

# Cover Letter Tips & Advice



Your cover letter is your first and best chance to attract an employer's attention. Our expert cover letter tips and advice are designed to give you the knowledge you will need to create a powerful, personalized cover letter that will set you apart and help land you that interview!

## Featured Cover Letter Tips:

1. Four Secrets to a Confident Cover Letter
2. Five Things All Great Cover Letters Have In Common
3. Four Statements that Need to Appear in Your Cover Letter

## 1. Four Secrets to a Confident Cover Letter

In the job search, as in life, confidence is key. A little moxie can encourage others to have faith in you, and if you're willing to back yourself up when the road ahead looks uncertain, those around you—including total strangers—will be more likely to believe in you. When you walk, talk, shake hands, smile, frown, sit down, or stand up, your confidence comes through in your actions. To bring that same quality and strength to your written words, make sure your cover letter contains these four elements:

### 1. Sentence Flow

Before you send your cover letter off to employers, read it aloud at least once. Your sentences should be structured just as they would be if you delivered this message to your reader from a podium, over the phone, or from the other side of a dinner table. Your words should flow together smoothly, and each thought should link fluidly and effortlessly to the next.

### 2. Positivity

A confident cover letter is positive, from beginning to end. You don't have to fawn all over your reader or add lots of exclamation points, but your words should all have positive connotations. They should imply that:

- You feel good about who you are (even about your past mistakes).
- You're at a strong and excellent place in life (even if you don't feel this way every minute of the day).
- You have passion and energy to spare. You aren't angry, regretful, apologetic, or hung up about anything that happened in the past. You aren't worried or hesitant. You're ready for anything.

### 3. Personal Detail

Your cover letter should include at least one or two details about who you are as a person—what drives you (besides your desire for this job) and what events have brought to this point in your life and career (besides the company award you won or the revenue increases you generated last quarter). If you like skiing, you grew up in another country, or you chose this field when you were five years old, sharing this fact can give your resume a strong, confident human voice.

### 4. Relevance to the Position

The more your skills and background link directly to this specific position, the better. Show your readers that you've been searching high and low, and you've never seen a position so perfectly suited to who you are and what you can do. Use every bit of information available to you to do this. The position involves consumer electronics sales? Perfect! You've been a salesperson for three years and you've enjoyed consumer electronics for twenty! The position requires a Masters in Zoology? Perfect! You have an MBA, but in college you minored in zoology! Don't apologize or focus on small disconnects. Turn your attention to similarities only.

***Use Your Cover Letter to Sell Yourself***

## 2. Five Things All Great Cover Letters Have In Common

Regardless of the industry or the level of the position, every successful cover letter shares a few things in common with every other great cover letter that finds its way onto the “yes” list. These letters all come with different writing styles and different core messages, and they’re sent and received from every geographic area of the country. But they all do these five things. And they do them well.



### 1. Allow hiring managers to picture a real human being on the other side of the transaction.

Few employers are interested in cover letters that feel like they were written by a hired service, a machine, or a spam generator. If one glance suggests that your letter could have been sent to five hundred other recipients without a single adjustment, that’s not great. It’s okay to use a template letter that you edit in a minor way for each employer (otherwise it would take an hour to complete each application), but your success will lie in how personal your letter sounds and feels on the receiving end.

### 2. Inspire employers to take a chance, take a risk, or invest a little time and effort in order to find out more.

Your cover letter can’t get you a job. But it can get you an interview. Once your letter and resume get you past the gates, the rest will be up to you. These documents don’t have to convince anyone to hire you—they just have to make employers want to talk to you in person. Think of the job search like the dating process: The cover letter is just an icebreaker. If your icebreaker fails, then the process stops right there. But if it succeeds, the real work can begin.

### 3. Offer a few words or phrases that managers will remember, even if they forget the rest.

Some managers can point to a valued employee and quote a memorable line from her cover letter even ten years after her hiring date. In fact, lots of managers can do this. And often, the selection process begins with a conversation similar to this one:

Manager 1: So out of thirty resumes, we have to narrow it down to three. Let’s go with the one guy, the one who used to work for the Jones Company. And that girl...

Manager 2: The one who grew up in Spain and speaks four languages?

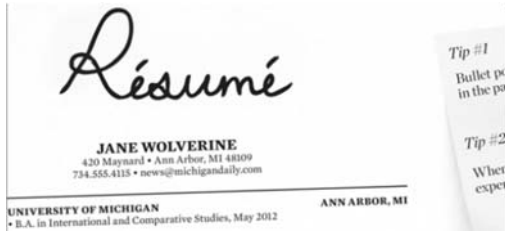
Manager 1: Yes. And that other woman, the one who said she’s “not afraid to make mistakes, but she never makes the same mistake twice.” I think she’ll really fit in here.

### 4. Show managers a light at the end of the tunnel.

The hiring process can be difficult, expensive, risky, and unpleasant. But a position that has to be filled has to be filled—and often within a high-pressure timeline. So give managers a reason to hope that the end is near and this position is about to be placed in confident, reliable hands. Show that you’re ready to take the wheel so they can let go.

### 5. Most important: Great cover letters are readable, clear, and enjoyable

### 3. Four Statements that Need to Appear in Your Cover Letter



An effective cover letter accomplishes two goals: It shines a spotlight on your resume and supporting materials (like work samples), and it convinces potential employers to call you in for an interview. Your cover letter probably won't get you hired on the spot, but it can certainly move you forward to the next stage of the selection process.

So if you want employers to pick up the phone as soon as they put down your application, how can you make your case in a way that's clear, brief, professional, and interesting? How can you use this one-page message to inspire confidence in your abilities and outshine your competition? Start by making sure these four statements appear somewhere on that page.

#### Four Key Messages in Your Cover Letter

The following four statements will make you stand out as a candidate:

##### 1. A description of similar work you've handled in the past.

Especially at the entry level and mid-career level, managers like to see assurance that you've done this kind of work before. Hiring is expensive and so is training, and both of these can easily go wrong and result in hassles and costly headaches.

So regardless of your skillsets and other credentials, managers will skim your resume and cover letter looking for evidence that you've handled this kind of software, managed this kind of project, dealt with this type of client, sold this type of product, or worked behind this kind of counter at least once before in your professional life.

##### 2. A brief summary of your entire job history.

The key word is "brief." Your cover letter is no place for an exhaustive laundry list of company names and position titles. But employers still like to get a sense of your basic career trajectory, since it gives them an idea of what you're used to, the type of culture in which you thrive, and the kinds of accomplishments that make you feel proud and fulfilled.

##### 3. The unique skills that make you perfect for this particular job.

As far as you can tell, this position will require someone who is great at Skill X, and you happen to be exceptionally competent and adapted to Skill X. Let your employer know that you aren't just smart and hardworking—you're smart, hardworking, and perfectly suited for this exact job in ways your competitors aren't.

##### 4. A brief description of what you want.

Again, brevity is key, but at some point in your cover letter you'll need to be clear about the kind of job you're looking for. If you're working your way to the executive level and this job can take you there, say this. If you thrive under high deadline pressure, mention this fact. If you love working closely with a small team in a collaborative environment, say this.

Your cover letter should be 80 percent focused on your employer's needs and how you can contribute to the company. But 20 percent should be focused on you. After all, this letter has everything to do with your own passions and your own future.

#### ***Be Clear About Your Skills & Ambitions***