications have been mentioned as pre-requisites, stating this now will help confirm your credentials.

Example:

As you can see from my attached CV, I have recently completed a three year degree in Economics at UCT, attaining a 2:1, and I believe the knowledge and skills built up during this time make me the perfect candidate for the role.

3. Third/Fourth paragraph – *What can you do for them?*

Use practical examples to emphasise what you can do for the company. These might be performance based (if you have some relevant work experience), but will most likely be focussed on your academic career.

Always make sure your examples are as specific and pertinent as possible. If you've completed particular modules which may be applicable, this is the point to include them.

It's also a good place to include any extra-curricular studies or activities which are applicable to the position, or which help reinforce your skills. Examples could be particular books you've read around the subject, seminars you've attended, or any qualifications undertaken which are outside your degree.

Other examples include outlining your dissertation (e.g. 'achieved a first class distinction grade in my dissertation on x'), or more quantifiable achievements you may have attained whilst in previous employment or during work experience (e.g. 'Increased revenue by x%', 'drove x% more traffic to the website during my time in employment', 'an increase in students grades by x' etc.)

Example:

The position particularly interests me because of my passion for Analytics. During my course, I studied topics such as Econometrics, Accounting & Finance and International Economics, and the mathematical and modelling skills learned from these modules have given me an excellent foundation for building a career as a Commercial Analyst.

Aside from my degree, I have built upon my interest in this field in a number of ways. Recently I have completed my dissertation on architectures for data-intensive analytics, which allowed me to put my theory for the subject into practice. Further, I have also started an online analytics course, which has given me a much more rounded view on the subject.

4. 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 Online Retail Company LTD build upon their reputation as one of the biggest brand names. Add to this my passion and enthusiasm for analytics, and I believe my contribution will have an immediate impact on the business.

5. Closing the letter

Thank the employer for their time. It is also a good opportunity to indicate you'd like to meet with the employer for an interview.

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 the proper research into the company advertising the vacancy, and without tailoring it to the role, it will lack the impact for which a cover letter can drastically improve your chances of reaching the interview stage.

And these words hold even more importance when it comes to graduate jobs. Putting the time and effort in to each one will pay dividends, so keep at it. The more research you do and the better written it is, the greater your chance of standing out from the graduate crowd and setting yourself apart.

Example 1

[Today's Date]

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

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

As you can see from my attached CV, I have recently completed a **[time period]** degree in **[Discipline]** at **[University name]**, attaining a **[degree classification]**. I believe the knowledge and skills built up during this time make me the perfect candidate for the role.

The position particularly interests me because of my passion for **[Subject]**. During my course, I studied topics such as **[topics or modules relevant to the position]**, and the skills learned from these modules have given me an excellent foundation for building a career as a **[Job Title]**.

Aside from my degree, I have built upon my interest in this field in a number of ways. Recently I have **[completed my dissertation about.../completed work experience/attended an event]** which has allowed me to put my theory for the subject into practice. Aside from this, I have also completed a great amount of independent research, in particular **[reading books such as X, Y & Z/completing X course/teaching myself X skill]**, which has given me a much more rounded view on the subject.

I am confident that I can bring this level of expertise with me to your organisation and help **[company name]** build upon their reputation as **[state their position in market – learned through your research]**. Add to this my passion and enthusiasm for **[Subject]**, and I believe my contribution will have an immediate impact on the business.

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

Yours sincerely/Yours faithfully **[Use sincere if you have used the hiring manager's name, if not known, use faithfully]**,

[Your name]

[Contact phone number]

[Signature - if desired]

Example 2

Dear [title and surname of hiring manager],

I am writing to express my keen interest in the role of [job title or job reference number] as advertised on Careerjunction. As you can see from my CV, I am a graduate with the required qualifications for this role and with additional, successful experience in the workplace.

EITHER (A)

Recently I undertook work experience at [company/organisation] where I was praised for [specific attribute or achievement]. During my time there I was involved in [key duties, such as taking customer queries, filing legal paperwork etc] and particularly enjoyed [managing the working lunch arrangements for senior client meetings when I gained valuable insight into the industry/implementing a new filing system that saved time/shadowing a senior member of staff/ whatever it was].

OR (B)

During the summer holidays, I have worked in a variety of roles for different companies and this work experience has taught me valuable workplace skills. These include: [List transferable skills learnt on the job, such as excellent customer service, meeting deadlines, managing different priorities and working as a team. If you were given additional responsibilities or achieved something specific, then say so]

I am attracted to this vacancy because I am very interested in working for a [large/small retailer/non-for-profit organisation/whichever kind of company it is] because [it is a fast-moving environment/positively changes our society/ I admire your technology product/name the reason].

I hope I have convinced you that my up-to-date qualifications, proven skills in the workplace and enthusiasm to learn would make me an asset. I am confident that I possess the attributes you're looking for and am available for an immediate start. Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you'd like to discuss my application further.

Yours sincerely,

Your name

Your phone number