

# Creating Effective Cover Letters

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## **1. Keep your letter short enough for someone to read in 10 seconds.**

Three paragraphs is the ideal length, says Vicki Salemi, a career expert and author of "[Big Career in the Big City](#)." Use the first paragraph as an intro, the second for the meat, and the third to wrap up.

## **2. Hook your reader's interest in the first paragraph.**

Tell your employer the title of the position for which you are applying and where you found it posted. Try a professional but bold statement that catches the reader's eye. Salemi suggests opening with a pitch.

## **3. Pick two or three skills from the job description and show you have them.**

Read the job description carefully and identify the top two or three qualities the company wants in a candidate, Salemi says. Then use your cover letter to demonstrate you have those skills, giving examples of when and how you've used them in the past.

## **4. Use numbers and statistics to back up your claims.**

It's good to say you're experienced with social media. But it's much, much better to say you led a successful social media campaign that generated 3.2 million followers and increased revenue by 3%. The goal, says Dan Schawbel, author of [Promote Yourself](#), is to present yourself as a proven results-getter and show that you can replicate your past successes at a new company.

## **5. Don't just rehash your résumé in paragraph form.**

The cover letter is designed to showcase your interest in the company and your best attributes for the position. That doesn't mean it needs an itemized list of your every job and achievement. To be sure, if you won an exceptional award or executed a stunning project, then make sure to highlight it in the letter.

## **6. Address your cover letter directly to the hiring manager or recruiter.**

Nothing says "I don't care about your company" like an opening of "To Whom It May Concern." That may have been OK before the advent of modern technology, but today it generally takes as little as a Google or LinkedIn search or a phone call to figure out the name of the hiring manager. Addressing your letter to the correct person (and spelling their name correctly!) will automatically ingratiate you to the reader and show that you've spent some time researching the company and position.

## **7. Customize your tone for the company culture.**

You might be applying to a Fortune 500 company, a startup, or something in the middle. No two companies are alike, not just in mission but also in culture. An important part of tailoring your cover letter to the company is striking the right tone, Schawbel says. If you know the place you're applying to has a casual vibe, then your letter can reflect that with pithy sentences and fun anecdotes that show an easygoing side of your personality. On the other hand, if the company seems to have a formal culture, it's probably best to use traditional phrases like "Dear Mr./Ms." and straightforward prose.

## **8. Proofread carefully, and consider getting a second pair of eyes.**

How you absolutely don't want to be remembered is as the person that submitted the sloppy cover letter. So proof, proof, and proof again, or enlist a friend to look at your document with a fresh set of eyes. A typo, grammar mistake, misspelling, or other error can "leap off the page in a bad way," Salemi says, and is the easiest way to let a hiring manager knock your application straight from their desk to the trash bin. Don't give them the chance.

*Adapted from Business Insider "New Rules of the Perfect Cover Letter", 2013.*