

# Covering letters and supporting statements

Covering letters and supporting statements both have the same function; to explain to an employer why you are applying to them, and how your skills, knowledge and experiences fit the role and the organisation.

the  
**Careers Group**  
University of London

## What are they for?

A covering letter is usually sent with your CV and is set out as a formal business letter. A supporting (or personal) statement usually forms part of an application form, and may be in response to statements such as the following:

> 'Please use the space below to indicate why you feel that you are suitable for this post, including details of relevant experience and evidence of your ability to meet the selection criteria.'

## What are employers looking for?

If you are applying for an advertised role, your covering letter or supporting statement should provide evidence for the requirements in the person specification (or other information supplied to you by the employer about what they are looking for).

An example person specification, for a job as a Policy Assistant with a think thank:

## EXAMPLE PERSON SPECIFICATION

### CRITERIA OR REQUIREMENTS

#### 1.1 Qualifications and Experience

1. Educated to degree level in a relevant subject such as economics, town planning, geography
2. Experience of researching and analysing data and information (both qualitative and quantitative)
3. Experience of developing and managing a project

#### 1.2 Knowledge / Skills / Abilities

4. Knowledge of economic development issues and ability to apply this to London's economy
5. Ability to communicate effectively, both verbally and in writing
6. Knowledge of funding programmes and sources
7. Ability to work in partnership with organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors
8. Understanding of the needs of business and the workforce and the ability to translate this into practical assistance and/or policy development
9. Ability to use IT for project management and presentation of information

#### 1.3 Equal Opportunities / Health and Safety

10. Awareness of Health and Safety issues in the workplace
11. Ability to demonstrate commitment to and awareness of equal opportunities and an understanding of its relevance to economic development

Example cover letter overleaf

# Covering letters and supporting statements

Your letter or statement needs to show that you meet every criteria. Employers are often pressed for time, so make sure it is easy for them to see this: consider using each point from the person specification as a heading.

Some person specifications list 'Essential' and 'Desirable' criteria. In this case, you'll need to show you meet all the essential criteria, but the desirable criteria are optional: things the employer would like to see but are not a must.

If you are sending a covering letter speculatively (i.e. for an unadvertised job), please see our information sheet on 'unadvertised jobs and internships'.

For covering letters, try to write to a named person as it sounds more personal. If the job advertisement does not specify a name it is worth contacting the company to ask who to address the letter to. You should also include where you saw the position advertised.

## How do I demonstrate my skills?

Give an example of how you've used the skill or knowledge. The **STAR** method can help when you are giving this evidence:

**Situation:** Briefly set the scene. Think about the minimum the employer needs to know in order to understand your example.

**Task:** Briefly describe what you had to do (the task you faced).

**Action:** Describe in detail what you did and how you did it. Refer specifically to the relevant competency (e.g. team working). This is the most important section, as it demonstrates your skills and abilities.

**Result:** Described what happened as a result of your Actions. What happened, changed or got better?

## Showing your motivation

Tell the employer why you want this job and show motivation and enthusiasm. Avoid vague statements and blatant flattery; be specific and illustrate your opinions with some original points. This is also the chance to deal directly and positively with any gaps or apparent weaknesses in your skills or experience.

Your closing paragraph is a good opportunity to restate your interest and summarise your suitability. If you are sending a covering letter for an unadvertised job, you can demonstrate your keenness by informing the organisation that you will follow up your letter with a phone call.

## Professional style and length

It is important to be concise and formal. You need to demonstrate your writing style and your ability to present a persuasive argument clearly using relevant information. Covering letters should normally be one page long; supporting statements are more variable but some employers will give you a word or page limit which you must stick to.

## Careful editing

When you have drafted your letter or statement, spend some time editing it. Read through each paragraph and ask yourself whether the point that you are trying to make is clear, whether you could be more concise, and if you have covered all the requirements of the person specification (if applicable). Always check carefully for spelling and grammar mistakes, and ask someone else to review it for you.

44 Fenton Road  
London , N8 9NS  
DD/MM/YY

### Example letter

The parts in italics would be included in a covering letter but not a supporting statement.

Mr B Taylor  
Londra  
25-32 Freeman Street  
London, EC1 YHG

Dear Mr Taylor

Policy Assistant – Londra

*I am writing to apply for the above position as advertised in The Guardian on 15 July. I am currently completing a Masters degree in Urban Geography at St. John's University. Please find enclosed my CV as requested.*

I am interested in a career in policy because, as a student in London, I have been able to observe London's rapid economic development first-hand and have become fascinated by the way in which various legal, political, economic, cultural and social factors combine to shape the city. My Masters dissertation has focussed on the impact of the economic development of Canary Wharf on the surrounding residential areas. For this project I collected a large amount of data, including quantitative data such as financial reports, and qualitative data including interviews with local residents. I was able to analyse this data effectively and draw conclusions about the relationship between economic and social development.

This shows that she understands the job and how her interests relate to it, and relates course content to the needs of the role.

I have had experience of the processes involved in creating policy in my capacity as a volunteer researcher with the London Disabled Forum. My research informed the Forum's response to a government policy consultation and I developed important key skills such as the ability to communicate effectively in writing, and to work in partnership with other organisations. In addition, I gained an insight into Equal Opportunities and Health and Safety, as these issues regularly impact on members of the Forum. Working at the Students' Union bar further enhanced my ability to communicate verbally with customers and colleagues.

In this paragraph, she has provided a good summary of aspects of her work experience relevant to the job.

I have had extensive experience of developing and managing projects. In my role as Events Secretary for the University Economics Society, I organised our annual awards ceremony and dinner. This involved securing funding and sponsorship from local businesses, sourcing speakers and inviting guests. I also ensured that the event ran smoothly on the day by giving all Society members clear tasks, such as greeting guests at the door, managing the audio-visuals and distributing refreshments. I used IT to manage the project, by creating a spreadsheet which summarised the tasks and was updated as required. This enabled me to see at a glance the status of the project. The event was a great success, and was featured on the home page of the University website. We also raised £1600 for the Society through ticket sales.

Relates her extra-curricular experience to the needs of the role and clearly shows the positive results achieved in the example.

Having thoroughly researched the sector, I am drawn to Londra by your focus on economic development issues and their impact on London's economy. I attended your forum event on 15 January, which helped me understand how you work in partnership with a range of organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors. This appeals to me as I believe the solution to sustainable economic development lies in collaboration.

Here she provides specific examples of what she likes about the company and shows how she has found out about them. This convinces the reader that this is a serious application.

*I am available for interview at any time and look forward to hearing from you in due course.*

Yours sincerely  
Sadia Mira

