

The Legal Cover Letter: An Overview

Cover Letters and Other Correspondence

Cover Letter Preparation

A personal, well-crafted cover letter should accompany each resume you send to an employer. This letter is your first contact with a prospective employer, and it offers you a first opportunity to make a positive first impression on the firm or organization. It should establish logical reasons for sending your resume to a particular employer (your experience, geographical considerations, personal contact, etc.) and state your interest in and qualifications for the particular type of work.

Your cover letter and any other correspondence should be neatly typed on quality paper. Use paper that coordinates with your resume. Letters must be originals; never use copies. Neatness, proper punctuation, and correct spelling are a must. Proofread and have another person proofread. Errors can happen and must be avoided. Employers will assume that the quality of your letter reflects the quality of your work.

Always address the cover letter to a specific person—never send a letter “to whom it may concern.” In order of choice, use 1) the person in charge of hiring, 2) the person who interviews on-campus, 3) a graduate of F.S.U. College of Law, or 4) the senior partner in the firm. Check with the Career Placement Office for information regarding on-campus interviewers. Martindale-Hubbell, NALP, Lexis, and Westlaw are also sources of information.

Mention any pertinent information about yourself not available in your resume. Close your letter by stating your interest in and availability for a personal interview. If you plan to be in the area at a certain time, mention that fact and indicate that you will call regarding an interview at that time. Direct your letters to each employer; do not give the impression of a standardized form letter.

In every letter you write, the approach you take and the language you use are critical. Be professional, clear and concise, but let your letter also reflect some of your personality. A good rule for judging the effectiveness of your correspondence is to read over it as though you were the person receiving it. Be creative with your letters. You should tailor your letters to meet your specific needs.

Cover Letter Structure

Your Address
Date of Writing

Inside Address

Dear Mr./Ms. _____:

First Paragraph: Introduce yourself. Tell why you are writing, name the position for which you are applying, and tell how you heard of this opening.

If you are writing to someone who is a “friend of a friend,” mention this person’s name and indicate that he/she suggested you write **in the very first line of the letter** to get the person’s attention.

If met an attorney through a non-business setting, reintroduce yourself.

If you are writing to an alumni/ae, indicate this connection as well.

Second Paragraph: State your interest.

Tell why you are interested in working for this employer, and specify your interests in this type of work. If you have experience, sources, publications, or clinical experience, be sure to point out what particular achievements you have accomplished in this field or type of work.

Third Paragraph: Establish your value.

Use this paragraph to supplement, not replicate, the information on your resume. Refer to the attached resume which gives a summary of your qualifications and a description of past employment or to whatever material (such as a writing sample) you are using to illustrate your training, interests, and experience.

Fourth Paragraph: Assert your method of follow up

Have an appropriate closing to pave the way for the interview by giving your telephone number or by offering some similar suggestion for an immediate and favorable reply. Let the employer know if you will be in that area or that you will call to arrange for an interview and that your resume is enclosed.

Sincerely,
Your Signature
Your name (typed)
Enclosure

Follow Up Correspondence

Once you have sent your cover letter to an employer, you may not get an immediate response. You may have to contact the employer again after your initial try. If this is the case, **wait about two weeks** for a response to your first letter before following up with another letter or a telephone call to ensure the employer received your resume. Some students hesitate to call an employer under these circumstances. **Persistence in follow-up is considered a positive quality.** Being a pest, however, is not. If you receive a negative (we do not have any openings) response, then remove that employer from your list. If you receive a “putting off” response (we’ve been too busy to even look at resumes), ask when you should call back and then follow up.

Ten Tips to Remember

- **Avoid typos** and grammatical errors at all costs. Have someone proofread your letter.
- Sometimes **less is more**. You should not restate everything that is in your resume.
- Do not address your letter to “Hiring Partner” or “Recruitment Coordinator”. Take the time to find out the **name and spelling** of the individual.
- Show that you’ve done your **homework** on the firm and know its areas of practice.
- Do not **exaggerate**. Lying will ruin your credibility.
- Remember, lawyers are a pretty conservative group. Stay away from being cute or **too conversational**.
- Focus on **what you can provide** the employer, not why this job is the perfect opportunity for you.
- Remember, you have to **stand out**. Don’t write a boring, generic cover letter which sounds like something you are sending hundreds of other employers.
- The **tone** of your letter is crucial. You want to be confident and enthusiastic without sounding cocky.
- Don’t shy away from mentioning **connections** if you know someone in the firm.
- Establish a **geographic tie** for out-of-state employers.