

CVs and Covering Letters

This information has been written to help you in producing effective CVs and covering letters when applying for placements, graduate level jobs and postgraduate courses. We suggest that you read through, look at the samples, draft your own and then have a CV discussion with a Career Development Adviser.

Career Development Services also run a programme of workshops to help you improve your employability skills, including one on CVs - check our website www.careers.brad.ac.uk for further details or contact us.

This leaflet can be downloaded in pdf format from our website – **www.careers.brad.ac.uk**. If you require this leaflet in any other format, please ask at the help desk in the Careers Service.

**Career objectives, personal profiles, evidence, skills, achievements, references . . .
HELP! Where do I start?**

Yes, it can all be rather confusing if you haven't put together a CV before, but this information will help you to understand what an effective CV should look like and what it should include.

It will also provide you with an overview of how you can structure it to make the best possible impact.

In this information we only provide advice on placement and graduate level CVs for the UK. However, if you are seeking part-time work in the UK you may find it more useful to refer to our information on '*Finding and Applying for Part-Time Jobs*'.

Similarly, if you are applying for work outside the UK, you must check the standard format for that country and adapt your CV accordingly. For information on CVs for other countries contact Career Development Services and we will direct you to appropriate resources.

What is a CV?

CV actually stands for Curriculum Vitae – “pathway of life”. It is used to showcase your skills, achievements, qualifications and any relevant experience you may have.

Generally used with a covering letter, your CV gives an overview of who you are and what you have to offer an employer. Ultimately it is your “marketing leaflet or brochure” that if done effectively, “sells” you to the recruiter with YOU as the product being sold!

Naturally you should use a CV when you are asked to submit one as part of the application process (e.g. if a job advertisement states “apply in writing” to...) but you will also need one if making a speculative enquiry to an organisation to find out if there are any potential opportunities for you.

Don't forget that if you attend careers fairs or visit agencies/recruitment organisations, then you are also advised to take along your CV.

What do employers look for?

The million dollar question! Most employers say the following are essential for CVs and covering letters:

- Is it focused on the role applied for and the particular organisation?
- Is it easy to read and does it have a logical layout?
- Does it emphasise the most relevant information? Making sure you explicitly meet any specific selection criteria.
- Are all the sections included i.e. is there any key information missing?
- Does it make an immediate impact and leave them wanting to find out more?

You need to make sure that your CV and covering letter meet these requirements!

What type of CV should I use?

There are a variety of CVs used in the UK today and whilst it's true that you can have different formats of CV, you also need to think about the type of job you are applying for, the organisation's culture, your experience and how you wish to "sell" yourself to the employer.

It is always better to produce a revised and focused CV for each application, rather than have a standard CV template which might miss out specific information. Just don't forget which version you have sent to whom!

Types of CV:

Chronological: structures and details education and work history in reverse date order.

Skills based: emphasises the skills you have developed throughout your employment, education, voluntary activities etc. In this type of CV, details about your employment and education are usually kept to a minimum with the focus on a skills section which details the transferable skills you have to offer, along with evidence to back these up.

Hybrid: recently there has been an increase in CVs which combine the above two styles i.e. they tend to have skills with evidence but rather than being listed in a separate section the information appears in several sections.

Academic: most commonly used in postgraduate applications for research based or lecturing positions. This format places greater emphasis on the subjects you have studied, projects or dissertations undertaken and areas of academic interest and research. Post-doctoral CVs also need to include a summary of research expertise together with a list of publications and conferences attended (if applicable).

For certain sectors there may also be differences in how you present your information to a prospective employer. An example of this is for "creative" CVs which often require a more individual approach.

What style of CV you choose is up to you and may even be a combination of the types of CV outlined above. We have produced a *CV Guideline* and some *Sample CVs* which indicate some of the different types of CV that can be used. Please see later in this information and on our website www.careers.brad.ac.uk and www.prospects.ac.uk.

Where do I start?

It is obvious really – start by reading through this information and think about our suggestions before you write or type anything.

There are some sections of your CV that require hardly any thought e.g. your personal details, education prior to university etc so if you start with these then you will have made progress immediately.

For each section of your CV start by listing all the things that you have done and list the highlights for each e.g. "*bar work – managed team of six bar staff and organised rotas*". Once you have done this you can think about listing the knowledge and skills gained and show the attributes you demonstrated or developed.

For most people this is usually the most difficult part of a CV. You also need to think hard about what the employer or type of work you are interested in is looking for i.e. what are they asking for? e.g. if applying for accountancy, what types of skills are accountancy firms looking for? Do you have these already or do you have the potential to develop these skills? How did you gain these skills? Give evidence!

This information needs to be included in your CV either in an extra skills section or by showing how you have developed the skills within your work experience or education sections.

What sections do I need to include in my CV?

There is no hard and fast rule about what you **must** include in your CV, but the following points are typically what you need to include:

Personal details:

Name, address, telephone number (land line and / or mobile), current and most reliable e-mail address. No need to include a photo, your date of birth, gender, ethnicity, marital status, religion etc in a UK CV. Do NOT include a National Insurance Number to avoid any identity theft.

Sometimes a person's nationality is obvious, and sometimes it isn't. If your nationality has an impact on work permit issues then it is advisable to make this clear.

Career Objective/Personal Profile:

This is an optional extra. When these work they can be highly effective, but when they don't they can be indecisive and vague, without meaning and a waste of space. If you want to include one make sure it is effective and sells you successfully and get someone else to read it objectively and critically.

Focus on the role applied for and include personal qualities, experience and skills and make sure your claims are specific and substantiated.

Personal Profiles are a matter of individual preference and they are not universally popular with employers. If you do decide to use one make sure it adds value to your CV.

Personal Profiles are useful in academic CVs as they can be helpful for highlighting the area of research you want to enter and can be adapted for each application.

Education and Qualifications:

University (postgraduate and undergraduate) should be given first, followed by secondary level education (GCSEs, A-Levels or equivalents). Education and qualifications should be integrated and not listed in two separate sections.

You do not need the full address of the institution but make sure that you include some information about your degree (dates) and the content, possibly your dissertation, relevant modules and skills that you have acquired.

You may want to give a short explanation of your degree, especially if it is relevant to the role you are applying for and you don't always need to use the official module title e.g. "Introduction to Computing" as this probably doesn't really sell your skills! Try to focus on the content of the subjects or modules that may mean more to the reader.

If you have not yet graduated you can give your predicted or expected degree results e.g. 'BSc (Hons) Computer Science – expected 2:1'.

Do include other relevant qualifications, e.g. RSA, CLAIT, ECDL etc.

If you have lots of additional qualifications you could include a separate 'Additional Qualifications' section.

If you have overseas qualifications then you should indicate their UK equivalence.

Employment History or Work Experience:

Include information about the organisation you worked for and give dates, your role, duties, responsibilities and skills developed. Even if you have no paid work experience then you should include any voluntary experience here. You may want to divide into “relevant experience” and “other work” depending on what you have to offer.

Ideally place the information in reverse chronological order but if you have a large number of jobs that are similar you could group them together. Focus on the skills you developed and how these could be transferred into different roles i.e. what did you do? what did you learn? are there any particular achievements?

Skills/Personal Qualities:

A very important part of your CV. Provide detailed information about any additional or outstanding skills you have, giving evidence about how they were developed. Rather than just stating “I have excellent communication skills” you should provide evidence e.g. *“My verbal presentation skills have been developed to an excellent standard as a result of delivering weekly seminar presentations to groups of 20+ as part of my degree”*.

Try to match your skills to those identified in the job description rather than just producing a generic list of skills. Try to avoid duplicating information shown elsewhere on your CV.

Interests, Responsibilities and Achievements:

An optional section(s) but many employers value this information as it can indicate further evidence of possibly working well with others, time management and personal priorities. You may need one or more sections here depending on what you have done.

Try to find a balance between your activities and again provide evidence of your skills/interests in particular areas. Instead of just listing your hobbies, you need to quantify them and show how they enable you to develop as a person. How often do you do the activity? What level have you reached?

Also remember to include any positions of responsibility you have held e.g. Treasurer of your Football Club or Social Secretary of the Pharmacy Society etc.

Additional/IT Skills:

This section is not compulsory but is useful to include if you have additional or specialist skills and qualifications. Remember to list them in full e.g. *“I have extensive experience of using a wide range of IT applications including Microsoft Word, Excel, Access and PowerPoint. I use the internet regularly to search for information relevant to my course assignments”*. You may also wish to indicate the extent of your knowledge of particular packages.

Include other relevant skills, e.g. languages, current first aid certificate and full clean driving licence.

References:

Usually, you should give details of two people unless they ask for more. Ideally you should have one academic referee and one employer (current or previous, UK or overseas).

If your CV is very full and you don't have space then it is perfectly acceptable to write “Referee details are available on request”. However, if you do have space, include their full names, job title, address, telephone number and e-mail address. Don't forget to ask their permission first!

Where do I put the sections on the pages for maximum impact?

Most UK CVs are two pages long although exceptions are made for academic CVs and those who have extensive employment or other experience. Some employers e.g. some areas of the media, like a one page CV and this may also be acceptable for first year students who have limited work experience.

In the case of a standard two page UK CV, in order to get the employer's attention you need to ensure that the most important information is placed in certain sections. The top of each page is important space as it has the most impact on the reader and the first page has more impact than the second. Make sure you put key information in these places. Less important information should go at the bottom of the second page and hence why referee details are often here. Avoid splitting an important section across the two pages, where possible.

Have a look at our examples on our website at www.careers.brad.ac.uk if you are unsure of what we mean by this.

What about the font, colour etc?

- DON'T use a Microsoft (or any other) template or wizard to produce your CV. You are unique and your CV should be unique too.
- Think about whether or not to justify the text or leave it left aligned.
- Think carefully about use of colour – it can be a very effective tool if used professionally – a disaster if not! But remember also that most employers will photocopy or print your CV and/or covering letter on a black and white printer.
- Use a simple to read font e.g. Arial, Garamond, Verdana, Tahoma, Times New Roman and use bold, italics, underline etc to emphasise.
- It is unwise to have your font size smaller than 11 point but don't be afraid of maybe using a larger size for headings or specific information.

My written English is not great. What can I do?

How you say something can be just as important as what you say. This is the same for a CV as you need to be professional, positive and enthusiastic in your writing.

Keep your sentences short and start sentences with action words e.g. persuaded, researched, implemented. Choose words with an impact that will convey your skills and qualities. (See our page of useful words and phrases to help you.)

Although spelling and grammar checkers are useful, get someone else to look over it as they may see errors you have missed? Do pay attention to your tenses and make sure they match e.g. if in the past, use "*presented*" and "*developed*" whereas if you are describing something you are still doing currently use "*presenting*" and "*developing*".

I am a mature student. What about me?

Mature students often have a wealth of work and life experience that can be really valuable to future employers. Unfortunately not all employers realise this and mature students are advised to work hard to make sure that employers can readily see their transferable skills. It is often better to highlight skills that have been developed in previous employment rather than focus on job specific specialist skills.

A Personal Profile can be very useful for mature students who can then focus the employer's attention and show how they stand out from other graduates. For further information or advice contact Career Development Services.

I am a disabled student. What about me?

If you have a disability it is up to you whether you disclose this information or not. If you do decide to disclose then it is important, as ever, to market yourself effectively and highlight the skills and qualities you have gained through the management of your disability. E.g. a visually impaired student may be able to demonstrate their aptitude for IT but may find it useful to highlight the determination and self-reliance that undertaking a degree and managing the disability may have required. For further information on this, look at www.skill.org.uk.

Where can I see sample CVs?

In this information we have included both a *CV Guideline* and a *Sample CV* to indicate what you can put into a standard UK CV. These should give you some ideas about what to include, how you might give evidence of your skills and how you might lay out your CV, but it is important to note that they are not perfect examples. Your own CV may be structured and presented very differently. Other example CVs can be seen on our website at www.careers.brad.ac.uk.

How do I send my CV to an employer?

Always send a covering letter together with your CV and check how they want your information sent in – by email? By post?

Email

- Most CVs and covering letters are now sent by email and when sending, we suggest you add both documents as attachments, rather than typing the covering letter in the email itself. The reason for this is that when you print out emails they can look rather messy and the formatting all over the place. It is essential your letter looks like a proper business style letter.
- Attachments should be sent in the form of Microsoft Word documents as these are often the easiest format for the reader to access. Alternatively you can use the Adobe Acrobat format i.e. a pdf if you can be sure that the receiving computer system can read it. Make sure to name your attachments clearly using your name i.e. 'Chris Jones CV', 'Chris Jones covering letter'.
- Although email can be an informal method of communication, you must keep it formal, professional and concise when applying for a job. Always follow the employer's instructions and quote any references they require. You also will need to say that your CV and covering letter are attached.
- Think about your email address - best not to use *Hotsexystuff@hotmail* for job applications!

Example E-mail

To: mrpatel@acompany.co.uk

Subject: CV and covering letter to apply for the post of x, reference y

Dear Mr Patel,

Please find attached my CV and covering letter to apply for the position of x. Please can you confirm receipt of this application by return e-mail.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Jones.

Post and fax

- Post is still commonly used but requires that you use good quality white or cream paper and a high-resolution printer to give a professional impression.
- Post early to ensure you meet the closing date and to allow for delays with the postal service!
- If faxing, phone first to let the employer know when you are about to send it to avoid it getting lost amongst other faxes.

What about posting my CV on the Internet?

Many people will choose to put their CV on the web in the hopes of maximising their job seeking potential. If you are using an on-line recruitment consultancy or job search sites then there are usually two ways of posting your information.

The first is to complete the site's own on-line CV form and the second is to upload your CV as a Word document or pdf. There may be advantages in using the on-line CV form as opposed to uploading your CV. These sites can often manipulate the form based information for employers seeking particular skills.

If you choose to develop your own web pages or use a social networking site e.g. LinkedIn, our recommendations for the CV page you create are as follows:

- It needs to clearly state on your web pages that this is a CV.
- Be clear about whether you are seeking employment or freelance opportunities.
- Be aware that different web browsers may vary in the way they display your page.
- Avoid using lots of "over the top" graphics unless you are seeking a job in graphic / web design and even then they should be simple. Graphics intensive CVs may load slowly for some people and you don't want to annoy or lose any potential readers.
- Be careful about revealing your personal contact details as there are some strange people out there! You could just use your e-mail as the contact point and provide your telephone number and / or home address at a later date.

CV Top Tips

- Identify what the employer is looking for: read and pay attention to the job details and highlight your skills, experiences and qualities to match their needs.
- Target your CV to a particular job / organisation, don't use the same CV for every job.
- Don't start every sentence with 'I'!
- Keep it to 2 pages and allocate space according to the importance of the information.
- Highlight important headings and text, think about what you want the employer to see first...second...third and so on and try and use bullet points to break up large sections of text.
- Be honest!

CV Checklist

Before you send off your CV you may find it useful to review it by looking at this checklist to see if there is anything you have missed.

The content of the CV

- Has the key personal information been included e.g. name and contact details?
- Are the details on education appropriate and listed in reverse chronological order?
- If using a skills profile does it provide evidence of a range of skills for example, IT skills, language skills, technical skills, key skills e.g. communication skills, teamwork, numeracy and problem solving?
- Is evidence of skills provided drawing on a range of experience? For example, academic work, employment, voluntary experience, clubs and societies, positions of responsibility e.g. Course Representative.
- Is there a summary of employment (paid and unpaid work)?
- If a section on interests has been included has some detail been given?
- Names and addresses of two referees have been included (and if not a statement indicating that references are available on request is given).
- No key information is missing?

The structure of the CV.

- Is the layout of the CV logical and easy to follow?
- Is the CV on one or two pages of A4 paper? Make sure it doesn't fizzle out half way down page two!
- Are the subheadings used effectively to give the CV a clear structure?

How the CV looks.

- Are the sections aligned correctly (possibly by using the tab key effectively)?
- Has careful consideration been given to the use of font style, bold and underlining?
- If on paper, is the printing of an acceptable quality (no smudges) and the paper clean and not creased?
- Is the size of font appropriate and consistent (not too big or too small)?
- Are there any spelling or grammatical errors?

Overall Comments

- Does the CV do you justice and would YOU want to interview YOU for a job or placement?!

CV GUIDELINES

YOUR NAME (bold/font size 16)

Your full address and postcode (you can put it on one line to save space)

Tel: 07777 111 222 (mobile) 01274 123456 (home)

Email: use a professional sounding email address

PERSONAL PROFILE or CAREER OBJECTIVE (optional)

Only 4 to 5 lines (maximum). When these work, they can be highly effective but when they don't, they can be indecisive and vague, without meaning and a waste of space! If you want to include one, make sure it is effective and sells you successfully. Include personal qualities, skills and personal strengths and make sure your claims are specific and substantiated. If using "Career Objective" then be sure it's targeted to the job and to the company.

EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS (in reverse chronological order)

University of Bradford

2008 – 2011

Your exact course title e.g. BSc (Hons) Business and Management Studies

Final Year Project:

"E-Commerce and the changing business process" – An analytical investigation, examining and identifying the issues in business etc. etc. You may use up to 4/5 lines if relevant.

Modules included: – Average 68%

Name of Module, Name of Module, etc but try to put in order of importance and no need to list all. You can add in individual results if you think it helpful

Awarded the "Name of Prize/Award" for best overall student?

Name of School, Town or City (and Country if applying overseas)

Year – Year

GCE A Levels: Subject (Grade), Subject (Grade), Subject (Grade) and Subject (Grade)

GCE AS Levels: Subject (Grade) and Subject (Grade) (if grades are poor then leave out)

Name of School, Town or City (and Country if applying overseas)

Year – Year

GCSEs: 9 subjects (3As, 4Bs and 2Cs) including Mathematics, English and French

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY or WORK EXPERIENCE (in reverse chronological order)

Name of Company/Organisation, Town or City (Country?)

Month Year – Month Year

Job Title

- Be specific – tell them what you did, roles and responsibilities and the skills you have developed. Avoid writing vague statements that may sound good but provide no specific information.
- Use action verbs and quantify and qualify your statements – see examples below.
- "Handling and resolving up to 100 customer queries per day which enhanced and improved my communication skills, particularly the ability to professionally handle difficult customers."
- "Responsible for a project worth £10K and led and managed a team of 10 staff."
- Keep checking that what you've written is fully targeted to the job and to the company
- If you have any particular achievements then do mention them. If several then you could have a separate section on your CV. Employers like specifics.

Name of Company/Organisation, Town or City (Country?)

Month Year – Month Year

Job Title

- The bullet points above are still applicable but try to highlight different skills and don't repeat the same ones as above.
- Use the correct tense – past tense for previous jobs and present tense for current jobs.
- If the job is relevant to the one you are applying, give more details on responsibilities, however if it's not that relevant, you may want to concentrate on the skills gained.

VOLUNTARY WORK EXPERIENCE (in reverse chronological order and only if relevant)

Organisation/Company Name, Town or City (Country?)

Month Year – Month Year

Job Title

- Same notes as above; keep checking that what you've written is fully targeted to the job and to the company
- "Raised £1K for Cancer Research by organising . . ."

IT / COMPUTING SKILLS OR TECHNICAL SKILLS

- Can be useful as a separate section or you can include in the additional skills section below
- Name the specific packages that you can use and indicate the level of competency. The following are examples only.
- "Highly competent with Microsoft Office 2007/XP (Word, Access, Excel & PowerPoint)"
- "Competent user of the Internet and use extensively for project research and information gathering."

ADDITIONAL SKILLS

Key Competencies/Skills Profile

- Choose the skills that most closely match the career area or the job applied for eg teamwork, problem solving, analytical skills, customer service, planning and organising.
- eg. Teamwork – From your education, work experience and leisure pursuits, pick out the best examples of when you have demonstrated team working skills. Get down to specifics rather than writing at a general level. Pick a key aspect or incident within each scenario that demonstrates the skill, rather than trying to tell the whole story.
- eg. Communication - Be specific as there are several ways you can communicate! eg from one-to-one telephone calls to group or individual presentations to audiences of over 100 people!

Languages

- Depends on the job and your competency, useful to add but do state the level of your skills

ACTIVITIES AND INTERESTS

Positions of Responsibility (could also go into sections above or even as a separate section)

- *President of the Economics Society* – write down what you do/did and the skills gained
- *Class/Year Representative* - write down what you do/did and the skills gained

Voluntary Work (you may want to put it here if more appropriate than above)

Leisure Interests

- Society memberships, outside interests, sports (a section on its own if you are very active in sports and take part at competitive levels but useful to say how often you do something and with whom (county/university/local league).
- Keep brief but show a balance between the active and passive, group and individual pursuits.

REFERENCES

It is acceptable to put "Names and addresses of 2 referees will be made available upon request". If you have space, give name, title, full address, telephone and email contacts (usually one academic and one employer – ideally not GPs, friends or family!)

Peter Papaionannou

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Date of birth: 24th February 1986

Personal Profile

Mechanical engineering graduate with a balance of practical and academic qualities. Enthusiastic, systematic, structured worker who takes a logical approach to challenges. Confident and organised team member as demonstrated by several successful group projects at University. Flexible, creative and always striving for excellence.

Education & Qualifications

2006 – 2011 **University of Bradford**

- MEng Mechanical Engineering, 2:1 honours

Awarded JCB Design Prize for excellence in applied engineering design (final year project)

Principal modules included:

- Part A/B: Thermodynamics, Fluid Mechanics, Electronics, Mechanics, Design Materials Processing, Computer Aided Design, Control, Industrial Design Project (group project in association with Andersen Consulting).
- Part C/D: Kinematics, Computer Aided Engineering, Polymer Engineering, Individual Project (feedback control system), Dynamics, Mechatronics, Design Management, Project Engineering (team project in association with Land Rover).

Diploma in Industrial Studies (awarded in recognition of industrial placement)

1999 – 2006 **Tong Secondary School, Bradford**

- A Levels: Physics (A), Mathematics (B), General Studies (D), Chemistry (D)
- 9 GCSE passes including: French (A), Geography (A), English (B), English Lit (A), Design Tech (A)

Professional Development

- Associate Member of The Institution of Mechanical Engineers

IT Skills

- Comprehensive knowledge of Microsoft Office programs including Microsoft Project and AutoCAD.
- Additional knowledge of Unigraphics, ProEngineer and Solid Edge modelling packages.
- Wide experience of Visual Basic, plus knowledge of C++ and Matlab programming languages.

SAMPLE CV CONTINUED

Industrial Placement

2008 – 2009 **Triumph Motorcycles, Hinckley – *Production Engineer***

- Worked closely within a team of eight engineers to ensure consistent production of current designs and effective integration of new products. Required close communication with my manager and the Production Manager.
- Gained experience of modern technologies; including robotic welding, laser cutting, 5-axis CNC machining, and other processes associated with manufacturing a motorcycle chassis.
- Developed report writing skills when I evaluated current logistic and manufacturing processes and produced a report that was presented to senior management. Received an award for a “Jargon free” presentation as a result.
- Planned several aspects of the new production unit, including liaising with third parties concerned with the introduction of the new facility and dealing with issues as they arose.
- Knowledge developed included improved understanding of the product design, development and manufacturing process, and insight into current manufacturing methodologies.

Employment

Summer 2010 **Build-it, Ilkley – *Joiner***

- Small building company offered a wide variety of practical challenges associated with all aspects of shop-fitting, including structural building, bespoke joinery, glazing, etc.
- Developed excellent communication skills as role required close co-ordination with colleagues in my building team as well as external contractors and customers.

Summer 2007 **Dixons College, Bradford – *Volunteer Summer School Assistant***

- Completed 40 hours voluntary work working with large groups of school children in the vacation.
- Developed my leadership abilities as this role involved organising activities for “challenging” groups of teenagers. It taught me the importance of strong listening skills and how to motivate this age group.

Summer 2005 **Swinton Insurance, Halifax – *Customer Services Assistant***

- Duties involved collating customer details, setting up policies, calculating premiums and data input.
- Worked towards both monthly personal and team targets and regularly overachieved.

Additional Information

- St John Ambulance Award for first aid.
- Full, clean driving licence.

Interests

- Property Development: Currently spending all my free time renovating an Edwardian terrace with assistance from family members.
- Sport/ Recreation: Weekly swimming and karate at a local sports centre with a group of friends, regular hillwalker.

Motorcycling: Rebuilt, own and ride a 1963 Royal Enfield.

Referees

Contact details available upon request.

Covering Letters

Why do I need a covering letter?

Because if you don't, your CV could end up in the bin! It's true - whether writing in response to an advertisement or speculatively, an effective covering letter could make the difference between you getting an interview or a rejection. As a general rule a covering letter should always accompany your CV e.g. if an advertisement asks for you to 'apply in writing' or to 'send a CV', you should submit a covering letter as well, **unless** you are explicitly asked not to do so.

The purpose of the covering letter is to get the reader to look at your CV, and to draw out some of the key information included in your CV. However a poor covering letter, or no covering letter, can mean that the reader simply does not look at your CV. So please don't throw all your hard work away by attaching a poor covering letter - you only get one chance to make a good impression!

What should be included in a covering letter?

Here are our suggestions on the content of a covering letter, although the order in which you present it is up to you. For examples of how covering letters could be structured please see our *Covering Letter Guideline* and *Sample Speculative Covering Letter* at the end of this information.

Setting the scene – who are you and why are you writing?

If writing in response to an advertised position make clear which position you are applying for and where/when you saw it advertised. E.g. *"I recently graduated with a BSc (Honours) Accountancy and Finance degree from the University of Bradford and wish to apply for the position of Trainee Accountant, post reference TA012, as advertised on your website on 2nd July 2011"*.

If applying speculatively you need to specify the type of position you are looking for and when you are hoping to start e.g. *"I am a final year BSc (Honours) Optometry student at the University of Bradford seeking a pre-registration opportunity to commence in July 2011"*.

Or if you are sending this letter after having spoken to someone you could start with something like: *"Further to my recent conversation with Tracy King at the Yorkshire Graduate Recruitment Fair on 7th June, I am pleased to enclose a copy of my CV, as she suggested"*.

Why you?

If writing in response to an advertised position you need to demonstrate why YOU are the ideal candidate. To do this you should address the key requirements of the role by highlighting what relevant skills, qualities, qualifications and work experience you have to offer the organisation.

For example, if the advert specified someone with good influencing skills: *"Last summer I worked for a market research company where on one Saturday I successfully persuaded over 40 shoppers to stop and answer questions relating to their buying habits, despite their initial reluctance"*. Refer to your CV but don't repeat the same sentences.

If applying speculatively be keen to explain what you can offer as opposed to what you can gain – and be positive and enthusiastic. Avoid common phrases such as 'I believe I could gain valuable experience with your company'. Instead focus more on what you have to offer in terms of skills and experience e.g. *"Having worked for a large supermarket chain during the last two years I have gained experience of dealing with and resolving customer queries and complaints. I have thoroughly enjoyed this experience and believe it would be beneficial to your organisation"*.

Why them?

Whether writing in response to an advertised position or speculatively you will need to explain why you are interested in working for that organisation. What in particular attracts you to the organisation? What do you know about them and what projects or work is the organisation currently involved in? It is essential you show that you have carried out research and thought about why you are applying. We suggest you re-read the job advert and check out the website, company literature and any relevant articles/journals.

Avoid common phrases such as 'I am applying to you as you are a large multinational company with a great reputation'. Instead explain what it is specifically about this organisation that makes you want to work for them. For example *"I am particularly interested in clinical trials as I am looking to embark on a career in pharmaceutical research and development, and am specifically interested in your organisation's current research into drugs to fight cancer"*.

Or if after speaking to someone from the organisation you were inspired to apply, you could mention it here e.g. *"I recently met one of your representatives at a Careers Fair held at the University of Bradford on 7th June and became very interested in your organisation, particularly..."*

How can I end the letter positively?

You should always finish your covering letters with a strong positive ending.

If writing in response to an advertised position you could explain when you are available for interview or say that you are looking forward to hearing from them e.g. *"I am particularly excited about this position and hope that you are interested in finding out more about my background. I am available for interview anytime"*. You could provide details of how you can be contacted e.g. *"If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone on 0777 123456. I am available anytime after 3pm"*.

If applying speculatively you could ask for the opportunity to meet e.g. *"I hope you will find my details of interest and should you feel there might be a suitable opening, now or in the future, I would be pleased to discuss this with you"*. Or if you are planning to follow up with a phone call you could say when you intend to phone e.g. *"I hope you will find my CV of interest and I will call you to try to arrange a suitable time to speak with you next week"*.

How should a covering letter be laid out?

Your covering letter should ideally be limited to one side of A4 with short paragraphs to make it easy to read. Covering letters should be laid out in a professional business style format i.e. start with your full address at the top, followed by the employers full address (and name where possible) and then the date.

You should also make sure you use the correct ending i.e. if writing to "Dear Sir/Madam", end with "Yours faithfully", if writing to "Mrs Smith", end with "Yours sincerely".

You may want to justify your paragraphs on the left and right to make it look tidy, but there is no need to indent paragraphs as this is considered quite old fashioned.

Your covering letter should have the same font size and typeface as your CV, and if posting, use the same quality and colour of paper for both your letter and CV – the two documents should look like a professional package.

How can I include information that could be seen as a negative?

Sometimes you may want to use your covering letter as an opportunity to bring up something that you consider a negative. For example if you have lower results than the employer is looking for but you have a good reason why, (e.g. serious illness) you may want to mention this here.

Or if you are an international student and you only have permission to work in the UK for a limited period of time, you may want to explain this e.g.

“As an international student I can apply for permission to work in the UK for up to 2 years after graduation, under the UK Government Tier 1 – Post Study Work scheme (replaced the International Graduate Scheme). I am also aware that it may be possible for an employer to sponsor me under the Tier 2 - Skilled Workers with a Job Offer scheme (replacing the Work Permit Scheme). If you require further information please visit the website www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/

Similarly there may be situations when you want to mention a disability although this could also be raised at a later date – the choice is yours. The main thing is that you present all information in a positive light. If you need any help with this please get in touch with us or visit www.skill.org.uk for further information.

Whatever happens you need to avoid negative phrases e.g. ‘Unfortunately I do not have any relevant experience’ instead bring out the positive – *“Although I do not have the required 6 months experience working directly in an IT support role I have voluntarily undertaken numerous website design projects for local charities. Recently I was responsible for designing a website using Java.net”*.

Do I need to send covering letters with application forms?

If you are sending your completed form through the post or as an attachment, it is a good idea to include a covering letter, particularly if there is something relevant to your application that is not covered on the form. Including a covering letter also gives you the chance to draw out some of the key information provided in your application form, and expand on why you are a suitable candidate and why you want to work for the organisation.

Obviously, if you are completing your form online, where there is no mechanism to send a letter, you do not usually have this option, and do not send a letter if you are explicitly asked not to do this.

Covering Letter Top Tips

- Send it to a named person! If you are unsure who this should be, phone the organisation and ask – it is much more likely to be read if sent to a specific person.
- Target the letter to the organisation – explain why them. What makes you passionate about working for them?
- Avoid continual use of “I”. Think about how to phrase your sentences and paragraphs more effectively.
- Remember the main aim of the covering letter is to get your CV read!
- Don’t forget to sign if sending by post!

Useful Words and Phrases

Certain words and phrases can help your CV and covering letter sound more active. These are generally verbs that convey a sense of action and result. Here are some examples:

Achieved	Distributed	Keen	Quantified
Adaptable	Effective	Launched	Reacted
Administered	Efficient	Led	Recommended
Advised	Eliminated	Liaised	Refined
Analysed	Enabled	Managed	Repaired
Arranged	Encouraged	Maintained	Represented
Assessed	Engineered	Mediated	Researched
Broadened	Ensured	Minimised	Resourceful
Built	Established	Modernised	Resolved
Capable	Evaluated	Monitored	Responded
Collated	Expanded	Motivated	Restored
Communicated	Experienced	Negotiated	Revamped
Competent	Expertise	Networked	Reviewed
Completed	Facilitated	Operated	Significant
Composed	Flexible	Organised	Simplified
Consistent	Focused	Participated	Solved
Consulted	Generated	Performed	Specialised
Controlled	Goal-oriented	Persuaded	Streamlined
Co-ordinated	Guided	Planned	Strengthened
Created	Hard-Working	Presented	Successful
Customer Focused	Helpful	Proactive	Supervised
Dedicated	Honest	Processed	Thorough
Delegated	Identified	Produced	Trained
Demonstrated	Implemented	Productive	Transformed
Designed	Improved	Proficient	Trustworthy
Determined	Influenced	Profitable	Undertook
Developed	Initiated	Programmed	Unsupervised
Devised	Instigated	Promoted	Valued
Diagnosed	Instructed	Proposed	Versatile
Diligent	Interacted	Provided	Volunteered
Directed	Introduced	Qualified	Willing

And some useful phrases:

Demonstrated skills in .	Experienced in all facets/phases/aspects of
Extensive academic/practical background in . .	Promoted to . . .
In charge of implementing . . .	Proven track record in . . .
Knowledge of . /experienced as . . .	Experience involved/included . . .
Extensive training/involvement in . . .	Successful in/at developing . . .
Constant interaction with . . .	Reported to senior management when . . .
Provided technical assistance to . . .	Disseminated results of analysis . . .
Worked closely with . . .	Instrumental in . . .
Succeeded in . . .	Familiar with . . .
Planned and managed . . .	Supported customers/colleagues with . . .
Initiated financial savings by . . .	Researching, assessing and synthesising. ..

COVERING LETTER GUIDELINE

This is the place to put your address, including post code. Ideally all text to be right justified, include your tel no if you wish

Today's date

Put in the name and job title of the person you are applying to together with company name, address and postcode

Dear (Name of person applying to e.g. Ms Berry or Sir/Madam),

Re: (Job title of role applying for and reference number, if relevant) – even speculative letters need a title e.g. 'Civil Engineering placement opportunities 2012/13'

Section 1 – This should be where you clearly state what position you have applied for - if you choose not to list it as shown above. You may find it useful to say where and when you saw it advertised, or if a speculative application what type of role you are seeking. You can inform the employer at this point of the degree/course title you are studying/have studied, how relevant to the role applied for and possibly your classification if graduated. Maybe also let them know that your CV is attached for their information.

Section 2 – This is really your opportunity to sell yourself to the role by showing what it is that you have to offer that makes you an ideally suited candidate and one that they must progress to the next stage of selection. Skilled applicants will look at what skills and qualities are required for a particular role and try to show their suitability. Employers tend not to like bland statements eg "I have excellent communication skills" as they much prefer candidates to give appropriate evidence showing how they have a particular skill. Try not to directly repeat what is on your CV but pull out the points the employer will be most interested in.

Section 3 – This is your chance to say what particularly attracts you to the organisation to which you are applying. It is a chance to show that you know what they do and possibly what particular projects or work the organisation is doing that attracts you to them. How do you know about them? Reputation? Contact person? Try to avoid saying salary, number of holidays and such like as this is what YOU will gain and not what the organisation thinks is good about their goods, services, research etc.

Section 4 – The "positive" ending! Try to finish off your letter on a positive note, there are many ways to do this. Suggestions include: "I hope you will find my details of interest, however if you have any queries then please do not hesitate to contact me on the above number. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future."

All the way through your letter, think of your layout, font size (not too small / too large) and possibly consider justifying the paragraphs. If sending with a CV, then both documents should be the same font and of similar appearance so that they look like a professional package.

Yours sincerely (if you started with "Dear Ms Berry")

Yours faithfully (if you started with "Dear Sir/Madam")

Space for your signature (unless sending electronically – scan in your signature if you wish)

Your name (in full, not initials)

Enc. (If including enclosures e.g. your CV)

EXAMPLE OF A SPECULATIVE COVERING LETTER. WE HAVE ALSO DEVELOPED AN EXAMPLE CV TO GO WITH THIS LETTER NAMED 'IT STUDENT CV'. TO SEE THIS PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE WWW.CAREERS.BRAD.AC.UK

73 Field Street
Bradford
BD7 0ND

1 May 2011

Mr William Brown
Happy Computers
40 Adler Street
London, E1 1EE

Dear Mr Brown,

Opportunity within IT

I am enclosing my CV in the hope that you may have an opportunity arising within your IT department, ideally in a support role. I am due to complete my BSc (Honours) Business Computing degree from the University of Bradford on 7th June, and am confident I possess a range of skills, experience and qualities to make a long term contribution to your organisation.

As you can see from my attached CV, through my degree I have developed a wide range of technical skills from software development, networks and operating systems to database design and web development. Recently I voluntarily designed and implemented a website for a small local charity using Java.net. This was a really enjoyable experience and am still responsible for updating this website on an ad hoc basis. In addition to my existing IT skills, I learn quickly how to use new software and am always eager to learn from others.

Having worked in the Provident Financial Call Centre over the past 18 months, I have gained experience of answering incoming calls by listening to customer requirements, diagnosing their needs and providing appropriate solutions. Through my experience working at Kebabish, I have demonstrated a range of skills including the ability to work with different types of people, so I believe I could fit easily into your team. Working on busy Saturday nights I demonstrated my ability to handle pressure and deal with stressful situations.

Furthermore my organisational skills have been developed during the first semester of my final year where I juggled working 20 hours per week, undertaking voluntary work, completing my coursework and preparing for exams, yet I still received an average of 63% across my modules.

I am very keen to work for Happy Computers because of your outstanding commitment to both client service and charity work, with social responsibility at the heart of all your activities. I understand your core business focuses on making charities and housing associations more effective by providing cost effective, high quality ICT training. As a keen volunteer myself I have a desire to make a contribution to other charities and would really enjoy working for an organisation with this ethos and client base. In addition, I am aware that Happy Computers has been rated one of the top three IT training companies in the country for the last three years.

I appreciate you taking the time to read this letter and would be delighted to discuss any possible opportunities with you. I am available for interview at your convenience and can be contacted by telephone on 07777 123456, or by email anoor27@hotmail.com.

I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Yours sincerely (don't forget to sign it!)

Ahmad Noor

Further Resources

Appointments with Advisers

Once you have a draft copy of your CV or covering letter, we recommend you come in to see one of our team of Career Development Advisers who will look through and make suggestions for improvement.

You can book a 45 minute guidance appointment in advance by telephoning the Information Desk on 01274 234991, calling into Career Development Services or emailing careers@bradford.ac.uk.

Alternatively, during term time, you can use our 20 minute Drop-In Duty sessions which are bookable on the day. These 20 minute discussions are ideal for getting some quick feedback on a CV or covering letter.

There is no limit on the number of appointments you may have – we encourage individuals to return as they require.

Information Room

We have a wide range of CV and covering letter resources in the Careers Service in Student Central including specialist reference books (eg Creative CV Guide, Global Resume Guide); DVDs; leaflets and guides.

Workshops

- We also regularly run workshops on a wide range of topics including CVs and covering letters. Visit our website to view our current workshop programme.

Internet

- www.careers.brad.ac.uk - useful information; more sample CVs and an employability skills section containing information on what recruiters look for in a candidate.
- Go to www.careers.brad.ac.uk/destinations - an additional section on our website which is for current students only (you will need to use your Bradford login to access the resources).
- www.prospects.ac.uk - useful resources; different types of CV
- www.targetjobs.co.uk – useful pages on applications and CVs, including examples.

Equality and Diversity

- Additional advice on job seeking with regard to equal opportunities issues can be found at www.prospects.ac.uk/equal_opportunities.htm
- The equality section of our website also has further resources and information on a range of equality issues - www.careers.brad.ac.uk/employability/equality-issues/index.php