

## THE SUCCESSFUL VET

Cover Letter — A Worked Example

### A Cover Letter That Leads With the Mission

Below is a complete cover letter built on the company-first structure. The applicant is fictional, a former Army logistics NCO moving into operations, and the company is invented for the example. Read the letter first. Then read the notes that follow each paragraph to see why it works.

Notice what the letter never does: it never opens with what the applicant wants, and it never lists duties. Every paragraph points back to the company's mission.

#### THE LETTER

##### Marcus Reyes

marcus.reyes@email.com • (210) 555-0147 • San Antonio, TX • March 4, 2026

Dear Hiring Team,

Redline Freight is rebuilding regional trucking around predictable, on-time delivery instead of the lowest possible bid, and you are doing it in markets the big carriers have written off. That caught my attention because I spent six years keeping supply moving in places where late was not an option and excuses did not help anyone. When I read that Redline is opening three new terminals in the Southwest this year and staffing them with people who can build operations from the ground up, I knew this was a mission I wanted to help carry.

**WHY THIS WORKS:** *The first sentence is entirely about Redline, not Marcus. It names something specific (rebuilding regional trucking around reliability, opening Southwest terminals) that proves he actually researched them. His own background only shows up as the reason their mission resonates.*

That focus on reliability is exactly the work I care about. In the Army, I ran the supply operation for a unit of roughly four hundred people, often in remote locations where a single missed delivery could stop everything. I learned that on-time is not luck. It is the result of clear systems, honest tracking, and people who own the outcome. Building that kind of dependable operation in a brand-new terminal, for a company that has made reliability its whole promise, is the work I want to be doing next.

**WHY THIS WORKS:** *This bridges his service to their mission. The military experience appears as the reason Redline's promise resonates, not as a duty list. He translates everything into plain civilian language (no PLL, no MOS) and ties the lesson he learned directly to what the company sells.*

Here is what I would bring to one of those new terminals. In my last assignment, I cut average resupply time by 31 percent by mapping out where the delays actually happened and fixing the three steps that caused most of them. I am strong at standing up a process from nothing and getting a team to trust it, which is exactly what a new terminal needs in its first year. My aim would be simple: get your Southwest terminals hitting their on-time targets faster than the plan expects, so Redline's reputation for reliability holds even as you grow.

**WHY THIS WORKS:** *The payoff. It opens with a real, quantified result (cut resupply time 31 percent) and ties his skill directly to their specific challenge (standing up new terminals). The closing line states the outcome in terms Redline cares about, their on-time reputation, not in terms of what Marcus wants.*

Thank you for considering my application. I would welcome the chance to talk about how I can help Redline make on-time delivery the standard in markets everyone else gave up on. I am ready to get to work.

**WHY THIS WORKS:** *Short and forward-looking. It thanks them, restates their mission in one vivid line (on-time delivery where others gave up), and closes with quiet confidence. No rehashing the resume, no begging.*

Sincerely,

**Marcus Reyes**

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## USE AI TO SHARPEN IT, NOT WRITE IT

*Do not ask AI to write your cover letter. It will hand you the same generic, you-first letter every other applicant turns in. Use it the way the book teaches: as a force multiplier on work you drive. These three prompts keep you in the driver's seat.*

### 1. Research the company (run this first)

*Best in Perplexity, because it cites sources you can check.*

"I'm applying to [Company] for a [role] position. Act as a research assistant. Tell me, with sources I can verify: what is this company actually building or trying to do right now, what have they said publicly about their mission or values, and what recent news, projects, or changes are they working on? Give me three specific things I could genuinely reference in a cover letter to show I've done my homework. Do not make anything up. If you're not sure, say so."

### 2. Critique the draft you wrote

*Use this on a letter you've already drafted. It edits your work instead of replacing it.*

"Here is a cover letter I wrote: [paste]. The job is [role] at [Company]. Critique it against four rules. One, the first sentence should be about the company, not about me. Two, my background should appear as the reason their mission resonates, not as a list of my duties. Three, there should be at least one specific accomplishment with a real number. Four, it should avoid the verbs led, managed, oversaw, and directed. Point out exactly where I break each rule and suggest a fix, but do not rewrite the whole letter. Keep my voice."

### 3. Unstick one paragraph

*When the opening is the part that won't come, this gives you options to react to.*

"I'm stuck on the opening of a cover letter for [role] at [Company]. Here's what I know about them: [paste a fact or two]. Here's my background: [one sentence]. Write me three different opening sentences that lead with what the company is doing and why it matters, not with what I want. Keep each to one or two sentences, plain language, no buzzwords."

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## THE PATTERN TO COPY

Strip away the specifics and the shape is simple. Their mission, then why it resonates with you, then the impact you can have on it, then a short close. If your first sentence is about you, rewrite it. The whole letter answers one question for the reader: how does hiring this person move our mission forward?

*Want the blank version? The fill-in-the-blank Cover Letter Template walks you through this same structure with prompts for every line.*

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## SEE BLANK EXAMPE BELOW

## Cover Letter Template

Company-First Structure

[Your Name] [your.email@example.com] [(555) 555-5555] [City, State] [Date]

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Dear [Hiring Manager name, or “Hiring Team” if you can’t find it],

### PARAGRAPH 1 — WHY THIS COMPANY, WHY NOW

**HOW TO WRITE THIS PART:** Open with *THEM*, not you. Name the specific thing the company is building or the problem they are solving, and say plainly what pulled you toward it. This first sentence proves you researched them and are not mass-applying. Do not mention yourself yet.

[Company] is [describe what they do or are building, in one specific phrase — a product, a mission, a problem they’re solving]. That work caught my attention because [say plainly why it matters to you — the real reason it stands out from every other company hiring for this role]. When I read that [name a specific detail — a recent project, a value they state, a direction they’re heading], I knew this was a mission I wanted to help move forward.

### PARAGRAPH 2 — WHY IT RESONATES WITH YOU

**HOW TO WRITE THIS PART:** Now bridge their mission to your story. Connect what they do to something you lived or care about. Your military or personal background shows up here as the *REASON* their mission resonates, not as a list of your duties.

That mission lines up with where I’ve already spent my energy. During [your service or recent experience, in plain civilian words], I [describe a real situation that connects to their mission — a problem you saw, something you cared about, work you did that points the same direction]. It taught me [the lesson or conviction that now draws you to this company’s work]. Helping a team like yours solve that at scale is exactly the work I want to be doing.

### PARAGRAPH 3 — THE IMPACT YOU CAN HAVE ON THEIR MISSION

**HOW TO WRITE THIS PART:** This is the payoff. Show the concrete value you bring and tie it directly to their goals. Use a real result with a number if you have one. Every sentence should answer: how does hiring me move this company’s mission forward?

Here is what I would bring to that work. At [previous role, company, or unit], I [a specific accomplishment with a result and a number — what you delivered, cut, built, saved, or improved]. I’m strong at [one or two skills that directly serve their mission, in plain language], and I’d put that to work on [the specific challenge or goal of theirs you’d help with]. My aim would be simple: [the outcome you’d drive for them, stated as a result they care about].

### PARAGRAPH 4 — CLOSE WITH SHARED PURPOSE

**HOW TO WRITE THIS PART:** Keep it short and forward-looking. Thank them, restate your interest in *THEIR* mission in one line, and invite the next step. A few sentences, warm and professional. This is a note, not another resume.

Thank you for considering my application. I’d welcome the chance to talk about how I can help [Company] [restate their mission in a few words — the thing you’re excited to contribute to]. I’m ready to get to work.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

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## BEFORE YOU SEND IT

- The first sentence is about the company, not about you.
- You named something specific about them that proves you did your research.
- Your background appears as the reason their mission resonates, not as a duty list.
- At least one accomplishment has a real number attached.
- You replaced every gold bracket and deleted these instruction notes.
- It fits on one page and reads in under a minute.
- You avoided the verbs led, managed, oversaw, and directed in favor of words that show a result.