

Careers Success Toolkit

Cover letters and examples

Careers and Employment Support
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Student Services

Cover letters and examples

Introduction

Finding a job requires time and effort, particularly in a competitive job market. To be successful, you will need to develop a number of job hunting skills – such as researching careers information, job hunting creatively and presenting yourself effectively in writing and in person.

Careers Success Toolkit has been written to help you develop these skills. These guides follow the selection process, with sections on job search strategy, putting together a persuasive CV and application form, and interview techniques. Within each guide there are references to other sources of useful information. Many of these resources are available in the Student Service Centre in Gateway House. If you are a graduate and are no longer living near the University, investigate the resources of your local public reference library, and/or the nearest university careers service.

The Careers and Employment Support Service offers a number of services to help you with your job hunt. These include:

- Information on occupations and employers
- **DMUworks** – an online vacancy database linked to our website dmu.ac.uk/careers
- Job vacancy bulletins such as Prospects Today
- Employer events such as our annual Leicestershire Student and Graduate Fair and employer presentations on campus.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of your job hunting strategy, there are Careers Advisers available at the Student Services Centre, Ground Floor, Gateway House between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

If you are no longer living near the university you may want to use our **E-guidance** service. Logon to dmu.ac.uk/careers and follow the email link to a simple form for you to complete with your query. A member of the Careers Team will get back to you with advice and information.

The covering letter

The covering letter is an important accompaniment to a CV. You can use it to clarify your motives for applying and draw together relevant facts and skills from your CV to show your suitability. It also gives you the opportunity to emphasise your enthusiasm and commitment to the job. Your letter should be confident, business-like and concise; be polite but not ingratiating.

A letter should open with a brief introduction outlining the reason why you are writing: introduce yourself and give your current position (eg final year History student at De Montfort University), and indicate whether you are responding to an advertised vacancy or applying speculatively. If you are writing 'on spec' make it clear what you hope to achieve – are you enquiring whether there are any vacancies or hoping to arrange a visit to gain work experience?

Follow your introduction with reasons for your interest in the job, career, and/or company and demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the occupation. Use the job specification, advert and company website to help you answer the crucial question 'why do you want this job?'

Your letter should also expand on key selling points from your CV including relevant knowledge, skills and experience. Provide clear evidence of your suitability for the post, emphasising the special contribution you could make if your application was successful. If there are any special circumstances, eg an overseas work permit, it may be appropriate to state this in the covering letter.

End your letter on a note of enthusiasm and expectation, eg 'I look forward to hearing from you'. It should finish with 'Yours sincerely' if you are writing to a named person, which is preferable to Dear Sir/Madam; a letter starting this way should end 'Yours faithfully'.

Examples of a covering letter

The following examples of covering letters are intended to introduce a range of styles which could be adapted to suit your own circumstances and writing style:

First letter

6 Roman Avenue
Kedleston
Derby
DE8 7BP

Mr Jahangir Khan
Human Resources Manager
Pentagon Computer Systems
Longcliffe
Loughborough
LE12 3JV

22 September 20XX

Dear Mr Khan

I'm writing in response to your advert in the Leicester Mercury on 20 September which requested applications for the position of Systems Programmer within your company. I graduated this year from De Montfort University with an upper second class (2:1) honours degree in Computer Science and enclose a copy of my CV for your attention.

My motivation for following a career in systems programming stems from a strong interest and ability in solving complex technical problems and a desire to become a specialist in my field. This opportunity would allow me to further develop my powers of precision, analysis and application. These qualities have already been tested in both educational and work environments.

During my placement year I worked for Microsoft in London and one of several projects involved helping to develop software for a major retailer which would control the scheduling of jobs on a mainframe computer. My final year project tackled the development and testing of a bank's Stock Exchange Order System and involved the ability to explain complex issues to tutors in pressurised circumstances.

Pentagon Computer Systems are a well established company in South Yorkshire with a strong reputation for staff development, as the 'Investor in People' award recognises. I would welcome the challenge of helping the company to build on its success and become a major employer in the East Midlands.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to ask. Meanwhile I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Ben Jarvis

Second letter

6 Morpeth Road
Gateshead
Newcastle-Upon-Tyne
Northumbria
NE10 7RJ

Ms M L Wentworth
Managing Director
Oasis Advertising Agency
Friar Lane
Kidderminster
Gloucestershire
GL1 6RP

26 September 20XX

Dear Ms Wentworth

This letter is to enquire whether a graduate with a background in creative thinking, with intuition and an imaginative approach to strategy, who also possesses some knowledge of Information Technology, could be considered suitable for a trainee position as an account planner within your organisation.

I enclose a copy of my CV which concentrates on being creatively distinctive yet commercially relevant, a philosophy which I was encouraged to practice whilst working at Viking Advertising Leicester. This experience enabled me to develop an understanding of a range of disciplines such as direct marketing, sales promotion, direct response marketing and account planning, and confirmed my long-term interest in working in advertising.

Key qualities that I can demonstrate include lateral thinking and, importantly, the ability to explain my thoughts clearly and persuasively. Good organisational skills have been developed, partly as a result of being Entertainments Officer at De Montfort University for the past 12 months and I possess a methodical approach to work.

I am drawn to Oasis Advertising due to the breadth of expertise it has demonstrated in all the communication disciplines and its track record in producing innovative advertising for clients such as Whitbread, Tesco, Weetabix and Reebok.

I hope that you draw positive conclusions from my CV and that my enthusiasm for advertising will persuade you to interview me. Unless I hear from you I will telephone you this Friday to see if a meeting can be arranged.

Yours sincerely

Melanie Brooks

Third letter

23 Gladstone Avenue
Oadby
Leicester
LE8 2YX
sroberts@enet.com
(0116) 222 876

12 February 20XX

Mr C Daniels
Concept Designs
16 London Road
Leicester
LE1 5TG

Dear Mr Daniels

I am a first year student at De Montfort University, studying for a degree in Product Design. I would like to gain some practical experience in the design industry and am writing to ask if you would consider employing me on a voluntary basis during the summer vacation.

Your company website provided an excellent overview of the organisation and I was inspired by the flair and attention to detail reflected in your products.

The degree course is helping to refine my creative skills and has highlighted particular strengths in areas such as CAD and model making. A period of work experience would add a commercial dimension to my profile and provide you with a range of relevant design skills.

Ideally I would like to organise a four week placement at any stage between June 20 and 24 September. I am enclosing a copy of my CV and would welcome the opportunity to show you my portfolio and discuss this further.

I very much look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Susan Roberts

Points to note

The first letter is in response to a newspaper advert and begins with a reference to the post being applied for, where and when the vacancy appeared, and a brief outline of the applicant's qualifications. This sets the scene and informs the employer immediately of the motives for writing.

One of the key issues in the mind of the employer will be 'Why does he want to be a Systems Programmer?' and the applicant addresses this next, giving a strong indication that he has valid motives for wishing to pursue this career. The section includes positive statements, highlights important qualities and offers evidence of suitability.

In an attempt to personalise the application further, the applicant has conducted some research into the company and uses this information as evidence of his desire to work for that particular organisation. This may be time consuming but is generally very well received by an employer and can mean the difference between a first interview and a rejection.

The second letter offers an example of a speculative letter, a form of cold-calling. This involves approaching an organisation in such a way as to persuade the employer that you have the qualities, skills and experience which make it impossible for him or her to ignore. This approach is highly recommended as many jobs do not get advertised and are filled instead by individuals who market themselves aggressively to selected organisations.

There are many similarities in content to the first letter but a notable exception concerns the final sentence. This tactic allows the applicant to retain control of the situation and makes it clear that she will telephone the company for a response rather than sit back and wait for a letter which may never arrive. If using this technique, it is vital to stick to any promises made and take action on the date or day suggested, otherwise your credibility will be damaged.

The third letter provides another example of a speculative approach, this time requesting a period of work experience. It is deliberately short thus avoiding an elaborate 'sales pitch'. Most employers do not have the time to read lengthy speculative letters and it is in your interest to be concise yet, gently persuasive. Make sure that you clarify the dates that you are available for work and identify particular areas of interest.