

Cover letters

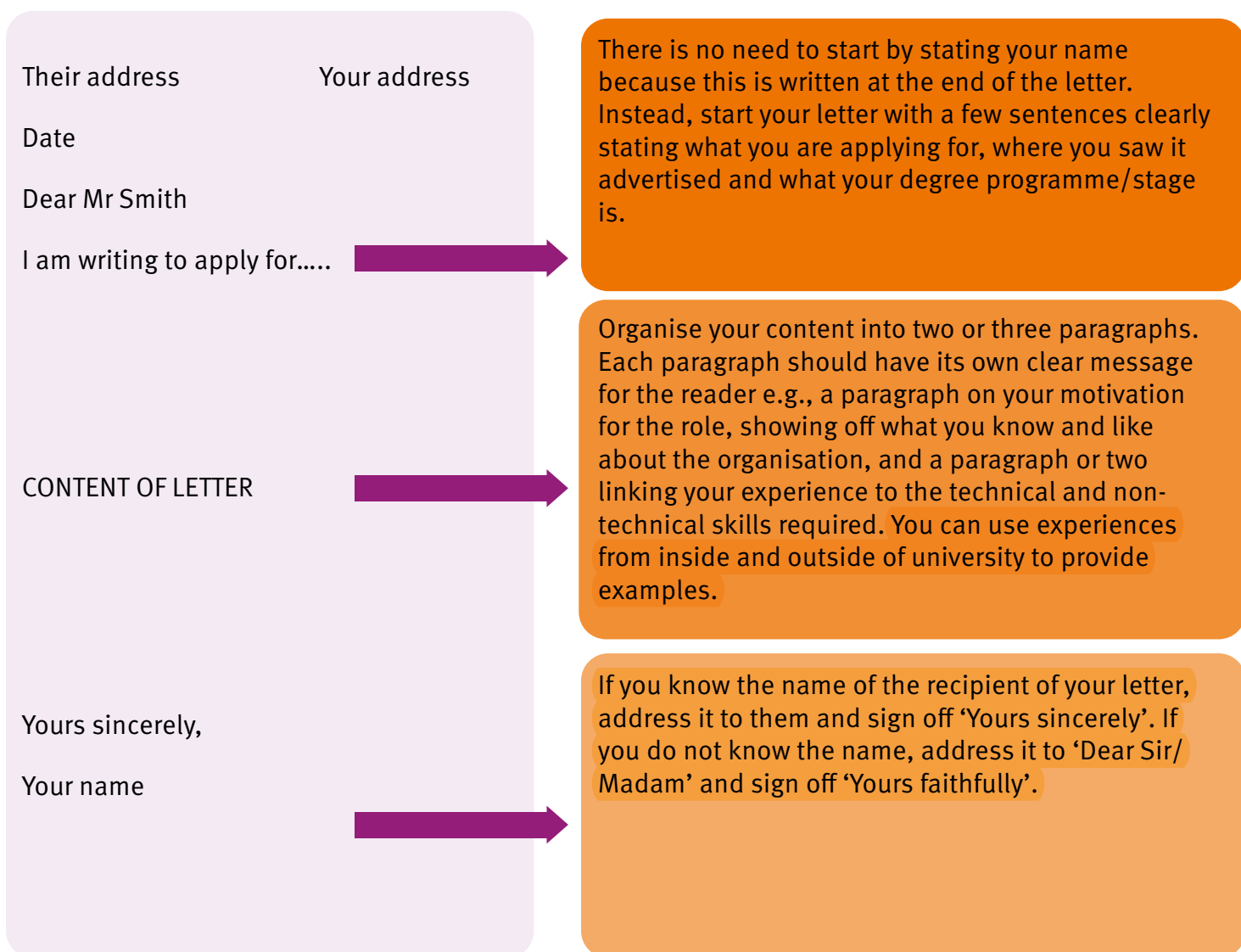
What is a cover letter?

A cover letter is usually sent with your CV as part of your application. The purpose of a cover letter is to complement your CV by showing that you understand the role and organisation you are applying for, have a strong motivation and will be a good fit for them. Your CV focuses on your skills and experience, but it doesn't explain why you are applying for the opportunity, so the cover letter is your chance to do this.

Layout

Your cover letter should typically be no more than one page for student and graduate level opportunities; however, it can often be up to two pages for other roles above this level. It should be laid out as a professional letter and you should be sure to check for spelling or grammatical errors, including double checking that you have spelt the name of the company correctly.

It is important to follow the business etiquette for the layout of a professional letter. This reassures the recruiter that, when you work for them, you will represent them professionally. The typical professional layout for a UK letter* is:



*If you are applying in another country, find out what a professional letter looks like there by using [GoinGlobal](#) (available on the Careers Service website)

Content

The content of your letter will be two to three paragraphs of prose. It is best to avoid bullet points and subheadings in your final version. Each paragraph should have a clear message. You can choose the messages and the order of your paragraphs.

For example:

Technical role relating to your degree subject:

Paragraph one: motivation (why this role and company)

Paragraph two: subject specific technical skills and abilities

Paragraph three: transferable/non-technical skills mentioned in the job advert e.g. teamwork, customer service

1. Motivation

Usually, you will have at least one paragraph describing your motivation. Recruiters are very keen to understand why you are applying for their role and want to see evidence for your interest in them. It is important to them because if they hire you, but you don't really want to be there, you are unlikely to do the job well or to stay very long. You can choose how best to organise this content. You might have a paragraph on 'why this role' and another paragraph on 'why this company'. Alternatively, you could merge these into one or combine a particular aspect of your motivation with related evidence of your skills.

Overall, you should show the reader that you understand both the role and company/organisation you are applying to and how you fit with them. You should link your interest in the role and the company to yourself, rather than just stating facts you have learned about them. Telling the story of how you became interested in the role or company and what you have done to deepen your knowledge of them can work well. If you are applying to an internship, show that you will value the opportunity they are giving you by linking it to your future career plans. Here are some ideas of how to develop your understanding of a job and a company/organisation:

- Read their website to understand what you are applying for, how it fits within the organisation and their values. Useful sections include 'About us', company values, their mission statement, the careers pages, 'News'. See more advice on our ['reading advertisements' webpage](#).
- Connect to their social media to keep up with their latest news.
- Do research using resources in the Imperial Library to understand the sector and the organisation you are applying to. Useful resources can be found on the Imperial Library [website under the section for 'Subject support, Business'](#).
- Attend careers events and talk to companies and recruiters to understand the role better and what the recruiters will be looking for in applications. See JobsLive for [upcoming fairs, events, and presentations](#).
- Do your own networking through [LinkedIn](#) or other contacts.
- Work shadowing and internships.
- Join in with relevant [student societies](#) and extracurricular activities.
- Choose relevant modules in your course.

See some examples of how to write about your motivation in the sample cover letters on the following pages.

2. Skills

The rest of your letter could be organised into one or two paragraphs showing that you have the skills and knowledge to be effective in the role you are applying to. Start organising this part of your letter by finding out what they are looking for in candidates (e.g., by reviewing the job advert, using networking opportunities) and thinking about how you match. Decide what evidence you can use to show that you have the skills and personal attributes they are looking for. You can use evidence from your academic achievements, extracurricular activities, work experience, volunteering, or sports. Include specific and interesting examples to convince the reader of what you can do. Where you can, include results and the impact of your work.

It's OK for this part of your letter to have some overlap with your CV.

Writing tips

- It really helps your reader if your content is structured in a logical and organised way. Before you start to write, think through the structure of your letter, and decide what message you would like the reader to take away from each paragraph.
- It can help to give yourself subheadings while you are writing to keep yourself 'on message'. You can take these out before you send the letter.
- Recruiters will read your letter very quickly so keep your sentences simple and short. This will make your letter easier to follow.
- After writing the letter leave it to one side and then come back with fresh eyes to check it.
- Get a friend to check it for spelling and grammar.
- For speculative applications (which is where you apply to a company who are not currently advertising an opportunity), you will need to grab the attention of your reader immediately. Ideally direct the letter to a named person rather than Sir/Madam. Make it clear who you are and what the letter is about in the first paragraph e.g., state clearly that you are looking for a summer internship, in which team and the dates you would be available. For more advice see our [speculative applications webpage](#).

Avoid

Unprofessional language. Your letter should be formal in style but keep to language that you would use in your day-to-day speech. Try to avoid the use of large and complex word structure as this can become pretentious and can lose focus on your meaning. The overuse of words like moreover, henceforth, hitherto, notwithstanding and incomparable should be avoided.

Being negative. Stay positive throughout. Sometimes it's tempting to mention some gaps in your experience or something you don't know. However, you don't need to highlight this in your letter.

Being vague. Including specific information will make your letter more persuasive. For example, if you worked in a team, say how many people were in it. If you raised money, say how much. Avoid words like 'various' as this is ambiguous.

Data Analyst job description and student cover letter: Robert Aske

Data and Analytics Consultant 6-week Internship (London) - Thorogood

As a growing organization in the Data & Analytics industry, we actively seek people with inquisitive minds who challenge the status-quo, are eager to learn, and are ready to dive into a fast-paced, challenging working environment. Successful candidates will be capable of, and motivated by, working across an entire project lifecycle as part of a globally distributed team. A successful candidate will demonstrate the capability to learn novel technologies, strong interpersonal and relationship management skills, and the drive to take on new responsibilities.

Qualified candidates must:

Be in the process of completing a bachelor's degree and have a strong academic record in a related business or STEM discipline.

Be able to:

- Show a keen interest in learning about data and new technology
- Work effectively individually, and as part of a project team
- Show responsibility in their work and deliver with quality
- Develop and nurture relationships (such as with clients, technology partners, and colleagues)
- Manage time and commitments in a fast-paced working environment

How has the Cover Letter on page 35 been adapted to the advert?

- The student demonstrates clear motivation for working at Thorogood and genuine interest for undertaking a data and analytics internship.
- Whilst it would be good to send this to a named person, often this is not possible so in this instance they have written this to the most appropriate job title.
- Describes working individually as part of their startup company experience and links this project to other key requirements such as developing relationships with colleagues and managing time effectively.
- This cover letter also includes a group work example to show how the student is able to perform collaboratively – there are more examples of this in the CV but this one has been reflected upon and linked back to the job role.
- The student signs off with their name and Imperial Course to give a professional finish.

Robert Aske cover letter

Thorogood HR Department
245 Hammersmith Road
2nd Floor
London
W6 8PW

Robert Aske
36 Pilgrims Square
London
SWZ 8HT

14th March 2024

Dear Thorogood HR Manager,

Re: Data and Analytics Consultant 6-week Internship (London)

I am a second year MEng Design Engineering student at Imperial College London with an interest in working in the data and analytics area after I graduate. Working at Thorogood as an independent consultancy company specialising in data management and trends will allow me to apply my data visualisation and analytical skills across an entire project and build my skills in areas such as Agile working, machine learning and data mining. I am particularly interested in how you focus on sustainability across all areas of the business including cloud adoption and learning more about the bespoke client data solutions developed to maximise their sustainability journey. An internship at Thorogood will allow me to work across a range of sectors with a variety of clients, from global pharmaceutical organisations to insurance companies; I have watched your 'Future of Data – Warehousing' webcast to broaden my knowledge of current industry issues and saw that Thorogood has worked with exciting clients such as SAP, IBM, Amazon and Databricks.

I have always enjoyed the data aspects of my studies, and this led me to undertake a first year Data Analytics internship at a start-up company. I was responsible for individually gathering, cleaning and analysing environmental impact data and producing it in an appealing format for use in company presentations and reports. As part of this I had to work closely with the start-up founders and report back my findings weekly to my supervisor. I also supported other projects and learnt quickly how to manage my time to meet a range of conflicting deadlines and expectations. To support my work in this role I undertook further courses in Excel/VBA to improve my skills and believe strongly in developing myself to deliver my best work.

The need to collaborate and work effectively in a small team has been an important part of my degree as the majority of my course work is group work based. During my first-year computer applications project I worked in a small team of four to develop an interactive web application. In addition to developing my skills in JavaScript and HTML I needed to consider the user experience and report back to the team on ways to make our app more streamlined in this respect. Acting as the user's 'champion' in the process allowed me to consider our project from a novice end user perspective as well as a design angle and how to build this into the project from the beginning. Considering the client's viewpoint and how to utilise their data to give meaningful business insights will be an important aspect of this internship and something I am looking forward to working on.

I am a UK citizen with the right to work in the UK and am based in London for my degree. Undertaking the Data and Analytics internship with Thorogood would be a fantastic opportunity to work in a varied environment, spending time with professional data analysts as well as contributing to the work you do.

Yours faithfully,

Robert Aske
MEng Design Engineering – Imperial College London