



Learning pack

Tailoring your cover letter

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During the initial stages of the recruitment process a cover letter is often required in addition to your CV. It is an introduction to you, your values and goals; but more importantly gives you the opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge of the company and role for which you are applying.

A concise and relevant cover letter is your opportunity to make a strong first impression. It is also important that you learn how to adapt your cover letter for each and every job application, to ensure it is tailored for the specific role and company.

Recruiters often ask for a cover letter as a way of differentiating between applicants. It is an effective way to introduce yourself in your own voice, in a way that a CV cannot. A well-crafted, interesting or unique cover letter can set you apart from other applicants, and catch the eye of the recruiter.

Remember, recruiters often have to sift through huge numbers of cover letters; so you need to spend some time on this process to make an impact.



Why is it challenging to create a compelling cover letter?

'One size does NOT fit all'. Perspectives on what should be represented in a cover letter change according to a host of factors. These factors include the diverse range of potential readers, sector and cultural variations, the breadth and depth of the candidate's experience. When faced with the limited space to capture this degree of complexity, applicants are often confused how to proceed. For many, cover letter writing is seen more as an art than a science.

Published advice regarding the transition of postgraduates into more senior roles is relatively poorly addressed in the marketplace. Most advice is directed towards the undergraduate market and those typically seeking more junior roles. This pack is designed to significantly redress the balance for Cranfield postgraduate students.

A misconception originating at undergraduate level is that you can have one generic cover letter. As soon as you gain more experience than just your academic qualifications you need to shape, mould and adapt your range of experience to the needs of the audience. You need to learn the skills to project the very best you have to offer to meet the needs of the recruiter. We believe that you are your own best marketing consultant and will be well equipped for future campaigns, if you employ the strategies contained in this pack.

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Plan your cover letter

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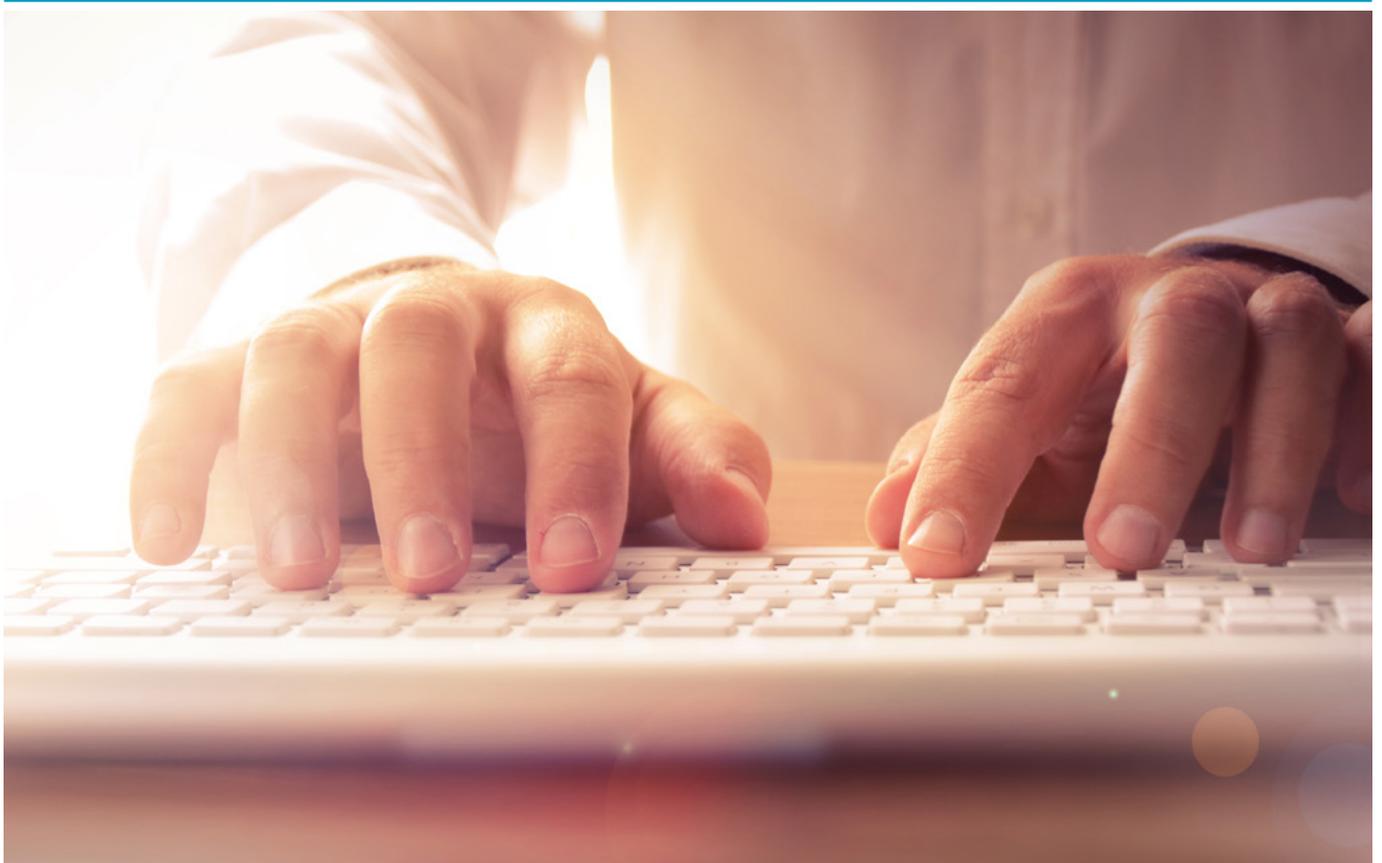
Personal impact

The best letters have something to say that hits the reader personally and a distinctive cover letter will enable you to make your mark as an individual. By tone, character and vocabulary, a letter conveys the feeling of a personal conversation with the sender. Write with your own personal style to enable you to stand out from the other candidates and to establish a relationship with the reader.

In addition, it will enable you to tailor your message to the reader. Line managers, HR and recruitment consultants value and read cover letters differently. A potential line manager is likely to be interested in hearing how you might help them solve the problems and issues they are currently facing, whilst HR and recruitment consultants are more likely to be looking at your fit with key competency requirements.

Match your skills to the role requirements

- This is the bulk of your one page cover letter. It is essential to closely identify the match between your own experience, skills and competencies and the requirements of the recruiter. This will help you to select what you should say in the cover letter.
- Do use some of the same key words as those used in the job description. Human Resources (HR), hiring managers and 'recruitment software' will be looking for these words, e.g. if 'Excel modelling' is essential, ensure that you mention your expertise in this area.
- Ensure that you tell the recruiter what you can bring to the organisation rather than what you stand to gain.
- Do mention relevant theses, elective modules and independent projects that have a bearing on the role for which you are applying.



Your cover letter strategy

The cover letter offers more flexibility than the CV because it enables you to convey your interest for the organisation, role and demonstrates your suitability. A well written letter will hook the attention of the reader so that they look at your track record in the attached CV.

First impressions

Your cover letter acts as a first impression. A misspelled, inaccurate letter can say, 'don't hire this person', while a well written letter will convey to the employer that you are professional and thorough. Remember that the aim of the cover letter is to create an eagerness to read your CV. Keep this in mind and your chances of receiving an invitation to an interview will greatly increase.

1

Identify application guidelines

2

Identify company and contact details

3

Research the organisation and the sector

4

Match your skills to the role requirements

5

Complete and structure the outline of the letter

6

Ask a peer or the Careers Service to proof read your letter

7

Allow your Careers Service Manager to help you fine tune the letter

8

Apply

Starting to write

Do your research.

Research the organisation and sector

It is essential to research the company and industry sector to which you are applying. This will enable you to demonstrate your knowledge of the business area and to highlight how you fit with the company and the role.

Areas to research could include:

- What drives company profits?
- What are its needs?
- What are its pressing concerns and primary opportunities?
- What is the working environment like?
- What are the most important values held by the organisation?

As you collate notes on what the company needs and what you can do for them, be sure to use your own words – not brochure jargon. When you craft your letter, demonstrate your fit with the company in your own language and style. When referring to your fit with the competencies required be explicit.

For example, you could catch the reader's attention early on in the letter by making reference to a key opportunity that the business is pursuing and linking this to your own skills and experience, hence demonstrating how you will be able to add value to the business. Another example would be to refer to one or two key values of the company and to give evidence of how you share these values.

Sources of information

- Use the resources in the MIRC (building 111) and Kings Norton Library (building 55) such as MINTEL to do searches on your target company. Ask the MIRC and Library staff for assistance if you need it.
- Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram: Do they have an online presence on Social Media? If so, find pieces of information that could be interesting to add in your cover letter.
- Factiva (press releases and articles from over 10,000 different global press sources)
[Intranet>services>library>cranfieldcampus>eresources a-z> Factiva](#)
- Career intelligence sites
www.glassdoor.co.uk
www.vault.com
- Speak to people working for the target company. Ask them about current hot issues for the company as well as the key competencies required for your target job role.
- Make use of company presentations, careers fairs and the Alumni Relations Team to put you in touch with people who can give you this valuable information.
- Keep up-to-date by reading the Financial Times (FT) and the business sections of good quality newspapers, such as The Times, The Telegraph, The Independent, The Observer, The Guardian, The Harvard Business Review, as well as Fortune Magazine. Copies of these including access to Bloomberg, are available in the MIRC.
- SATM and SWEE industry related publications on the following websites that can be useful are:
www.the-mia.com
www.aerosociety.com
www.theiet.org
www.cieem.net/student-membership
www.cips.org
www.engc.org.uk
www.imeche.org
www.wes.org.uk
www.designcouncil.org.uk
www.instituteofwater.org.uk

Develop your content

Get the basics right.

Contact information

The address of the person you are writing to should be displayed on the top left of the page with the date listed below it, alongside your address which should be clearly displayed in the top right corner of the page.

Subject line

Include a subject line that clearly highlights the specific job title and job reference number that you're applying for.

Salutation

It is important to use the correct salutation. For example if you are addressing your letter to Dougal Smith you would start your letter with 'Dear Mr Smith' or, if you have previously had personal contact you might start your letter with 'Dear Dougal'. You must never refer to someone as 'Dear Mr Dougal Smith' or 'Dear Dougal Smith'. If writing to a woman, use the appropriate salutation i.e. 'Miss' (not married) 'Mrs' (married) or 'Ms' (if unknown). If you don't know who the letter should be addressed to and you're unable to find out, please use 'Dear Sir or Madam'. This will also help you to determine the appropriate phrase to close your letter. You should use 'Yours sincerely' when you have used a name at the beginning of the letter or 'Yours faithfully' if you have used Dear Sir or Madam.

First paragraph - engage with the company

The first paragraph should be written in such a way as to make a connection with the company that you are applying to. You need to put across in a compelling way why you are motivated to apply for that particular role within the organisation and what interests you about the organisation and projects/activities they are involved in.

It is also a good idea to mention the names of any employees or alumni working for the company that you have met or spoken to. In addition, show that you have researched the company, including anything in the press that is current news. This could include something topical; quotes from senior directors or partners of the company or even draw reference to the core company values/mission statement and how they align to you.

Second paragraph – write about your relevant skills and experience for this role/application

In the second paragraph you need to show your academic and work experience which is specific to the department or area of the business that you would be working in, if you were to be offered the role. If you can, highlight any transferrable skills that directly relate to the requirements of the role and give examples of projects that showcase the use of those specific skills.

Third paragraph – adding value and what makes you different?

The third paragraph is your opportunity to highlight what individual skills and ideas you could offer the business to strengthen their team and help the business achieve their strategy.

Finally, your closing sentence.

This is where you thank the reader for their time and consideration and how you look forward to the opportunity of discussing your application and suitability in more detail for the specific role.

Check your work - triple check before sending

First impressions count, so accuracy is critical to a successful cover letter. This is the first impression a potential employer will have of you, so any misspelling or grammatical errors could result in your application being rejected.

1. Check your spelling - English (UK) spell checker.
2. Check your grammar.
3. Ensure you have three distinct paragraphs plus your closing sentence.
4. If in doubt contact the Careers Service and book an appointment for your letter to be reviewed.

Example cover letters

Red Bull Racing
Bradbourne Drive
Tilbrook
Milton Keynes
MK7 8BJ

29th September 2017

Hans Schmitz
387 Stringfellow Hall
Cranfield University
Cranfield
MK42 0TB
h.schmitz@cranfield.ac.uk
+44 (0)7785 695447

Dear Sir/Madam,

Reference: Graduate Aerodynamics Engineer (HR090317)

Red Bull has a great Formula 1 motorsport history, having developed from a main sponsor to a multiple world championship winning team. Their clever ideas and innovations, especially in terms of aerodynamics, and the desire to always perform at the highest possible level has captured my interest. This dedication and passion for motorsport was supported by the statements of Marco Bertulies-Esposito, who is currently a Junior Structural Analyst at Red Bull Technology and an alumnus of the Cranfield Motorsport MSc.

I am currently completing an MSc in Advanced Motorsport Engineering at Cranfield University with a focus on aerodynamics. During my previous work experience as a Design Engineer in the aerodynamic and cooling department at AUDI AG in Germany, I learnt a wide range of skills and developed expertise in all areas of car racing mechanics, which has significantly helped me to create efficient and powerful solutions to complex aerodynamic problems. A car is made up of numerous different parts which all have to fit and work together. My knowledge combined with experience in cooling, suspension development, powertrain design and packaging plus aerodynamics allowed me to find innovative solutions which didn't just solve the problem but even enhanced the vehicles performance. One of these ideas is a patent and currently being progressed. Additionally I used my free time to be an active aerodynamicist in the international TOP10 formula student team "Schanzer Racing Electric" and in the FIA championship, winning AUDI VLN Endurance racing team "Tuning Akademie". I shared my trackside and theoretical experiences in a presentation at the Professional Motorsport World Expo in Cologne and have undertaken development projects within AUDI SPORT.

I have been fascinated by motorsport and technology all my life, spending weekends on the kart race track, designing race cars in university and developing hybrid high performance road cars at work. Adaptable and methodically minded to work with initiative to identify and rectify faults. This combined with my Design Engineer experience at Audi and proficiency in MATLAB and SOLIDWORKS would be beneficial for this role. My wish is to work in a demanding and fast paced environment. Being part of a diverse and dynamic team within Red Bull Technology would be a valued opportunity to utilise my exceptional social aptitude, global mind-set and enhanced engineering skills.

I enclose my CV for your attention and am happy to provide any further information in support of my application. Available to interview at any time and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours faithfully,
Hans Schmitz

Heineken International Head Office
PO Box 222
5000 AA Amsterdam
Netherlands

27th September 2017

Kristian Neilson
6 The Drive, Cranfield
Bedfordshire, MK43 0TB
United Kingdom
kristian.neilson@cranfield.ac.uk
+44 (0)7533 085808

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: HI00210 - International Graduate Programme – Marketing & Sales

As one of the world's leading beverage brands, Heineken not only consistently provides high quality products but is also well known for its phenomenal marketing. The strong on- and off-trade presence of Heineken and the innovative solutions the company creates to cope with issues such as the growth of niche categories, are the main reasons behind my interest in working for this pioneering company. I have also been inspired by a recent conversation with a Cranfield University alumnus, who is currently on the International Graduate Programme. He spoke about the challenges he encountered and how these experiences have improved him from both a personal and professional perspective. Dedicated to doing the best I can, I am confident I will successfully represent your core values of enjoyment, respect and passion for quality, and will become a great asset to Heineken.

Travelling through Asia after graduating has consolidated my interest in other countries and cultures. This interest further developed during an internship at the marketing department of a multinational organisation, where I drove data insights at an international level. Last year I started my international career by undertaking a Masters in Strategic Marketing at Cranfield University and I am eager to continue my international career exploration. I undertook an internship within a start-up, driving brand awareness and enhancing my knowledge on building brands. Reflecting on this, I realised how I thrive on creating innovative new strategies to improve brand awareness. My passion for brands in the beverage industry developed during my education. As a key assessment of my Masters, I chose to write a marketing plan for a brewing company. This included developing strategies to improve a current brand and a strategy to build a new one, with which I successfully secured the top grade within my class. The strong analytical skills I have developed enable me to critically evaluate possibilities and make the best decisions to efficiently and effectively achieve results. Having led several teams during my education, I strive to enhance team performance and deliver high quality work.

Heineken's core values align well with the key attributes I am looking for in a role and an employer. I feel that this alignment, coupled with my prior experience and enhanced capabilities through the undertaking of my Masters would allow me to make an immediate and lasting contribution to the Marketing and Sales International Graduate Programme of your organisation as a whole moving forward.

I hope that I have been able to express my genuine interest in working for Heineken. I want to thank you for your time and consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

Kristian Neilson

Example cover letters

Amey PLC
The Sherard Building
Edmund Halley Road
Oxford OX4 4DQ
Oxfordshire

20th October 2017

Kimberley Chu
22 St Johns Road
Bedford
MK40 3TE
kimberley.chu@cranfield.ac.uk
+44 (0)7728 615963

Dear Mr. Fernando,

Re: Full / Part Time Student Placement – Milton Keynes Waste Recovery Park

Amey is a business with over 100 years' experience in providing consultation and infrastructure support services in the UK and abroad. You have been providing waste management services to UK local authorities and during my visit to Milton Keynes Council's Materials Recycling Facility, I learnt about the business whilst working with the council to build a new state-of-the-art waste treatment facility. I really admire the company ethos to treat waste as a resource which conforms to the motion of circular economy. Allowing Amey to provide its customers with cost-effective, comprehensive waste and resource management solutions.

I am currently completing an MSc in Waste and Resource Management at Cranfield University and have recently graduated with a BSc Environmental Management Degree. My skillsets acquired during my studies means I am already familiar with waste management technologies and familiar with those being installed in your facility. My understanding of the recycling sector, waste management, sustainability, risk management, conservation and environmental management would be beneficial for this role. I have managerial and supervisory experience from working in the retail industry, therefore I understand responsibilities of given tasks including operational running, reporting, adhering to company policies, resource and time management, team work, and supervising staff which would add value to the company.

I believe in the power of circular economy and the waste sector is one of the key drivers for this holistic change which is why I have been studying it for five years. I have the necessary knowledge and understanding to fulfil the required duties in supporting the facility management and keen to develop my hands on expertise. I am flexible and adaptable to dynamic working environments and perform well within a team or using my own initiative. With my positive attitude I feel I can add great value to the management of the facility as well as be part of the company's growth.

Thank you for your kind consideration. I have enclosed my CV for your attention and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Kimberley Chu

Accenture
30 Fenchurch Street
London
EC3M 3BD

4th September 2017

Sabrina Montgomery
Mitchell Hall
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Bedfordshire
MK43 0AL
sabrina.montgomery@cranfield.ac.uk
+44 (0)7877 123881

Dear Francesca,

Re: Business Transformation Manager Position, Accenture

It was a pleasure to meet you last week following Accenture's presentation evening at Cranfield University School of Management. I have long been impressed by Accenture and the commitment that the business has to delivering sustainable benefits for its clients. It was therefore a wonderful opportunity to hear first-hand from Sarah, Amit and Mark and I was struck by their enthusiasm for co-creating solutions with clients as well as enhancing their client capabilities through knowledge and skills transfer. Accenture clearly demonstrates the difference that it takes to deliver long term transformational change, and it is no surprise to note the recent Change Management awards that the organisation has recently won in successive years.

My career in the retail and food industries, supplemented by my year at Cranfield as an MBA scholar has equipped me with strong analytical, communication and teamwork skills. I have delivered effective change management both as a consultant involved in business integration following company acquisition, as well as in retail management through strategy development and resource restructuring. I therefore fully appreciate the need for successful stakeholder engagement, in particular preempting and mitigating conflict through offline negotiation in order to deliver sustainable solutions. Throughout my career I have also developed excellent project management skills in order to provide logical, prioritised structure to facilitate business transformation. I thrive in a challenging and fast-paced environment where speed, accuracy and resilience is paramount and consistently work to stretch my ability both inside and outside the work environment, most recently having competed in last year's Round the World Yacht Race.

The drive and passion exhibited by those working at Accenture is something that resonates strongly with me, and I would be very proud to work as part of your team. I believe that I could add immediate and sustained value to Accenture through the application of my skills and experience as well as my collaborative and personable approach.

Please find attached a copy of my CV. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my application and suitability for the role in person.

Yours sincerely,

Sabrina Montgomery

Cranfield University

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T: +44 (0)1234 758190 (SATM/SWEE/CDS)

E: cranfieldcareers@cranfield.ac.uk

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