

Top 10 Power Tips for Cover Letters and CVs

Your New Mindset

In a job search, the best approach is to put yourself in the imagined shoes of the employers—to see things from their perspective. Picture yourself as a member of the search committee: what are your top priorities and concerns? What would you most want to find out about the candidates?

Sharpen Your Cover Letters

1. Take Aim

The cover letter is not really about *you*, the applicant. It's about the employer's needs and how you can meet them. So don't write about everything you've done in your fantastic career thus far. Instead, stick to highlighting the most relevant experience that meets *the needs of the employer*.

2. Get Organized

Your cover letters need to be *one page only*. Really. And each paragraph needs a clear topic and focus:

- First paragraph: name the specific job you're applying for and the institution. Include how you found out about the opening, plus WHY you're attracted to teaching specifically *at that school*.
- Second paragraph: focus on your relevant teaching experience and what is distinctive about HOW you teach.
- Third paragraph: detail the highlights and range of your performance experience and how it informs your teaching.
- Fourth paragraph: offer any other genuinely relevant experience plus your degrees and pertinent training. Note: delay any mention of your education and degrees until the end of the letter to avoid being immediately labeled "young and inexperienced."

3. Check Your Tone

Confident is fine; arrogant is not. Stating that you are the "perfect" or the "ideal" candidate for the job is presumptuous since the people who decide who's right for the job are your readers.

4. Customize

Tailor each cover letter to the prospective job and institution. From letter to letter, what changes are your particular reasons for wanting to teach at each school (based on your online research). Depending on the particular job requirements and priorities, you may also need to emphasize different aspects of your experience in each letter. The order of your examples and highlights should mirror the employer's priority order found in the job description.

5. Triple Proof It

Use spell check, grammar check, and read your drafts OUT LOUD. Why? Because as musicians, our ears are often better than our eyes at detecting awkward transitions, fuzzy details, and run-on sentences. Have at least two trusted mentors—preferably people who have served on search committees—read your drafts before you send anything out.

Power Up Your CV

6. Make it Bulletproof

Use bullets to showcase what, who, and how you teach. Include:

- the age range and levels of your students
- the repertoire you teach (name 4-5 diverse composers to illustrate your breadth)
- any curricula you developed
- evidence of your students' achievements (competitions won, acceptances to festivals, schools)
- examples of creative teaching strategies or assignments
- what lessons/classes typically involve (e.g. "lessons include sight reading, improvisation, and harmonic analysis" or "Lessons emphasize creative problem solving and motivated practice techniques" or "class projects included 2 community performances.")

If your bullets would be true of 75% of your colleagues, then you aren't getting at what makes your teaching unique. Think about when you helped a student overcome a major difficulty: what was the creative approach you used? Think back over what your students find particularly engaging and effective.

7. Divide and Conquer

Organize your experience into categories, such as Teaching Experience, Performance Experience (with subcategories), Awards and Honors, Education—and depending on your experience—Recordings, Publications, and Community Service. To tailor a CV to one opening, read the full job description carefully. If they are looking for recruiting, or general classroom experience, these may be additional categories to create, if you have the appropriate experience. The categories you use and their order should reflect the employer's priorities.

Avoid overwhelming readers: if you have more than seven items in a category, try creating subcategories. With fewer items in each list, you can better highlight your most impressive and relevant credits.

8. Add In

Your "smaller" performances and outreach experience. If you believe only "big name" venues count, think again. Showing that you've performed in all kinds of community settings—clubs, hospitals, senior centers, K-12 schools—is good evidence that you'll be able to recruit and help strengthen the school's ties to the local community.

9. Leave Out

Your GPA	Hyperbole, generalizations, or clichés: go with facts
Your high school degree	Dollar amounts of awards or grants
Your pre-college music program	Titles (no "Professor" or "Dr.")
Anything vague or confusing	Any "untruths," "embellishments," or "stretching" of the truth

10. Check the Eye Candy

The layout, readability, formatting, font, and your letterhead (the design of your name, instrument, contact info at the top of all your materials)—these all matter. They are the committee's first impression of you, so be professional and easy on the eyes.

**** Guarantee:** If you follow these recommendations carefully, I can guarantee you'll be ahead of the majority of applicants. By putting your best foot forward you'll be that much closer to landing your next job.
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