Workshop: Cover Letter That Gets Read

Mine the Ad, Build the Four Paragraphs, Open Strong

Bonus material for uniquestoremarket.com's "How to Write a Cover Letter That Gets Read" guide. A facilitator script that walks a client or small group through the guide's method live: what the letter is for, the three requirements in a job ad, the Hook / Proof / Fit / Ask structure, and the opening line.

Session objective

By the end of this session, each participant leaves with: (1) three requirements pulled from a real job ad in priority order, (2) a first draft of all four paragraphs (Hook, Proof, Fit, Ask) for that application, and (3) an opening line that passes the "could someone applying for a different job have written this?" test.

Format and length

75 minutes. Works 1-on-1 or with a small group (up to 6 keeps feedback workable). Each participant brings one real job ad they intend to apply for, plus their CV and, if they have one, their last cover letter. Needs: paper or a shared doc, and a timer.

Agenda

1. Opening — the same opening, twice (10 min)

Read the guide's two openings aloud. Weak: "I am writing to apply for the position of Operations Coordinator as advertised on your website. I have five years of experience in operations and believe I would be a good fit for your team." Strong: "You're hiring an Operations Coordinator to get a warehouse move done without pausing shipments. I ran exactly that move for a 40-person distributor last year — we lost half a day, not the two weeks everyone predicted." Ask: "What does the second one prove that the first does not?" Land the point: the letter exists to show you understood the role and can do the part they are worried about. Everything the CV already shows is spent space.

2. Strip a letter, set the target (10 min)

Exercise from Ch. 1. Each participant takes a previous letter (or the sample from the first agenda item) and deletes every sentence that only repeats the CV, then counts the surviving words. Then each writes one sentence naming what their letter has to prove for the target job. Check it with the guide's test: does it name something the CV can't show? Set the target: 200–300 words, four short paragraphs.

3. Mine the ad for three things (15 min)

Exercise from Ch. 2. Participants highlight every sentence describing a problem or responsibility in their real ad, and ignore culture and benefits. Then apply the three signals: the first third of the ad, ideas repeated in different words, and what the job title promises. Walk the guide's Customer Support Lead example: response times mentioned twice in different words, "Lead" means managing people, and Zendesk is a tool that belongs on the CV. Each participant writes exactly three requirements in priority order and marks which one is the problem the role exists to solve.

4. Draft the four paragraphs (20 min)

Exercise from Ch. 3. On a blank page, write four headings: Hook, Proof, Fit, Ask, and fill them in that order. Give the lengths: Hook 2–3 sentences, Proof 3–5, Fit 2–3, Ask 1–2. Show the guide's Proof example as the model: one story, one number (31 hours to first reply down to four, same five people), aimed at requirement number one. Participants draft all four paragraphs. Remind them: Proof is aimed at requirement one only, not spread across all three.

5. Fit test and Ask check (10 min)

In pairs: cover the Fit paragraph and ask whether it would still be true for a rival company. If yes, rewrite it. Then read each other's Ask: does it state a specific request and the writer's availability? Compare with the guide's example (twenty minutes to walk through how they'd triage the current queue, free most afternoons this week). Cut any “I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.”

6. Opening line and close (10 min)

Exercise from Ch. 4. Each participant writes their current opening, then asks the guide's question: “Could someone applying for a different job at a different company have written this?” If yes, rewrite using one of the three working openings: problem-first, number-first, or observation-first. Share one rewrite aloud per person. Close by giving the Ch. 5 homework: cut the draft by 20% without removing a paragraph, then run the three pre-send checks — company name spelled correctly, nothing contradicts the CV, PDF named FirstnameLastname-CoverLetter-Company.pdf.

Facilitator notes

- The most common failure is a letter that restates the CV in prose. If a participant's Hook starts with “I am writing to,” send them back to the Ch. 1 strip exercise before drafting anything else.
- Participants tend to pick a long list of requirements. Hold them to exactly three, in priority order, and make them put tools and software aside for the CV (Ch. 2).
- A Proof paragraph that tries to cover all three requirements reads thin. One story, at least one number, aimed at requirement one (Ch. 3).
- Any number in the opening has to be real and verifiable (Ch. 4). Do not let anyone invent one to make the sentence sound stronger.
- Pairs well as a live companion to the full guide at uniquestoremarket.com/write-a-cover-letter-that-gets-read — the guide spreads this over five days; this session compresses Ch. 1–4 into one sitting and leaves the Ch. 5 cut, proof and tailoring as homework.

Full guide: uniquestoremarket.com/write-a-cover-letter-that-gets-read