

Career Advice

## Cover letters

# 8 things to cut from your cover letter



Jobsdb content team – updated on 31 January, 2026

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A cover letter is your introduction to a future employer — a short yet powerful outline of who you are and why you're a strong fit for the role. In Hong Kong's competitive job market, where efficiency and clarity are prized, the way you express yourself matters just as much as the skills you bring.

Instead of leaning on overused buzzwords, write in an active, specific way that reflects both your professionalism and your understanding of the role. Here are eight words and phrases to cut from your cover letter — and what to write instead.

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 impersonal and dated. In Hong Kong’s highly connected business community, taking the time to find a name shows initiative and respect,” says Nick Chow of [Macleans Group](#).

If you can’t find the name in the job ad or on the company website, use a job title such as “Dear Hiring Manager” or “Dear Recruitment Manager.” “Dear” remains more professional than “Hi,” but steer clear of “Dear Sir or Madam” — it sounds old-fashioned in 2026.

## 2. ‘Self-starter’

This phrase has become a cliché — it sounds impressive but now adds little value. If you want to show you’re motivated, give an example instead. “You may explain how you launched a customer engagement campaign that increased loyalty sign-ups by 40%, or how you implemented a workflow improvement that saved your team hours each week,” Chow suggests.

Recruiters in Hong Kong, especially those in fast-paced sectors like finance, logistics, and tech, will appreciate concrete results over generic self-praise.

## 3. ‘I believe’ or ‘I feel’

A cover letter is not the place for hesitation. Confident language shows maturity and self-awareness—both highly valued traits in Hong Kong’s results-driven workplaces.

Phrases like “I believe I’m a strong communicator” sound uncertain. Instead, write: “I’m a strong communicator who explains complex ideas clearly to both local and regional teams.” Give evidence: “At my previous role at the bank, I coordinated presentations to senior management and cross-border teams, ensuring projects ran smoothly.”

In professional communication, confidence is key — without sounding arrogant.

## 4. ‘Dynamic’

Another buzzword that means little on its own. “Rather than claim you’re dynamic, show it through action verbs and examples that reflect adaptability, a prized quality in Hong Kong’s rapidly-evolving industries,” says Chow. Your choice of verbs —

thrive, lead, spearhead — speaks louder than the label itself.

You might write: “I spearheaded the integration of new ESG reporting tools following new SFC guidelines,” or “I thrived under a shifting regulatory environment by introducing agile work practices.”

Chow 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.

## 5. ‘Dependable’

Employers already assume that workers are dependable, so stating it adds no value. In Hong Kong, where teamwork, trust, and punctuality are baseline expectations, it’s better to highlight collaboration and outcomes, according to Chow.

If the role involves teamwork, show how you contributed to concrete results: “Collaborated with design and marketing teams to deliver a product launch two weeks ahead of schedule.”

Specific achievements speak far louder than adjectives like dependable, reliable, or loyal.

## 6. ‘Salary’

Avoid discussing salary expectations in a cover letter. In Hong Kong, where salary negotiations follow later in the process, mentioning figures too early can come across as premature or limit your negotiating room.

Writing “salary negotiable” isn’t helpful either. Keep the focus on your fit, not your finances. Once you reach the interview stage, that’s your chance to discuss compensation more strategically.

## 7. ‘People person’

‘Nearly every job involves working closely with at least one other person — across departments, time zones, and often languages. Instead of calling yourself a “people person,” “illustrate your interpersonal skills through action,” Chow says.

You could write: “I initiated weekly cross-department check-ins to improve communication and reduce project delays by 15%.” This shows interpersonal awareness and problem-solving — qualities every employer values.

## 8. ‘Incredible’

Confidence is good; exaggeration is not. Words like “incredible” or “amazing” risk sounding boastful. Overreaching words and statements, like ‘I am an incredible salesperson’ or ‘I delivered huge results’. You’ll risk sounding arrogant or self-congratulatory

“Let your numbers do the talking,” Chow advises. “Increased client retention by 25%,” or “secured new business worth HK\$3 million in my first year.” Quantifying your success leaves a stronger and more professional impression than vague superlatives.

Your cover letter is your chance to stand out. In Hong Kong’s multicultural and competitive job market, precise language, clear examples, and professional humility will always make a better impression than buzzwords or clichés.

Show how you’ve applied your skills in real situations, back it up with measurable results, and your cover letter will reflect exactly what Hong Kong employers are looking for — capability, clarity, and confidence.