

Guide: Cover letter tactics



Prepared by a smart cv

82A, James Carter Road, Mildenhall,
Suffolk, IP28 7DE

sam@asmartcv.com
www.asmartcv.com

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Cover Letter Tactics: Executive Summary

Despite the digital transformation of recruitment, cover letters remain a valuable tool in your job application arsenal. While not every recruiter will read them, when they do, a well-crafted cover letter can significantly differentiate your application from the competition.

When to Include a Cover Letter

Always include a cover letter when explicitly requested, when applying for roles requiring strong communication skills, when making a career change, when you have employment gaps to explain, or when you have a genuine connection to the company. Conversely, you might skip it when applications specifically state "no cover letters" or for highly technical roles where communication skills are less central.

Crafting an Effective Cover Letter

A compelling cover letter should be concise (one page maximum) and follow a clear structure:

1. **Professional formatting** with your contact details, the date, and proper salutation
2. **A compelling opening** that avoids generic statements and instead demonstrates enthusiasm for the specific company or highlights your most impressive relevant achievement
3. **Value proposition** showcasing 2-3 specific examples directly related to their requirements, ideally with quantifiable results
4. **Genuine motivation** explaining your interest in this specific role and company
5. **A confident call to action** expressing interest in further discussion

For UK employers, strike a tone that balances professionalism with personality—confident without arrogance, enthusiastic without desperation, and concise rather than verbose.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Steer clear of generic templates, verbatim repetition of your CV, focusing solely on your wants rather than what you can offer, lengthy career explanations, oversharing personal information, and spelling or grammar errors.

Leveraging Technology

When using AI tools like a smart cv to generate cover letters, ensure you:

- Review and personalise the generated content
- Add specific details about the company to show your research



- Adjust the tone to match your authentic voice
- Double-check all details for accuracy

Remember, cover letters provide context for your application and convey aspects of your personality and fit that a CV alone cannot communicate. Your cover letter and CV should work as a coordinated pair, each enhancing the other to present a compelling case for your candidacy.

Cover Letter Tactics: When, Why, and How to Create an Effective Cover Letter

To cover or not to cover? That is the question

Let's be honest – you've probably wondered if cover letters are just one of those outdated job application rituals that nobody actually reads. And you wouldn't be entirely wrong to question it! But here's the truth: while not every recruiter will read your cover letter, when they do, it can make all the difference.

Obviously, you have a choice, our view though is 'Why not send one?'.

It could be ignored but it could make your application stand out from the pack. It is an opportunity to communicate with the Hiring Manager/Agency, to help your application stand out and to humanise your application. Modern recruitment processes have removed a lot of the human element of the process; a CV cannot do much more than give an essence of what you are capable of, a few pages of A4 cannot summarise a life. So, use every opportunity to bring some (but not too much) of your personality into the process.

When you should definitely include a cover letter

- **When it's explicitly requested** – This one's obvious, but if the job advert says "please include a cover letter," then you absolutely should. Ignoring this instruction immediately suggests you don't follow directions well.
- **For roles requiring strong communication skills** – If you're applying for positions in marketing, PR, customer service, or management, a well-crafted cover letter demonstrates your communication abilities in action.
- **When making a career change** – Your CV might not obviously connect to the new role, but your cover letter can explain your transferable skills and motivation for the change.
- **When you have circumstances to explain** – Perhaps you have a gap in your employment, are relocating, or are returning to work after a career break. A cover letter provides the perfect space to address these situations positively.
- **When you have a personal connection** – If you've been referred by someone inside the company or have a genuine connection to the organisation's mission, a cover letter is the place to mention it.

When you might skip the cover letter

- **When the application explicitly states "no cover letters"** – Some employers are moving away from cover letters to streamline their processes.

- **For highly technical roles** where communication skills are less central to the position (though a brief cover note can still help humanise your application).
- **When applying through platforms that don't have a clear mechanism for submitting one** – Though in these cases, consider a brief introductory note in any available text field.
- **For high-volume applications in industries where cover letters aren't standard** – In some sectors like retail or hospitality, particularly for entry-level positions, cover letters are less expected.

What should go into your cover letter?

A strong cover letter should be concise (one page maximum) and include:

1. Proper Formatting and Address

- Include your contact details at the top
- Add the date and the recipient's details where possible
- Use a professional greeting – if you know the hiring manager's name, use it (e.g., "Dear Ms. Thompson")
- If you don't know their name, "Dear Hiring Manager" is preferable to the dated "Dear Sir/Madam"

2. A Compelling Opening

Skip the generic "I am writing to apply for the position of..." that puts recruiters to sleep. Instead, try:

- Showing genuine enthusiasm for the specific company: "As someone who's used [Company's] products for years and admired your approach to sustainability, I was excited to see an opening for a Marketing Manager."
- Starting with your most impressive relevant achievement: "Having increased customer retention by 34% in my current role through data-driven campaign strategies, I'm keen to bring these skills to the Social Media Manager position at [Company]."
- Mentioning a mutual connection (with their permission): "John Smith from your Finance team suggested I apply for this position, noting that my experience in agile project management could be valuable to your team."

3. The Value You'll Bring

The middle section should highlight 2-3 specific examples that demonstrate why you're a great fit. Focus on:

- **Achievements that directly relate to their requirements** – Don't just claim you have skills; show how you've successfully applied them

- **Quantifiable results where possible** – Numbers make your contributions concrete
- **Specifics about the company** – Show you've done your research by referencing their challenges, values, projects, or clients

4. Your Motivation

Briefly explain why you want this specific role at this particular company. Authentic enthusiasm counts for a lot, so be specific about:

- What attracts you to the company (their values, projects, reputation)
- Why this role aligns with your career goals
- What aspects of the role most excite you

5. A Call to Action

End with confidence, not desperation:

- Express interest in discussing how your experience could benefit their team
- Mention your availability for an interview
- Thank them for considering your application
- Close professionally with "Yours sincerely" (if addressed to a named person) or "Yours faithfully" (if using a general greeting)

The right tone for UK employers

The ideal tone for a UK cover letter walks the line between professionalism and personality:

- **Be professional but conversational** – Avoid overly formal language that sounds like it was written in 1950, but don't be too casual either
- **Show confidence without arrogance** – Use phrases like "I believe my experience in X would be valuable to your team" rather than "I am the perfect candidate"
- **Be enthusiastic but not desperate** – Express genuine interest without sounding like this is the only job you've applied for
- **Be concise and respect their time** – British employers generally appreciate directness and clarity

Common cover letter mistakes to avoid

- **Generic templates** that could be sent to any company – personalisation is key
- **Repeating your CV verbatim** – your cover letter should complement, not duplicate your CV

- **Focusing solely on what you want** rather than what you can offer
- **Lengthy explanations** of career history – keep it focused on relevant highlights
- **Oversharing personal information** that's not relevant to the position
- **Spelling and grammar errors** – always proofread carefully, ideally having someone else review it too

Using a smart cv for cover letter creation

When using a smart cv, our AI analyses your career history and the job description to generate a tailored cover letter that highlights your most relevant experiences. However, remember to:

- Review and personalise the AI-generated content
- Add specific details about the company that show you've done your research
- Adjust the tone to match your authentic voice
- Double-check all details (company name, role, addressing the right person)

Final thoughts

The best cover letters feel personal, relevant, and genuine. They provide context for your application and convey aspects of your personality and fit that a CV alone cannot. When in doubt, include a concise, tailored cover letter – at worst, it won't be read; at best, it could be what sets you apart from equally qualified candidates.

Remember that your cover letter and CV should work as a coordinated pair – each enhancing and supporting the other to present a compelling case for why you're the right person for the job.

Good luck with your applications!