

UNIT 3

Effective cover letters

- Identifying features of cover letters
- Beginning a cover letter
- Writing the main body of the letter
- Writing an effective final paragraph
- Using appropriate language
- Writing a cover letter

Identifying features of cover letters

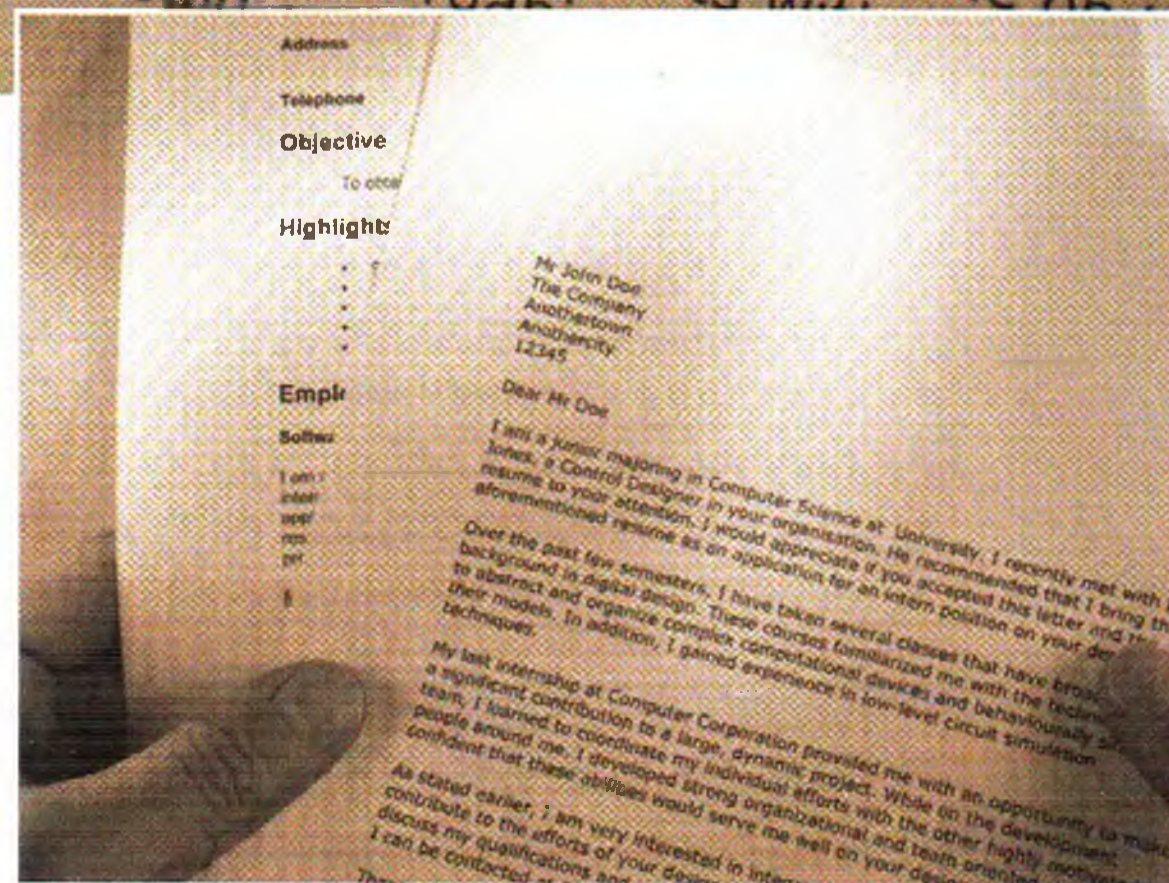
- 1 a In pairs, discuss the following questions.
- 1 What's the difference between a CV and a cover letter?
 - 2 Have you ever written a cover letter in English?
 - 3 What did you write in your cover letter?

- b Complete this introduction to cover letters using the words in the box.

business complement cover letter CV employer
interview introduction persuade position well-focused

- c Find an alternative expression for cover letter in the text.
- d Vicky Tang is the Communications Manager at Green Pharmaceuticals. She wants to change her job and phones her friend, Felix, a recruitment agent, for advice on writing a cover letter. In pairs, discuss what advice you would give Vicky on the following areas.
- the length and structure of the letter
 - the language you would use
 - the content of the letter

- e ▶ 3.1 Listen to the beginning of the phone call and answer the following questions.
- 1 How long has Vicky been working at Green Pharmaceuticals?
 - 2 Why is Vicky looking for a new job?



What is a cover letter?

A (1) CV gives information about the educational qualifications and professional experience you have, whereas a (2) _____ explains why you want the job. A cover letter should (3) _____, not duplicate, your CV. The main purpose of a personalised cover letter is to (4) _____ the reader to read your CV and consider you for the vacant (5) _____.

A cover letter is often your earliest written contact with a potential (6) _____, creating a critical first impression. A well-written, (7) _____ cover letter demonstrates your written communication skills and will help you to get that all-important (8) _____.

The letter of application should follow the general guidelines for all (9) _____ letters. It should have an (10) _____, a main body, and a final paragraph.

f ▶ 3.2 Read the statements below and predict whether Felix recommends them (✓) or not (✗). Listen to the rest of the conversation and check your answers.

- 1 Use high-quality paper that matches the paper of your CV. ✓
- 2 Ensure that your cover letter is written using formal language.
- 3 Use the same cover letter for every application.
- 4 Show that you have done some research into the company you are applying to.
- 5 Emphasise your suitability for the post.
- 6 Enclose copies of your educational qualifications and certificates.

g What do you think is the most important advice that Felix gives Vicky?

h Look at the example of a good cover letter that Felix sent Vicky. Read the letter and answer the following questions.

- 1 What is Jane studying at university?
- 2 Where did she work last summer?
- 3 What does she do in her free time?

Jane Nuttall
71 Lambert Road
Brixton
London
SW2 5XL
jane.nuttall@kcl.ac.uk
1 December 2008

b → Ms Diana Allsopp
Recruitment Manager
McClure and Company
Russell Square
London WC1C 9SE

c → Dear Ms Allsopp,

1 → I am a final-year student at King's College London reading Economics, and would like to apply for an Associate Consultant position with McClure and Company, as advertised on www.monster.com.

e → 2 → Management consultancy appeals to me because it combines analytic research across a wide range of business situations with frequent client contact. I recently attended a McClure and Company workshop run by Charlotte Penton-Smith, and she gave a very positive impression of the company. I was particularly impressed by the excellent in-house training programme which she described, and I would welcome the opportunity to work in such a close-knit team of supportive colleagues.

f → 3 → During my time at King's College I have employed a variety of different research methods, and am familiar with the analytical applications of spreadsheets. For example, for my recent dissertation, I used Excel to compare the effects of tax increases on alcohol and tobacco consumption. In addition, when I was working at the Williton branch of Costcutter over the summer, I presented suggestions for improving the layout of the store to the regional management team. They decided to put these ideas into effect and sales rose by 7% over the autumn quarter.

g → 4 → During my free time, I sing in and manage a jazz band, arranging concerts and gigs and managing the band's accounts. I very much enjoy collaborating with a team of people with similar interests and working towards shared goals. I am also learning Italian by attending weekly evening classes and studying on my own towards the A-level exam next June.

j → 5 → I enclose a copy of my CV and hope very much to be invited for interview.

k → Yours sincerely,
Jane Nuttall
Jane Nuttall

l →

a → Jane Nuttall
71 Lambert Road
Brixton
London
SW2 5XL
jane.nuttall@kcl.ac.uk
1 December 2008

d →

h →

i →

i Match Felix's advice (1–12) to the parts of the cover letter (a–l) in Exercise 1h.

- 1 Give your contact information and current date. a
- 2 End 'Yours sincerely' and type your name under your signature (indicate Ms or Mr if not obvious). ____
- 3 Give a clear context – say who you are and why you are writing. ____
- 4 Your sign-off should be friendly, polite and to the point. ____
- 5 Point out your aptitude for the sorts of skills they are seeking. ____
- 6 Name any employee you have met and say why they impressed you. ____
- 7 Your use of leisure time can show you are a well-rounded person. ____
- 8 Support your claims with evidence, focusing on results and achievements. ____
- 9 Include the name, title and full address of recipient. ____
- 10 Mention where you saw the job advertisement. ____
- 11 Explain your motivation for applying. This also shows you have done your research and learned something about the sector. ____
- 12 Show you are acquiring additional useful skills. ____

j Look at Jane's cover letter again. In which paragraph does she:

- 1 explain her interest in the position? ____
- 2 create a positive final impression? ____
- 3 demonstrate her skills and experience relevant for the position? ____
- 4 introduce herself and explain her reasons for writing? ____
- 5 mention other relevant skills and interests to impress the employer? ____

Beginning a cover letter

The first paragraph of your cover letter should detail the job you are applying for and, if relevant, where you heard about the job (for example an advertisement, or personal recommendation).

2 a Complete the following opening paragraphs using the words in the box.

advertised application consideration enclosed enquire
graduate qualified recommended requirements response

- 1 I am a final-year student who is about to graduate with a bachelor's degree in Industrial Engineering from Bristol University. I am writing to _____ about possible employment opportunities with Mendoza. I am interested in a position related to transportation management.
- 2 I am writing in _____ to your job posting for an investment banker on your company's website. I have _____ my CV for your consideration.
- 3 I was recently speaking with Mr Fox from your firm and he _____ that I send you a copy of my CV. Knowing the _____ for the position, he felt that I would be an ideal candidate, given my experience in international sales.
- 4 I would like to apply for the post of a Commercial Solicitor in your firm as _____ on Legalpositions.com. As a recent graduate, I was particularly happy to see that the position is open to newly _____ lawyers.
- 5 Please accept this letter as _____ for the Marketing Manager position currently listed on Monster.com. My CV is attached for your _____.

b Match the opening paragraphs (1–5) in Exercise 2a to the type of cover letter (a–c) they come from. Which type of letter do you think is most likely to be successful?

- a A reply to a job advertisement
- b A 'cold' speculative job application
- c A letter following a personal recommendation

c Evaluate the following opening paragraphs. What do you think is good or bad about them?

- 1 After attending the recruitment talk presented by Financial Investments, I am extremely interested in the post of graduate trainee in the International Sales Department. I have absolutely no doubt that my qualifications, skills and professional experience will make me an indispensable member of your team.
- 2 I am writing to apply for the graduate trainee position as advertised online in the *New York Times*. I am a final-year student majoring in Business Administration, with US and Chinese business relations as the focus of my dissertation. I believe I am suitable for this position because I am very interested in banking.
- 3 I would like to apply for a job in your organisation. I have always wanted to work at the cutting edge of global strategy with a firm whose greatest assets are its people, and I have decided that Rivers & Co. is the ideal place to start my career.

d ▶ 3.3 Listen to two recruitment experts, Grace and Oliver, discussing the letters. In which order do they discuss them?

e ▶ 3.3 Listen again. What advice do they give? Do you agree with their comments?

f Find a job advertisement that interests you, and write the opening paragraph of a cover letter in response.

Writing the main body of the letter

Demonstrating your key skills and experience

In the main body of the letter you need to show why you are the right person for the job, by highlighting your most relevant experiences and skills as they relate to the position you are applying for. It is important to demonstrate evidence of your skills clearly. It is not enough to claim that you are 'a hard-working, flexible team player, with excellent IT skills'; you need to be able to provide evidence.

3 a In pairs, discuss the following questions.

- 1 How long should the main body of the letter be?
- 2 How many specific points should you make?
- 3 How will this section change depending on the job you are applying for?

b Read the following extracts from cover letters. For each extract underline the two main skills the applicants demonstrate.

- 1 My past experience of working overseas has brought me a greater understanding of international cultures and traditions, as well as a better appreciation of my own culture. These insights would certainly benefit a multinational corporation, such as yours.

Skills: intercultural awareness / dependability / flexibility / self-awareness

- 2 Within my role as a project manager, I am responsible for leading a team of five people. We often have to work unsociable hours under difficult conditions. I ensure that team morale is maintained by regularly counselling team members to check they are coping with the demands of the job.

Skills: flexibility / lateral thinking skills / language skills / interpersonal skills

- 3 Although I do not possess any experience in the hotel industry, I was a Holiday Representative for Xtreme Holidays for two consecutive summers, where I learned that customer satisfaction is the key to success in the service industry. I implemented a new way for customer feedback to be recorded, which helped Xtreme Holidays develop the service that they provide by identifying areas needing improvement. I believe I can apply the skills obtained from my previous employment to this position.

Skills: IT skills / customer service skills / communication skills / initiative

- 4 This summer I worked at Alton Towers Themepark, where I was initially responsible for operating various rides. However, as I can speak both Italian and English fluently I was quickly moved into the gift shop to deal with customers. Working in the shop helped me to learn the importance of dealing with customers in a friendly and efficient way. During this month I suggested changing the layout of some of the gift displays. These changes led to a significant increase in the sales of souvenirs.

Skills: customer service skills / entrepreneurial skills / leadership skills / numerical skills

- 5 I have a strong history of staff management, working closely with my current team on their personal development plans, and understand my role assisting and promoting staff member success. I regularly seek feedback on my performance from my superiors and colleagues to identify areas I need to improve in.

Skills: reliability / leadership skills / self-awareness / technical skills

c Underline useful phrases from the extracts which you could use in your own cover letter. For example in extract 1, My past experience of ... has brought me a greater understanding of ..., as well as ...

d Identify three skills that you use on a regular basis and write three sentences that demonstrate these skills in action. Use the phrases in Exercise 3c to help you.

Matching your skills and experience to the position

In the body of your cover letter it is essential that you are able to demonstrate how your work experience and skills match the specific position you are applying for. To do this you need to:

- read the job description carefully;
- identify the skills and experience the company is particularly interested in;
- show any parallels with previous posts you have held or other experience.

4 a In pairs, discuss the following questions.

- 1 How will your cover letter change with each position you apply for?
- 2 How will you know which skills and experience to highlight?
- 3 Should you highlight skills and experience even if they are not obviously relevant to the job you are applying for?

b Read the letter written by Hanna Ahigren, who is applying for a job at the Australian Embassy in Sweden, and answer the following questions. At this stage, ignore the gaps in the text.

- 1 What position is Hanna applying for?
- 2 What is her current job?
- 3 What subject does she have a degree in?
- 4 What skills and experience does she have?

Dear Ms Tisdall,

I am writing in response to your advertisement for the position of Public Relations Officer and enclose my curriculum vitae for your consideration.

I am currently working as a Press Officer for the Swedish Ministry of Industry.

(1) This experience has enabled me to gain a broad understanding of the media and public relations. (2) _____ monitoring the Swedish and foreign media, and establishing and maintaining key media contacts. I also write press releases and organise media events. Through the successful undertaking of these responsibilities (3) _____ the Swedish political system. (4) _____ theoretical knowledge attained as part of my university degree in Political Science, and put this knowledge into practical application.

Previous experience at the Swedish Embassy in Warsaw gave me an opportunity to work with the diplomatic services. During my time there I learnt to promote the strengths of Sweden through public relations events, as part of a team. Poland's entry to the European Union was the main focus of the Embassy at the time, which significantly influenced my work there. (5) _____ writing reports, organising official visits to Poland, and developing various internal and external projects.

(6) _____ considerable experience in the area of public relations from my years at university and subsequent jobs. I am confident that the combination of my political science background and relevant skills makes me an ideal candidate for the position available. (7) _____ ideas and enthusiasm to the job.

(8) _____ I am very suited to Embassy work and feel this move would be a logical career step. The role of Public Relations Officer would allow me to develop my existing skills in an environment in which my political, linguistic and diplomatic skills could be utilised to their greatest potential.

I would be available for interview at your convenience. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Hanna Ahigren

Ms Hanna Ahigren

c Complete the letter in Exercise 4b using the following phrases.

- a I feel I have significantly strengthened my knowledge and understanding of
- b ~~This experience has enabled me to~~
- c My employment experience leads me to the conclusion that
- d My employment experience has enabled me to build on
- e I think that I could bring
- f My responsibilities included
- g Within my position at work I am responsible for
- h As you can see from my CV I have

d Here is the advertisement that Hanna responded to. In pairs, identify the main skills and experience they are looking for.

e Match the requirements listed in the advertisement (a–i) to sentences from Hanna's cover letter (1–6). Some sentences illustrate more than one requirement.

- 1 This experience has enabled me to gain a broad understanding of the media and public relations. i
- 2 Within my position at work I am responsible for monitoring the Swedish and foreign media, and establishing and maintaining key media contacts. ___ / ___ / ___
- 3 Through the successful undertaking of these responsibilities I feel I have significantly strengthened my knowledge and understanding of the Swedish political system. ___
- 4 Previous experience at the Swedish Embassy in Warsaw gave me an opportunity to work with the diplomatic services. During my time there I learnt to promote the strengths of Sweden through public relations events, as part of a team. ___ / ___
- 5 My responsibilities included writing reports, organising official visits to Poland, and developing various internal and external projects. ___ / ___
- 6 The role of Public Relations Officer would allow me to develop my existing skills in an environment in which my political, linguistic and diplomatic skills could be utilised to their greatest potential. ___

Australian Embassy: Public Relations Officer

Department: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Immediate Supervisor: First Secretary

Salary: SEK 18,000 per month (Tax free)

DUTY STATEMENT:

- a Monitor the Swedish, Finnish, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian media (including printed and electronic) each day; prepare a summary of key international and domestic news items.
- b Monitor and prepare reports on international and domestic issues in Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.
- c Organise programmes for visitors from Australia, and provide support to Australian-based staff in relation to high-level visits.
- d Assist in the management and implementation of the Embassy's public affairs function and cultural affairs programme.

SELECTION CRITERIA AND SKILLS REQUIRED:

- e Bilingual Swedish/English language and translation skills – both written and spoken
- f High-level understanding of Swedish government, economy, business and EU processes
- g Ability to prioritise, manage time effectively and work both independently and as part of a team
- h Personal contacts in the media (desirable)
- i Experience in a public relations and/or a media-related field (desirable)

Please note that to be considered, applicants must address the selection criteria when making their applications and all applications must be in English.

f Underline useful phrases from Hanna's letter which you could use in your own cover letter. For example, I am confident that the combination of my ... and ... makes me an ideal candidate for the position.

g Complete the following sentences using the phrases in the box from Hanna's letter.

As a result As part of my During my period of employment at During my time
having In the course of my current job Since I work with where I gained
~~While I was a~~

1 While I was a team leader at Global Computers, I introduced new quality control procedures resulting in a 50% fall in customer complaints.

2 _____ at Legal Solutions, I was responsible for marketing software services.

3 _____ degree course in Business Studies, I worked for three months in the Data Processing department of a large computer corporation, _____ experience in IT solutions.

4 _____ Star Enterprises I gained some knowledge of accounting, _____ assisted their bookkeeper for three months.

5 _____ I have been responsible for the organisation of conferences. _____ my knowledge and experience in this field have grown considerably and I now feel capable of managing events independently.

6 _____ people every day in a business setting, I have developed strong interpersonal and communicative skills.

h Complete the following sentences so they are true for you.

1 While I was _____ I was in charge of _____

2 During _____ I was responsible for _____

3 As part of my degree course in _____ at _____ I _____

4 During my period of employment at _____ I gained _____

5 At present I am responsible for _____ . As a result _____

6 Since I _____

i In pairs, discuss your recent work experience, or time at university. Highlight the skills you feel you have developed through these experiences. What are the main skills you have that make you more employable?

Writing an effective final paragraph

The final paragraph of your cover letter should round the letter off, leaving the reader with a positive impression of your application and a desire to interview you.

5 a In pairs, decide whether the following statements are True (T) or False (F).

- 1 The final paragraph should express willingness to provide any further information that the reader may want. ____
- 2 It is not necessary to mention any items (including the CV) you are enclosing/ attaching. ____
- 3 It is polite to thank the reader for their time and consideration. ____
- 4 The final paragraph may actually consist of two short paragraphs. ____

b Look back at the cover letters on pages 35 and 39. Did Jane and Hanna follow this advice?

c Read the following paragraphs taken from British and American cover letters. What differences in style do you notice?

- 1 I look forward to hearing from you in the near future to schedule an interview at a time convenient to you. During the interview I hope to learn more about your company's plans and goals and discuss how I might contribute to the success of the service team.

Sincere regards,

- 2 Should you have any queries regarding my application, or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would like to thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

- 3 I know that CVs help you to sort out the probables from the possibles, but they are no way to judge the personal calibre of an individual. I would like to meet you and demonstrate that along with the credentials, I have the personality that makes for a successful team player.

Yours truly,

- 4 You will find enclosed a copy of my curriculum vitae, which gives further details of my education and my career to date. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my professional history and qualifications with you in greater detail.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

d In pairs, discuss the following questions.

- 1 Which extracts most closely follow the advice in Exercise 5a?
- 2 Which approach do you prefer and why?
- 3 Which approach would be most suitable for the country you are applying for work in?
- 4 What, if anything, would you need to change if you wanted to use one of these paragraphs in your own cover letter?

e Read the following final paragraphs. What do you think is good or bad about them?

1 My experience and other technical skills are too extensive to be listed here. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my credentials at your earliest convenience.
I look forward to hearing from you.

2 I would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you how I might contribute to your company in fulfilling its present goals. I will be available for appointment from 1st July.
Thank you in advance for your consideration.

f ▶ 3.4 Listen to recruitment consultants, Grace and Oliver, discussing the extracts in Exercise 5e. What advice do they give? Do you agree with their comments?

g Think of a specific job you would like to apply for. Write your own closing paragraph using the phrases in the box and ideas from this section.

I look forward to hearing from you.
I would welcome/appreciate the opportunity to ...
Please do not hesitate to contact me.
should you have/require ...
Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Using appropriate language

Whether applying online or sending your cover letter through the post, it is important to write using appropriate language. Although informal language may sometimes be acceptable in cover letters, more formal alternatives will create a more professional impression.

6 a Complete the following table using the words in the box.

about additional contact employer employment ensure give
looking more receive request require show talk about tell want

Informal		Formal
get	→	1 <u>receive</u>
extra	→	2 _____
3 _____	→	would like
need	→	4 _____
5 _____	→	discuss
get in touch with	→	6 _____
7 _____	→	concerning/regarding
make sure	→	8 _____
9 _____	→	provide somebody with
10 _____	→	inform
boss	→	11 _____
12 _____	→	further/greater
13 _____	→	searching
ask for	→	14 _____
work/job	→	15 _____
16 _____	→	demonstrate

b Complete the following sentences using the formal words in Exercise 6a. In sentences 4 and 5, why is *should* used instead of *if*?

- 1 I am writing in response to our telephone conversation on 9th May regarding the secretarial vacancy.
- 2 I have recently graduated with a Master's degree in computing and am currently _____ for suitable _____ in the electronics field.
- 3 I would appreciate the opportunity to meet you, where I could _____ my skills, capabilities and professional experience in _____ detail.
- 4 I would be happy to _____ you _____ further references should you require them.
- 5 Should you _____ any _____ information _____ my application, please do not hesitate to _____ me.

c Rewrite the underlined sections of the following sentences using more appropriate formal language. Try to use the word in brackets.

- 1 I am writing about your ad for a Business Development Manager in *The Economist*. (response) in response to your advertisement
- 2 I am writing to ask if you've got any vacancies at the moment in your human resources department. (currently) _____
- 3 I am writing to apply for the financial administrator job. (position) _____
- 4 As you will see from my CV, my experience and qualifications are what you're looking for. (requirements) _____
- 5 The manager of your Milan Branch told me to get in touch with you about the opening for a media consultant. (recommended) _____
- 6 Here's a copy of my CV, and I look forward to an opportunity to demonstrate how my professional experience and skills would benefit Star Electronics. (attach) _____
- 7 If you need any more info about my application, please do not hesitate to contact me. (should) _____
- 8 Thanks for your time and consideration. (would) _____

d The following extract from a cover letter is too informal. Rewrite the extract using appropriate formal language.

Dear Sarah,

I saw your advert for a job as a secretary on the Internet last week. I want to apply for the job.

I've been working as a secretary at Gordon's Financial Services in Barcelona for the last three years, but I'm looking for a new job in Milan because my husband has just got a new job with his company in Milan.

I've heard a lot about your company. I think it's one of the biggest financial service companies in Milan. I've worked for years in this area (over six years) and think that this has given me the experience that your company needs.

If you want to meet to talk about how my skills and experience can benefit your company in the future, I would be happy to come in and meet you.

Kind regards, Jane

Dear Ms Mattin,

Writing a cover letter

- 7 a Look at the example of a bad cover letter that Felix sent Vicky. In pairs, discuss the mistakes he has labelled (a–o).

Baldrick College
Swinton
SW4 8BT
Nat1987@bcs.ac.uk
PrincessNL@gmail.com
14 October 2008

Ace Consultants
45 Strand
London WC2 8LK

b Dear Sir or Madam,

c I would like to apply for a job at your company when I graduate this summer.

d f I have always wanted to work with a strategic management consultancy firm which helps it's clients make lasting and substantial improvements, and I cannot imagine a better place to work than Hillier and Thomson.

e g I am extremely confident that my university course has prepared me for a career in management. Whilst at university I had a number of part-time jobs and I would say that my main strength is my ability to get on with other people. I am a very sociable person and through a range of social activities I have perfected my outstanding communication skills.

h i k

l j As you will see from my CV I am not familiar with many computer programmes, but I would like to learn and am sure that I would pick things up quickly. I really want a job which will give me the chance to travel, as this is a particular interest of mine.

m n I would be truly grateful to be invited for an interview and to be given a chance to further discuss my application.

o Yours,
Natalie Laurent

b Match Felix's advice (1–15) to the appropriate parts of the cover letter (a–o) in Exercise 7a.

- 1 Find a named person to write to. b
- 2 Make your letter specific to each company you write to and make it clear what job you're applying for. ____
- 3 Don't copy phrases from websites and brochures. Use your own words. ____
- 4 Make sure the name of the company matches the one in the address. ____
- 5 Research and be clear about the job you are applying for. Strategic management consulting is not the same as management. ____
- 6 Mistakes of spelling and grammar are unacceptable – always double-check. ____
- 7 Make it clear what you bring to the organisation, not just what you can gain. ____
- 8 Don't apologise for skills you haven't got, especially where they are not a strict requirement of the job. ____
- 9 Don't exaggerate your level of skill. Always use examples to substantiate what you say. ____
- 10 End your letter '*Yours sincerely*' (if to a named person) or '*Yours faithfully*' (if not). ____
- 11 Be polite and respectful but not excessively so. ____
- 12 Don't be vague about your aptitudes. Make sure you know what the recruiter is looking for and then provide specific evidence, highlighting key parts of your CV. ____
- 13 Don't start all/most paragraphs with '*I*'. ____
- 14 Use apostrophes correctly (here *its* not *it's*). ____
- 15 Just give one email address (keep this plain and sensible). ____

c Rewrite the cover letter in Exercise 7a, using the language and advice from this unit. Then compare your letter with the model letter on page 111.

d Research a real job that you would be interested in applying for. Spend some time researching the company and the position in more depth. Think about the skills and experience that you have that are relevant for the post and then write a cover letter for the job.