

# Project Management

## Cover Letter Advice

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## INTRODUCTION

## FAQ'S

### Introduction

If your CV is your main marketing tool to sell yourself, then the inclusion of a cover letter is an excellent way to promote the sale and let employers know that you are an exceptional candidate. It is always good practice to send a cover letter with your CV when applying for a job. As well as being good practice, it is another chance for you to highlight your skills and experience whilst displaying your domain and company knowledge.

In such a competitive market, it is attributes such as willingness and drive that separate the wheat from the chaff, and these are traits that are easily spotted by recruiters and Hiring Managers in good (and bad) covering letters. More and more recruiters are treating cover letters as a vital addition to the CV, so with that in mind lets take a look at some of the major things to do and avoid when writing one.

### Frequently asked Questions

#### Should I always send one?

Get into the habit of writing a cover letter for every job that you apply for. The more you practice the quicker you will become at ascertaining the key points that you want to convey. You will become more effective as a result.

If a job advert has specifically asked that you include a cover letter, by not including one you are severely jeopardising your chances of securing an interview. From a recruiter's perspective by not doing so you are not only ignoring instruction, but also showing a lack of attention to detail, two key attributes of any decent project professional.

#### How long should it be?

Consider the fact that you are a project professional. As such, you should have a clear and concise approach to your work. Your cover letter should reflect this and therefore be as brief and to the point as possible.

The ideal length for a cover letter is one page, but this page does not have to be rammed full of text. Remember - this document should act as an introduction to your CV, not be your CV in letter format.

Over the years we have looked over thousands of cover letters, and the common consensus is that anything over a page is just not punchy enough, and will more often than not be ignored. three short and snappy paragraphs should be more than enough to state your interest in the role and convey your suitability. You should also consider using bullet points to highlight key information that makes you a strong contender for the role.

## FAQ'S

### What format should the letter take?

There are a couple of ways in which you can approach this. If you are applying by post then you will need to print out your document as you would any other letter. This will look more professional than a handwritten letter and will be a good pre-cursor to your CV. Make sure you use high quality white paper to maintain a professional approach. When typing, use the same formatting and font that you have used on your CV so as to keep the two documents consistent.

If you are applying by email which is more often than not the case, you can attach your cover letter as a separate document along with your CV. This is recommended as opposed to inserting the letter as the front page of your CV document, as it will clearly differentiate between the two and give the recruiter the option of reading either document first.

Alternatively, you can write your cover letter as an introductory email to the recruiter. It is really down to personal preference which method you choose. If you decide to go down the attached document route, you can always point the recruiter in the direction of your cover letter in the introductory email.

## FAQ'S

### What should I include in the letter?

Whereas your CV is a consistent document about you and your achievements, a cover letter should be specific to the job you are applying for and should focus on the key areas that the employer is looking for. All too often, we see cover letters from candidates who have simply cut and pasted excerpts from their CV into the letter. This may save you time, but it is easy to spot and highlights a laziness and lack of imagination that could see your application being rejected.

Employers want to see that candidates understand the requirements of the job and that they have the skills and experience to fill them. It is therefore important for you to study the job specification and pick out the key responsibilities that relate to work you have done in the past. The trick is then to provide the recruiter with good examples that highlight why you are the best person for the job.

If you are applying for a job directly and not through an agency where you might not know who the company is at this stage, make sure you have done some research on the company and convey this in the letter. It is common sense that an employer will be more impressed by a candidate who understands the company and who has a grasp for what it will take to be a success there in their organisation.

## THE TOP

### The Cover Letter

We're now going to run through the Cover Letter very simply, from Top through to Middle and Bottom. To view our example of an effective Project Management cover letter, please turn to page 8.

### The Top

As with any letter, it is common practice to include your contact details (address, email, phone number) in the top right hand corner of the letter. If you are applying directly to a company and not through an agency, then also include the company name and contact details in the top left.

Before you begin your letter, type the role you are applying for along with any job codes before the main body of the letter.

Be as formal and direct as possible when addressing the reader. If you have the full name of the person you are addressing the letter to, then always use their surname. "*Dear Mr Richardson*" is more suitable than "*Dear Ian*". Always try to avoid using "*Dear Sir / Madam*" where possible, as it immediately portrays a lack of research on your part and can be viewed by the reader as the initial signs of a stock application.

In your first paragraph you should be looking to

## THE MIDDLE

state the title of the post you are applying for as soon as you can, along with where you heard about the opening, e.g., the local paper.

You should also in this first paragraph state in as broad a context as possible who you are and what you have to offer, for example,

*"Project Manager with over 10 years client facing experience in the NHS..."*

This first paragraph only needs to be 4 to 5 lines in length and should 'set the scene' for the main body of information that is to come in the middle section.

### The Middle

The middle paragraph of the cover letter is where you really need to sell yourself and attract recruiters to your CV. This is the section where you should be highlighting the skills and experience you have that make you the ideal candidate.

Begin by looking at the key responsibilities that are listed on the job advert. These should form the basis for the evidence that you provide in this paragraph. Having assessed the role requirements look for good examples from your work history and relate them to the core

## THE MIDDLE

requirements in the advert. By using this approach to refer to your CV, you will come across as a candidate who is conscientious and committed to the role. Again - don't be tempted to cut and paste sections of your CV. There are so many candidates that apply for roles at random who don't read and respond to the individual requirements of each job.

Always try and back up any statements you make with facts and figures to support your case, for example,

*"As you will see from my CV I have been responsible for managing project budgets of between £1-1.5 million..."*

By supporting your claims like this, you will immediately give the recruiter a clear indication of the calibre of candidate that you are and set your application aside from the 30 others that they have had that morning.

Many applicants make the mistake of highlighting key skills and experience in the cover letter that are not in their CV. Remember, cover letters can become separated from the recruitment process so make sure your CV contains the facts.

When writing about your skills and experience, formatting is not really an issue. Listing your main arguments in bullet points is just as effective as writing in prose. The method that

## THE END

best suits your writing style should be the method you use.

This middle paragraph is also your chance to demonstrate that you have done some research on the company. As well as highlighting why you are a good fit given your experience, say what has impressed you about the organisation and what attracted you to them in the first place.

This paragraph will form the main body of your cover letter as stated previously. To view our example letter please turn to page 8.

### The End

When rounding off the letter be positive and highlight the aspects of your personality that will appeal to the potential employer. As a project professional some of the main traits you may wish to emphasise are:

- An ability to communicate across all levels of an organisation.
- Being driven within your work to achieve results to time and budget.
- Your focus on team ethics and your ability to fit into such a structure.
- An ability to organise and prioritise tasks appropriately.

These are just some of the attributes that you might want to draw upon. Again, you should be looking for hints and guidance from the original

## THE END

job advert to help you stand out, as each organisation and role will require a different set of soft skills to the next.

Finish your letter by saying you will look forward to receiving feedback in due course, but be careful not to put any pressure on the recruiter in terms of a time limit as to when you would like a response.

Always try and sign your letter with your signature, especially for postal applications. If you are emailing your letter and you do not have access to a scanner, then your name printed at the bottom will suffice.

As with your CV, make sure you thoroughly check your cover letter for spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. Share it with family members and friends and ask them for their objective opinion.

Now that you have read these hints and tips, please turn to page 8 to view our example of an effective Project Management cover letter.

### **You have the Cover Letter - now what?**

Read other articles in our series of [project management careers advice](#)

These include;

- Job Applications
- Project Management CV Advice
- Knowing Where to Look for a New Role
- Succeed in Getting the New Role
- Project Management Qualifications
- Career Change

## COVER NOTE EXAMPLE

Mr David Rogers  
5 Lord Street  
Preston  
Lancashire  
PR1 4RT

### **Project Manager – Engineering / Air Defence, Ref: 67153**

Dear Mr Johnson,

I am writing to apply for the position of Project Manager - Engineering / Air Defence (Ref: 67153) which has recently been advertised in on Total Jobs. Given my 15 years of Project Management experience in a variety of engineering environments, I would consider myself a strong candidate for this role and so have attached my CV by way of application.

As you will see from my CV, I have been responsible for managing project budgets of between £3-5 million during my time at Rolls Royce. You will also note that I have built and managed virtual teams located in Germany and the US. The provision of regular progress reports to key clients and senior management has been a standard aspect of my roles for the past ten years. Given my expertise in Lean Manufacturing and Earned Value Management, I see a number of parallels between your working practices and my own experience, hence why I am so keen to pursue this opportunity further.

As an experienced Project and Engineering Manager I am an excellent communicator who is just as comfortable in a board room scenario as I am on the shop floor. I am meticulous and process driven, with a tenacious approach to meeting targets and team organisation.

I will look forward to receiving your feedback in due course.

Yours sincerely

David Rogers

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