

# Application letter (Cover letter)

Applying for a job is about selling yourself. Selling in the sense of convincing others of your qualities. This starts with knowing what you can offer organisations. The next step is figuring out what the organisation needs, and how you can provide for that.

## Before you start: gather info on the organisation and position

Before you can write a good letter, it is important that you take the following steps first:

- Go through the vacancy carefully and underline keywords (required skills and experience) that you can repeat in your letter.
- Search on the internet (Google or LinkedIn) for information about the organisation and the composition of the team you are applying for. Check, for example, the mission, the most important values and the annual plan.
- Try to find out whether there is someone within the organisation whom you have been in touch with before or whom you know through one of your contacts. Gain as much 'inside information' as possible. Only then you will know what you should or should not include in your letter.
- Formulate a good question before contacting a member of the application committee. Make sure not to ask questions that you could have answered yourself if you had read the website carefully and always ask if you are calling at a convenient time. During the conversation, give a hint of your enthusiasm, motivation, and experience. If the call was pleasant, you can refer to this in the first paragraph of your letter.

You should now know what style you can best use in your application and what tone you can best adopt (formal or informal, creative or corporate/traditional).

## Before you start: what do you want to know?

Answer these questions for yourself: what do I want the employer to know about me? Why am I motivated for this job? And why am I a good fit for this position? To do this, look back on your own career so far and see how you have been shaped. What have you done and what insights, knowledge, experiences and skills have you gained? Why did you have certain jobs, friends, hobbies/interests? Why did you choose your study program? Look back on your successes and failures and what you have learnt from them. If you know what drives you, what gives you energy and why you are choosing a particular direction, you will be able to convey that message much more convincingly.

## Structure of the letter

- Your name and address (*more formal/traditional organisation*)
- Company's address and name of the contact person (*more formal/traditional organisation*)
- Place and date
- Subject (including vacancy number)
- Salutation, e.g. Dear Mrs./Madam X or Mr./Sir Y. Find out to who you should address the letter. Correctly capitalise names and positions, such as 'Dear Mrs Van Doorn'.

## Paragraph 1: how to draw attention?

- **More informal/creative organisation:** make sure you immediately captivate the reader with your opening sentence. A standard introduction about where you found the vacancy or something similar will not interest the reader. But an opening with a statement, a current problem or an experience will immediately stimulate and invite the reader to continue reading. Perhaps you can get inspiration for your introduction from the “storytelling” method. You can also make an appointment with your Career Officer to get started.

*Example:*

“Dressage is my passion because it is precision work. It requires good cooperation between the horse and the rider. The horse is steered on the path while riding. I like doing this because I want to do it perfectly, that is my ambition. I could express that ambition and aim for perfection in this job as well.”

- **More formal/traditional/corporate organisation:** in your opening, you can refer to a pleasant (telephone) conversation or show your commitment in some other way. In your first paragraph, you could also mention two relevant things from your CV that are appropriate for the position.

*Example 1:*

“Students are forced by the current political measures to graduate faster and faster. It is therefore important to recognise the personal talents of students quickly and to offer good guidance in their study programme of choice and their student career. I am very interested in the best ways to achieve this, and would like to do research on this in my internship, preferably within [name of organisation].”

*Example 2:*

“As a result of our interesting conversation during the Career Event of [study association], I hereby apply for the position as X at Y.”

## Paragraph 2: why do you want to work at organisation X?

In the second paragraph, you indicate the main reasons why you want to work at this organisation. What are your interests, ambitions and motivation and give examples. Describe how you see in your CV that your path logically leads to this vacancy. Think carefully about your motivation and try to be original, instead of offering standard/obvious reasons. If you have been an intern at a similar organisation, use this to strengthen your motivation. Show why you are interested in this industry, organisation and/or position and what ‘proof’ you have that this suits you.

*Example:*

“I am interested in both the topic of social anxiety and working with children, so the combination appeals to me even more. It seems a challenge to me to learn more about how children think and how you could explore that. From my experience as a student assistant at X, I learned how difficult it can be to find out what a child thinks and feels. I also noticed how strong the influence of social anxiety can be on the life of a child. During my internship, I discovered ways in which children will talk more about their thoughts, and I have enjoyed this very much. This has further increased my interest in this subject.”

### Paragraph 3: why are you the best candidate for this position?

In the third paragraph, you respond to the desires and needs of the company and convince the reader that you are the best candidate for the position. You talk about your qualities, knowledge and experience and how that helps the company. What does the company need according to you, and why are you such a good match? In the Netherlands, you do this by providing proof in your letter: by referring to your experience (academic/professional) and your competences and by linking these to the desired position, so that the reader will be convinced that you would like to work for them and that you will be the solution to any issues the organisation might have. It is better to highlight some qualities on the basis of examples, experiences, results achieved or reactions obtained, instead of listing vague qualities. What did you do during your part-time job, education (also think of projects), extracurricular activities or jobs? And what was the effect of that?

*Example:*

"During my part-time job I gained a lot of experience with high-functioning adult women with autism. I have learned that... and discovered that..." instead of "I have gained a lot of experience with autism during my part-time job".

*Example:*

"In the vacancy, it is indicated that you are looking for a Medical student. However, I think that my training in Psychology is also very suitable for this position. In courses such as Brain and Addiction, I learned not only about the social and psychological side of the treatment but about the medical side as well."

### Paragraph 4: how to conclude?

The conclusion of the letter is often quite standard. You give a brief summary of what you have to offer and why you want this or refer back to a section in your letter, and add a call to action (a personal conversation). Be sure of yourself, avoid words like 'hope' and 'think'. Make sure that the style of the concluding paragraph is consistent with the rest of the letter.

*Example:*

I would like to explain my motivation and CV in a personal interview. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

First name – last name

Attachment: Curriculum Vitae

### Pitfalls

- × **Do not write too much from your own perspective**, e.g. 'this job will enrich me as a person', 'because I need to find an internship for my studies...' or 'since I am graduating at the end of the month, I am looking for a job that fits my interests'. Any requirements or conditions you have for accepting the job will be discussed in the terms of employment interview, not the cover letter. Requirements for an internship, on the other hand, are of course useful to mention (e.g. period, number of hours, subject).

- × **Do not be too vague**, e.g. 'The activities in the job description appeal to me, so I would like to apply' (= too vague, because what exactly appeals to you?), 'The nice thing about the job is the contact with children. During my internship I noticed that I like children very much, but above all, I find them very interesting' (= too vague, what exactly do you like about children? And why do you find them interesting?).
- × **Repetition of the vacancy**: be original and tell your story in your own words. Avoid copying the vacancy text: 'I am a team player, do not have a 9 to 5 mentality, have excellent communication skills, am stress-resistant and ready for a new challenge'. What does this show? What specific skills do you have? What sort of new challenge are you looking for?
- × **Being negative about others**: do not speak negatively or too much about your other job, employer and/or colleagues.
- × **Repetition of your CV**: make sure that your letter complements your CV, not repeats it. Focus on your motivation and explain why you and the job match.
- × **Too much irrelevant private info**: do not give too much information about your private or family life.

## Finishing touches

Before actually sending the letter, take the following steps:

- Ensure that the layout of your CV and letter fit together.
- Have both your CV and letter checked by someone (at least for spelling mistakes).
- Save your letter in PDF format and use a clear title like 'Application letter from X X'.
- Print out your letter and double-check for sloppiness, spelling errors, incorrect details of the organisation.
- Passive writing: use an active writing style. Alternate long and short sentences and avoid unnecessarily difficult words and complicated sentences. Your letter should not be longer than 1 A4

## Letter check

Are you struggling with writing a letter? Or do you want someone to check your letter? Make an appointment with the Career Officer, so we can help you! We will specifically look at the content of your letter. For a spelling check, we advise you to consult friends and family.