

## 8 things to cut from your cover letter

A cover letter is like an introduction to a future employer – it's your first chance to make a good impression, and outline who you are and why you're suited to the job. So, when you set out to write it, there are some words you'd be wise to avoid.

The language you use in your cover letter can set you apart from the competition. While other people might use the same buzzwords and generic phrases that hiring managers see over and over, using active language that shows how and why you suit the role will help you stand out.

Here are eight words and phrases to cut from your cover letter – and what to think about writing instead.

1.

### **'To whom it may concern'**

It's an impersonal and dated greeting, says Mark Smith, Managing Director of recruitment agency people2people.

"If you can't find the name to address the letter to, use a job title, such as 'Dear hiring manager' or 'Dear recruitment manager'," he says.

"In the context of a cover letter, 'Dear' sounds more professional than 'Hi', but avoid 'Dear Sir or Madam' – it's a really outdated greeting."

2.

### **'Self-starter'**

Some terms are so overused that they've lost all meaning – and 'self-starter' is one of them, says Smith.

"It's a cliché and recruiters are tired of reading it," he says. If you want to show that you're motivated to succeed, Smith suggests including an example of when you have shown initiative and the results it delivered.

"Clichés provide very little value, so be specific about your qualities and achievements," Smith says. "If you initiated a new business development program, for example, what was the result?"

3.

### **'I believe'**

A cover letter is an opportunity to explain why you're the best person for the job, so use confident language and powerful, active verbs that highlight your relevant skills and experience.

“Phrases like ‘I believe I’m a strong communicator’ can give the impression that you are the only one who thinks this,” says Emma Harvey, Manager at recruitment agency Robert Walters in Melbourne. “It’s better to use stronger, active language and include examples to support your facts.”

For example: ‘I exceeded my budget by x per cent’, ‘I managed a team of four’, or ‘I created a new revenue stream that resulted in a \$x profit increase’.

4.  
**‘Dynamic’**

Another cliché that lacks clear meaning, ‘dynamic’ will not set you apart from other cover letters in the pile.

“It’s a word that belongs in a game of business buzzword bingo,” Smith says. “What does it really mean in the context of what you can bring to an organisation?”

Rather than ‘dynamic’, Smith suggests including an example of when and how you have adapted to change. “Adaptability is a valuable skill, but don’t just say ‘I’m adaptable’ – show examples.”

He also recommends replacing buzzwords with keywords that may be picked up by companies using Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) to scan and sort cover letters and resumes.

“Make sure you read the job ad carefully, identify the skills and relevant verbs and include them in your cover letter along with how and why they are relevant to you.”

5.  
**‘Dependable’**

Employers generally assume that workers are dependable, so there’s no value in writing it.

Harvey says it’s better to switch generic qualities like ‘dependable’, ‘reliable’ or ‘loyal’ for skills most relevant to the job you’re applying for.

“If the job ad mentions that you’ll be part of a team, include an example of collaborative work and what was achieved,” she says.

6.  
**‘Salary’**

Mentioning salary in your cover letter may limit your opportunity to negotiate, so don’t include it.

“Don’t mention your salary expectation, because it may not be aligned with the

employer's budget," Harvey says. "And avoid writing 'salary negotiable', because you may be selling yourself short. A cover letter is not the time to mention salary – save it for the job interview."

7.

#### **'People person'**

Almost every job will require you to work with at least one other person, so why mention it?

If teamwork is a vital part of the role, Smith recommends stating how you have worked with others to achieve something.

"For example, 'I initiated weekly team meetings to increase collaboration', and include the impact of this," he says.

8.

#### **'Incredible'**

While it's important to sound confident, avoid overreaching words and statements, like 'I am an incredible salesperson' or 'I delivered huge results'. You'll risk sounding arrogant or self-congratulatory.

"Let the results speak for themselves," Smith says. "Talk about the fact that you generated half a million dollars in sales or that there was a 30% increase while you were sales manager. This allows a recruiter to quantify your skills. It's hard to quantify a word like 'incredible' or 'fabulous'."

Your cover letter is an opportunity to set yourself apart from the competition. Give yourself the advantage by cutting out the clichés and generic phrases, and focus on showing examples of your skills and experience in action instead. That way, you'll be giving the employer a much better insight into what makes you someone they should consider for the role.

## **Read more:**

- [Cut these words from your resume immediately](#)
- [Cover letters: The good and the bad](#)
- [How to write a great cover letter](#)