

Resumes and cover letters are essential to the job search process. Many of the same rules apply to both, but one is not a restatement of the other. They are complementary, working best when job seekers understand the strengths of each format and spend a good deal of time creating and refining them. These “writing samples” are often the first impression you make on a potential employer.

In this section we will discuss some topics pertaining to writing effective resumes and cover letters:

- Style
- Content
- Tone
- Format
- Follow-up

RESUMES

Ideally, a resume is a well-structured, easy-to-read presentation of your capabilities and accomplishments. Its purpose is to intrigue a prospective employer to the point of inviting you for an interview. A resume is not a biography of your life, a catalog of your skills, or a job application. Because 99% of first contacts with prospective employers are resumes, more job opportunities are lost because of poor resumes than any other factor in the job hunt.

Employer surveys reveal that a resume gets two reads totaling 20 to 30 seconds. First, the resume receives a visual scan to determine whether it is attractive, interesting, and well organized. Second, it receives a content assessment to determine whether your background meets the employer’s needs sufficiently to proceed with an interview. It is critical to create a resume that:

- Is “well packaged”;
- Highlights the academic and work-related experience qualifying you for the position;
- Demonstrates additional skills, achievements, personal qualities, and interests that distinguish you from other job applicants;

- Suggests your ability to write well and succinctly; and
- Represents your ability to pay close attention to detail.

Resume Style

- Because a resume is a persuasive document, you should consider the following:
- Use active verbs to describe your accomplishments and capabilities.
- Use short sentences and eliminate unnecessary words (e.g., use “Edited college yearbook,” not “I edited the college yearbook”).
- Never use pronouns (e.g., “I,” “me,” or “my”).
- Avoid repetition. If you performed the same function in two different jobs, list it only once.
- Do not include introductory phrases such as “my duties included . . .” or “I was in charge of . . .” Instead, just plunge in: “Developed and implemented training curriculum to teach 11 Asian languages.”
- Use “legal jargon” where appropriate.
- Use bullets or dashes to shorten and add emphasis to your resume.
- Be brief.

Content of a Legal Resume

Heading

Put your name, address, and telephone number at the top of your resume.

- Your name is the most important piece of information on your resume, so make sure it is the first thing the reader sees by displaying it in a prominent position. (It can also be bolded and/or be in a different or larger font.)
- Include both your home telephone number and a number where you can be reached (or where a message can be left) during the day.

Objective

Legal resumes do not contain a traditional “Objective” section.

Education

List your current education first and proceed in reverse chronological order with the most recent item first.

- For each school, indicate the name and location, degree obtained, and year of graduation (or anticipated graduation). Do not include your high school education. If you were a high school valedictorian and want to show a continuous pattern of achievement, you may list it in the “Personal” section.
- List items such as honors, scholarships, activities, publications, research projects, law journals, and moot court.
- Include any other information about your academic achievements or membership in organizations that closely relates to your educational background. If relevant, briefly describe research projects or theses. Describe any honors you have received if they are not self-explanatory. Indicate your undergraduate grade point average (overall GPA or major GPA) if it positively reflects your ability. Academic honors, such as cum laude, should be italicized and lowercased.

Law School Grades

Most legal employers are interested in your academic record and will ask for a copy of your transcript. If your law school grades do not positively reflect your abilities, do not list them on your resume. Know, however, that some employers will not consider resumes that do not show some measure of academic performance; others will assume the worst if you do not list your GPA. Consult with a Career Services counselor if you are unsure whether your GPA or your relative rank should be included.

Experience

List employers and work locations in reverse chronological order.

- Give dates of employment as well as job titles. Because your most recent experience counts the most, spend very little space on positions that go back more than 10 years. Do not list names of supervisors or street addresses.
- Use “accomplishment statements:” concise statements of things you have done and the specific results of each action. Do not just list your work responsibilities, as they tell employers very little about who you are. Rather, use achievements to emphasize transferable skills, such as your motivation, flexibility, initiative, and work ethic.
- Add numbers or other quantifiable statements where possible.
- Use action verbs to describe your duties and accomplishments.

- Include significant part-time or summer employment, especially law-related employment. Group any other jobs in a summary statement such as “provided 75% of college expenses,” or “various part-time employment to supplement income.”

Other Categories

You can distinguish yourself from other applicants by listing community activities, mission experience, foreign language ability, specific skills, travel, individual hobbies, or interests. All of these categories are optional and flexible. You should shape them to show the reader that you are an outstanding individual.

Community Service

You may list volunteer work you have done in the community, particularly if it was unusual or helps qualify you for the position you are seeking. While not imperative, this section may make you stand out in the reader’s mind.

LDS Mission Experience

Missions may be included under the “Experience” or “Community Service” sections but should be clearly identified as “volunteer.” Do not list missions under the heading “Employment.”

Too much emphasis or detail may be to your disadvantage with non-LDS resume screeners, or even with screeners in Utah where everyone knows what an LDS mission is.

Personal Information

In this section, you can include information that does not fit neatly into the traditional sections described above. You should include interesting things that describe who you are. While this section alone will probably not get you an interview, it can help push you into the “interview” category if, for example, you are a gourmet chef and the reader likes to eat. It also provides good “ice breaking” material during the interview, especially if the interviewer spots something he or she has in common with you.

- Leave off your age, sex, race, marital status, and religion. It is against the law for interviewers to ask questions about these topics, and it makes your resume look outdated if you include them.

- Include anything that will make you stand out (in a positive manner) in the reader’s mind. If you have run a marathon or are a concert pianist, include it. Be specific. List “enjoy c.s. Lewis and historical fiction” rather than “enjoy reading.”
- Include interests that will appeal to a range of readers.
- Put this section at the end of your resume.

References

- Names of references are generally included, if at all, on a second page (repeating the heading from your first page—name, address, and telephone number—at the top). If you decide to include references, or are requested to do so, ask permission to use a person as a reference before listing them on your resume. Also, provide your references with a current copy of your resume.
- At least one of your references should be a law school professor since most employers are interested in your academic ability.
- Current or recent employers are good references.
- The reference’s name, job title, address, and telephone number should be provided and should be up-to-date.

Resume Falsification

In a competitive market, it can be very tempting to exaggerate your credentials, but the best piece of advice is don’t. Be ethical and remember that everything on your resume will most likely be verified. For instance, do not list your involvement with a law school organization if you have not paid the required membership dues. Because resume falsification is a violation of the BYU Honor Code, the law school can suspend or expel students and may notify the state bar of such violations. Individuals who falsify their resumes may assume that their actions are harmless and that there is a low probability of getting caught, but resume falsification harms the school, its students, and the individual.

US Format of a Legal Resume

There is no single prescribed format for resumes because a resume should reflect who you are. However, the following are some general guidelines to assist you in composing your resume. Have a Career Services counselor review your rough draft and make suggestions. Books in the CSO that contain sample resumes may also give you good ideas.

LL.M. Resume

Street Address • City • State • USA • Zip • (801) XXX-XXXX • email: student@lawgate.byu.edu

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

LL.M. (Master of Law) Candidate, April 2011

J. Reuben Clark Law School - Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, USA

- Course work includes: Contracts I and II, Torts I and II, Introduction to American Law and Legal Systems, Legal Negotiation and Settlement, Legal Writing and Research, Business Associations, International Business Transactions, Computer Law

DIREITO (L.L.B.), December 2008

Universidade do Vale do Paraíba, São José dos Campos, São Paulo, Brazil

- Concentration: International, Administrative, and Family Law

WORK EXPERIENCE

Legal Intern, May 2011 – present

Kirton & McConkie, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

- Review documents of international entity's properties throughout the world
- Translate legal documents and manage database entries

Associate, August 2007 – December 2008

Ruth Gandolfo Law Firm, São José dos Campos, São Paulo, Brazil

- Researched, drafted, and filed documents in preparation for trial, including pre-trial motion memorandum and answer to complaint
- Counseled clients, drafted documents, and assisted in court for judicial hearings and interventions

Part-time Assistant Attorney, March 2007 – October 2008

City Government of São Jose dos Campos, São José dos Campos, São Paulo, Brazil

- Judged / mediated in local small claims court
- Provided consumer's rights advice in a city with a population over 500,000
- Provided legal counsel in cases involving the city or the mayor in his official capacity

Associate/Intern, March 2007 – December 2008

OAB-Ordem dos Advogados do Brazil, São José dos Campos, São Paulo, Brazil

- Interviewed and assisted low-income clients on family law matters

General Services, April 2003 – July 2006

Johnson & Johnson/Cilag-Jansen, São José dos Campos, São Paulo, Brazil

- Provided training and services in international products and medical supplies

VOLUNTEER SERVICE

Full-time Missionary in the Amazonic Region and Midwest of Brazil, March 2001 – March 2003

- Brazil Brasilia Mission / The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Portuguese as native language and able to communicate in Spanish
- Member of Brazilian Bar Association, admitted to practice in 2009 (São Paulo)
- U.S. Permanent Resident (Allowed to work in the United States)

3L Law Student

Street Address • Orem, UT 84057 • (801) XXX-XXXX • student@byulaw.net

EDUCATION

JURIS DOCTOR CANDIDATE, APRIL 2008

J. REUBEN CLARK LAW SCHOOL, BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY, PROVO, UT

- BYU Law Review
- GPA 3.XX/4.00 (top XX%)
- Participant, Giles S. Rich Intellectual Property Moot Court Competition, 2004

ADVANCED COURSE WORK, AUGUST 2000 – FEBRUARY 2001

NAVAL NUCLEAR POWER SCHOOL, ORLANDO, FL

- Advanced courses in physics, chemistry, electrical engineering & nuclear engineering

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE, DECEMBER 1999

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY, PROVO, UT

- Major: Civil Engineering
- BYU Trustee Scholarship (four-year full-tuition academic scholarship)
- Member, BYU Rugby Team, 1995

EXPERIENCE

SUMMER ASSOCIATE, SUMMER 2007

KNOBBE, MARTENS, OLSON & BEAR, LLP, SAN DIEGO, CA

- Drafted patent applications, drafted office action responses for patented and trademark applications, and performed legal research

SUMMER ASSOCIATE, SUMMER 2006 AND SUMMER 2007

BROWN & BAIN, P.A., PHOENIX, AZ

- Performed legal research for partners specializing in antitrust law, intellectual property, environmental law, and accountant liability
- Participated in firm programs on legal writing, depositions, and oral advocacy

OFFICER, NUCLEAR TRAINED, MARCH 2000 – AUGUST 2005

UNITED STATES NAVY, USS OHIO SSBN 726 (BLUE)

- Qualified as Nuclear Engineer Officer by Naval Sea Systems Command
- Three-time recipient of Navy Achievement Medal for exceptional leadership
- Special assignment as Investigating Officer for a sexual assault case: compiled reports, interviewed witnesses, and prepared summary report for Commanding Officer for Captain's Mast

SERVICE

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COUNSELOR, SEPT. 2002 – AUG. 2005

US NAVY

- Assigned to handle racial, religious, and sexual discrimination issues

VOLUNTEER REPRESENTATIVE, MAY 1995 – MAY 1997

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS, SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL

- Speak, read, and write Portuguese

3L LAW STUDENT

Local Street Address, Provo, Utah 84606 • Tel: (801) XXX-XXXX • Fax: (801) XXX-XXXX • student@byulaw.net
Street Address, Long Beach, California 90814 • (562) XXX-XXXX

EDUCATION

J. REUBEN CLARK LAW SCHOOL, BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY, PROVO, UT

Juris Doctor Candidate, April 2006

- A.H. Christensen Award for Advocacy, March 2006
- Award for Distinguished Service to BYU Trial Advocacy Team, April 2006
- *Senior Editor*, Brigham Young University Law Review, 2005 – 2006
- Published book review: *The Tension Between a Godless Constitution and a Culture of Belief in an Age of Reason*, 2005 BYU L. REV. 861.
- *Director of Skills Training*, Trial Advocacy Board, 2005 – 2006
- *1st Place Winner*, BYU Trial Advocacy Team Intra-team Competition, Fall 2005
- *Participant*, Region 10 ABA National Trial Competition, Yuma, Arizona, Spring 2005
- *Member*, Trial Advocacy Team and Trial Advocacy Travel Team, 2004 – 2006
- *Member*, American Inns of Court, Utah Chapter 1, 2005 – 2006
- *Finalist*, Region 10 ABA National Trial Competition, Oregon, January 2005
- *Finalist*, Woody Deem Trial Advocacy Competition, January 2004
- *Participant*, Moot Court Competition, Spring 2004
- *GPA*: 3.xx; *Class Standing*: top xx%

VICTORIA COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Bachelor of Arts, English, April 2003

EXPERIENCE

BEST BEST & KRIEGER, Riverside, California

Summer Associate, June to August 2005

- Drafted motions to court and opposed various motions
- Prepared legal research memoranda for clients and attorneys in a variety of general business, partnership, corporate law, tax, water law, employment, workers' compensation, and education cases
- Attended court appearances and depositions

IDAHO SUPREME COURT, Boise, Idaho

Law Clerk to Justice Cathy R. Silak, April to June 2005

- Drafted court opinions and press releases
- Prepared speeches for various public functions

J. REUBEN CLARK LAW SCHOOL, Provo, Utah

Teaching Assistant, Lawyering Skills, Fall/Winter 2004-2005

SMITH, SMITH & HARTER, Santa Ana, California

Summer Associate, July to August 2004

- Wrote and processed complaints, petitions, motions, interrogatories, and demand letters for a variety of professional malpractice, family law, personal injury, subrogation, business litigation, and judgment collection matters
- Corresponded with clients and attended settlement conferences and depositions in a variety of cases ranging from the fraudulent conversion of securities to toxic chemical spills and the collection of child support arrears

SKILLS & INTERESTS

- Native fluency in written and spoken Spanish
- Mentored sixth grade students weekly, February – April 2006
- Missionary, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Dominican Republic, 2001 – 2003
- Studied French for 11 years; enjoy French literature and film, jogging, Latin dance, jewelry design, and Victorian literature

Production

Prepare your resume on a computer or word processor, and print it on a laser printer or a high-quality ink-jet printer. Never use a typewriter or a dot matrix printer.

Photocopying is the least expensive and most convenient way to reproduce your resume. If you use a quality photocopier, such as those in the law library, your resume should be acceptable to any employer. Copy your resume onto bond paper.

Size, Paper Type, and Length

Resumes should always be printed on 8 ½" x 11" paper. Use only black ink, on quality bond paper (at least 24 pound bond). Bond paper that is white, off-white, light gray, or a pale shade of cream or ecru is acceptable.

Most resumes should be confined to one page. If you have come straight from an undergraduate or master's program into law school, find a way to fit everything comfortably on one page. A general rule is that one page of your resume should reflect at least 10 years of experience. Thus, you may usually safely use a second page if law will be your second career. In that case, be sure the most important information appears on the first page. Include your name and "Page 2" at the top of the second sheet, and staple the two sheets together.

Appearance

Even if full of information, it is very important that your resume not appear cluttered.

Margins

Ideally, you should have at least one-inch margins at the top and bottom of your resume, and at least one-inch margins on each side of the page. This not only helps your resume to look balanced and provide sufficient "white space," but it also allows interviewers to write notes in the margins. Your resume should strike a balance from top to bottom and from side to side and should guide the reader through the information. Print a copy of your resume and fold it into four quadrants. The amount of information in these four quadrants should be approximately equal. If your resume is too heavy in a quadrant, it needs editing. You may also use formatting functions in

standard word processing programs to align and/or center your information on the page.

Capital Letters

Use caps sparingly and wisely. They may be used for your name (but not for any other element in your heading) and to introduce the major sections of your resume (“EDUCATION,” “EXPERIENCE,” and so forth).

Italics, Boldface, and Underlining

Once you have written your resume on a computer, go back and try out different effects. Highlight important material, but do not let the dramatic effect overpower your resume. The key here is consistency. If you italicize the name of your current employer, you must do the same for each previous job. Underlining is considered out-dated by some employers because it is a typewriter function.

Fonts and Type Size

Generally, use the same font throughout your resume. However, if you find two fonts that work nicely together, you may use one of them to help highlight important material. You may also use a larger type size to introduce major sections of your resume. A 12-point font is best but you may use a larger type size to introduce major sections of your resume. Never use below 10-point type size in your resume. Anything smaller is too hard to read. Again, consistency is the key in using both different fonts and type sizes. Never use courier font.

Indenting

Separate different information by indenting. Use two or three degrees of indenting to make the reader's eye follow the logical relationship of information.

Punctuation

You may use periods (.) at the end of each statement in your resume, or you may leave them off. Again, the key is consistency. Also, meticulously check and recheck punctuation, spelling, and grammar on your resume. A sloppy resume sends a message to potential employers about your inability to pay attention to detail. Have several people proofread your resume because you often overlook errors in your own work.

Consistency

Be consistent within each section of your resume, the order in which you present information, and throughout your resume as a whole.

Other Things to Consider

The 30-Second Scan Test

Remember, recruiting coordinators or hiring partners often spend no more than 30 seconds looking at a resume to determine whether an applicant should be considered for an interview. Thus, it is imperative that the reader should be able to pick up the highlights of the resume in 30 seconds. Try it yourself and give your resume to others to see if they think it passes the test.

Write Your Own Resume

Resume preparation services appear to be attractive resources for busy job-seekers but are usually not worth the price. Professional resume writers tend to use the same format, terms, and paper for all of the resumes they produce. Most employers will recognize canned resumes and wonder why they should hire applicants without the will or ability to write for themselves. A professional resume writer will also determine which skills and experience to emphasize on your resume. That emphasis may not attract the employers you want to impress.

Resumes require frequent updating, so you might as well learn to write it the first time. Use this opportunity to learn about yourself and to practice describing your background and talents in terms potential employers will understand, something you will be required to do in interviews. Oftentimes interview questions are based on information contained in your resume, so being familiar with that information will help you anticipate and answer these questions.

Submitting Your Resume

Many employers accept resumes by e-mail attachment, with your message serving as your cover letter. When using this method, be sure to find out if the employer requires the attachment to be in a particular electronic format, such as Word, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF. If mailing your resume, the best practice is to use a large envelope so that the resume is not folded. Resumes are often photocopied, and folds can be problematic for automatic

document feeders. Use printed labels if possible; however, time, convenience, and expense may dictate that you fold your resume or handwrite an address.

Follow Up

Following up does not mean pestering employers, but it does mean that you keep track of every resume you send out. Mark your calendar and call two or three days after you think the resume should have arrived. Do not fall prey to the “Don’t call us, we’ll call you” syndrome; you could wait forever. Confirm that the employers have received your resume, and offer to provide any additional information, such as a writing sample, references, or updated grades, that would be helpful to them.

Making regular contact with potential employers is key to getting an interview. If you cannot speak to the person in charge of hiring, leave a message. If the assistant in charge of hiring tells you that the employer will contact you by a certain day, and the employer does not, follow up. Many students have only received interviews or job offers after making regular contact with employers.

When you call to follow up on an application for employment, be polite and pleasant. Although secretaries and office assistants may not have control over whether you get a job, they can be allies in your job search by providing you with additional information or they can be obstacles, especially if they have an unpleasant encounter with you.

Advice from Law Firm Recruiting Coordinators

Below are comments of recruiting coordinators concerning resumes. Remember that each person has his or her own opinion as to what a resume should contain or how a resume should look. What one employer requires or prefers does not necessarily hold true for others. The key is to find out what specific employers are looking for and to provide them with the necessary information in a clear and accurate manner.

- “No one meets the standards of every employer. Students need to target most of their cover letters and resumes to employers that are real prospects.”

- “Pay close attention to the visual aspect of your resume. It needs to be aesthetically pleasing at the first glance. (Many students don’t pay enough attention to this.)”
- “Do a little research about the firm, and let it show in the cover letter and resume. We are a litigation boutique, so emphasize what you have done to prepare yourself to work here.”
- “You would be surprised how many typos we find on resumes. Attorneys looking at your resume will always find the mistakes. Unless you are at the top of your class, most attorneys won’t give sloppy resumes a second look.”
- “Make sure your address and phone number are correct. Many times we cannot contact a student we want to interview because he or she was careless.”
- “Put down the year and month you will graduate, not what year law student you are.”
- “Your resume needs to be easy to read at a glance. We don’t want to wade through it.”
- “Have the Career Services Office look over your resume before you send it.”

Information in this section was compiled in part from:

Allen, Jeffrey G. The Resume Makeover. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1995.

Tucker, Marilyn et al. Paving the Way: Directing Your Legal Career Search. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Law Center, 1992.

A cover letter is your personal marketing tool. Its purpose is to sell your qualifications to a prospective employer, and it provides you with your first chance to make a favorable impression. Many employers read cover letters first and, if they do not like the cover letter, they read no further. Good cover letters grab the reader's attention and motivate him or her to read the resume and set up an interview. The resume and cover letter together determine whether or not you get an interview with a particular employer.

Role of Cover Letters

The cover letter is different from your resume in several ways:

- It is less rigid and less limiting.
- It can include abilities, aspirations, and personal qualities that are not included in the resume, but that might help you to obtain an interview.
- It is more personal than the resume. It can help pin your resume down to the specific job you want.
- While resumes can be somewhat customized for a category of employers, a cover letter can be personalized and tailored to fit the specific circumstances of a particular job.
- In a cover letter, chronological order is not required. You have the flexibility of emphasizing any accomplishments you wish.
- Your cover letter should not disclose your entire academic and work history. Instead, it should emphasize your strongest qualifications that you believe best fit the prospective job.

In order to pique the reader's interest, so that you will have a better opportunity for getting an interview, your cover letter needs to be interesting but you also need to focus on what the employer will gain from you, rather than what you will gain from the employer. That is the only thing that matters. Think about whether an employer reading your letter will want to call you to schedule an interview.

Information compiled in part from:

Walton, Kimm Alayne. Guerrilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams. Chicago: Harcourt Brace, 1995: 172-73.

Content

The first paragraph of your cover letter should identify who you are and the purpose of your letter. You should include where you go to law school and your year, the position for which you are applying, and who, if anyone, has referred you (obtain permission before you use a contact's name). Keep the opening paragraph short; it should not exceed more than three lines.

In the second paragraph communicate genuine interest in the particular employer and city (e.g., mention any ties you may have). Briefly sell the qualifications, experience, or personal qualities you bring as an applicant (but be aware that most employers do not view summer clerks or new associates as profit centers, so do not oversell yourself). Use examples to demonstrate transferable skills. Instead of saying, "I am a hard worker," point to specific accomplishments that support those assertions (e.g., "The fact that I have been able to maintain a 3.0 grade point average in law school, while also working forty hours per week as a law clerk, demonstrates that I am a hard worker"). Mention degrees, skills, or significant professional work experience that would be valued by the employer.

For a small, targeted mailing, you might refer to a news item or something specific about the person to whom the letter is addressed. Showing interest in the employer stands out and makes it clear that your cover letter is not part of a mass mailing.

The third paragraph is the "action close." In this paragraph, note that you are enclosing a resume, and express a desire to meet to discuss your qualifications. Do not weaken the close with cautious words like "if" and "hope." Close with a confident, positive statement, such as "I look forward to hearing from you soon," and thank the employer for his or her time and consideration.

Remember to follow up every letter with a phone call. Do not leave it up to the employer to contact you.

Tone

A cover letter should be polite, businesslike, and to the point; do not attempt to tell your life story and or use the letter as a brag sheet. The tone of the letter should not be overly courteous or arrogant. The objective is to get an

interview, not to get a job. Consequently, the letter should focus on what you can do for the prospective employer, and not on what the job would do for you. For example, the letter should not say, “I would like to gain some practical legal experience by working in a firm such as yours.”

Even if you do not know much about a particular employer, most interviewers will be looking for evidence of the following traits:

- Intelligence and analytical abilities
- Motivation and work ethic
- Reliability and maturity
- Efficiency and organization
- Good writing and speaking skills
- Ability to generate profits for the firm

What to Leave Out

A cover letter is your opportunity to sell yourself by presenting yourself in the most positive light possible. Therefore, do not mention anything that weakens your application, especially personal or family problems. If your law school grades are low, do not attempt to explain why in your cover letter. Information that requires explanation should be discussed later in an interview. Moreover, including such information may prevent you from getting an interview at all.

Format

Although you have freedom in composing your cover letters, certain mechanical requirements should not be overlooked. Appearance and attention to detail are just as important as content. It is essential that your letter look attractive and that spelling, punctuation, and grammar are perfect.

Paper

Print your cover letters in black ink on 8 ½” x 11” quality bond paper that is white, off-white, a pale shade of cream, ecru, or gray to match your resume.

Margins & Spacing

Your cover letter should be concise (keep it to one page), and the page should not look crowded. Limit the body of your letter to approximately four inches and three paragraphs. Leave margins of at least one inch on all four sides, and center the letter on the page, vertically as well as horizontally.

Full justification (margins lined up on both sides) is not recommended. Use single spacing within paragraphs and double spacing between paragraphs.

The Inside Address

The inside address is a formality of business correspondence and should follow a standard format:

Name (First and Last)
Title (e.g., Hiring Partner, Recruiting Coordinator)
Firm or Company name
Street Address, Suite Number
City, State, Zip Code

The Salutation

Unless answering a blind advertisement, the cover letter should always be addressed to the person who will be doing the interviewing for the job (e.g., “Dear Mr. Jones:”). If contacting a law firm, write to the hiring partner or recruiting coordinator. Do not address the letter “Dear hiring partner” or “Dear gentlemen” (both obsolete and politically incorrect). Rather, spend a few minutes to get the person’s name. Type the salutation two spaces below the last line of the inside address and leave two more spaces between the salutation and the beginning of the first paragraph.

If you are sending an application to a Law Society member, Law School Alumnus or to another personal contact, also send the material to the recruiting coordinator or hiring partner. Your personal contact may be out of the hiring loop and may neglect to forward your resume.

The Complimentary Close

“Sincerely” is a simple and good choice for a close. “Sincerely yours” and “Very truly yours” are other common closes. Type the complimentary close, followed by a comma, two spaces below the last line of your letter.

The Signature

Always remember to sign your cover letter! You would be surprised how many people forget this simple but important detail. Following your signature include your name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address, if it has not already been included as part of the letterhead.

Punctuation, Spelling, and Grammar

Your letter is a writing sample, and any errors will eliminate your application. Thus, be meticulous. Punctuation, spelling, and grammar need to be perfect. Software programs that identify spelling and grammar errors must be used but are not substitutes for good proofreading and editing skills. If you use a merge function, be sure the employer's name merges properly. Ask a friend to do a final proofread.

Advice From Law Firm Recruiting Coordinators

- “Cover letters should be credible, strictly positive, unpretentiously confident, but not inflated or overblown.”
- “Make the cover letter short, and don't repeat information listed on your resume.”
- “Cover letters should not be so general that students could simply change the addressee and send them to any employer.”
- “Make sure you proofread and sign the letter, especially when you are sending a lot of them out. Occasionally I will get a letter that begins, ‘I really want to work in Washington D.C.,’ and we are a Missouri firm.”
- “Students should use cover letters to explain two things: why they are interested in the employer and why the employer ought to be interested in them.”
- “Because the resume, not the cover letter, will be circulated to the attorneys, avoid putting anything in the cover letter that you don't want overlooked.”
- “Explain why you want to relocate. If you haven't lived in the area, explain why you want to live there. This lets us know you are serious about coming to our area.”

Form Letters

Cover letters should be as personal as possible. When doing a small, focused (as opposed to a mass) mailing, you should customize each cover letter to fit the situation. This means presenting your unique qualities that relate to the specific job or demonstrating your knowledge about the firm or company to show the reader why you would like to work for them. When doing larger mailings, individualize letters with more generic information, such as the job's connection to your undergraduate credentials or work

experience (or you could mention your ties to the area, the reader's school, or a mutual acquaintance).

Common Mistakes and Things to Avoid

Listing Duties vs. Specific Accomplishments

Mention specific accomplishments instead of listing duties. Employers want to know more than what you have done. They want to know how well you have done it. Provide specific examples rather than vague generalizations.

Repeating Accomplishments

Do not repeat the accomplishments listed in your resume. If you do, when readers get to your resume, they may think reading your resume would be a waste of time. Instead, simply highlight one or two of your best accomplishments in your cover letter.

Being Excessively Courteous

Do not be excessively courteous. Great formality and excessive courtesy are hallmarks of insecurity. Convey a modest sense of self-confidence, without sounding arrogant, but avoid an apologetic tone.

Focusing on Your Own Needs and Wants

When drafting your cover letter, concentrate on what your prospective employer prefers to read—not necessarily what you want or need from the position. Also avoid frequent use of the personal pronoun “I.”

Misspelling Words

Use the spell checker on your computer and carefully proofread your letter for any errors the computer did not catch. Pay particular attention to proper names, such as the name of the contact, the employer, and your school (e.g., “Reuben” not “Rueben”).

Forgetting to Sign the Letter

Do not forget to sign the letter in blue or black ink with your full name.

Using Gimmicks

A gimmick in a cover letter is any tricky device used for its own sake to draw a reader's attention. These gimmicks (like strange graphics) rarely work because they are not tied to benefits the employer values.

Helpful Phrases

The following phrases may help you as you draft your cover letters:

Statement of Objective (Paragraph One)

- As a student at University of Wisconsin School of Law interested in _____, . . .
- Mr./Ms. _____ has recommended that I contact you with respect to _____.
- With a background in _____ I am seeking opportunities to _____.
- I am interested in applying for a position with your _____ (firm, agency, corporation) because _____ (type of practice, ties to geographical location, reputation).

Statement of Qualifications (Paragraph Two)

- I can offer your firm specific _____ (experience, courses) in _____.
- My background in _____ might be of particular interest to you.
- I am currently _____ and anticipate _____.

Concluding Statements (Paragraph Three)

- I would be pleased to further discuss my qualifications in an interview.
- I would be happy to discuss arrangements for an interview.
- I will be in _____ (specific city) on _____ (specific date) for an interview with _____ (another employer) and could meet with you at that time.
- I can be contacted at _____ and look forward to hearing from you at your earliest possible convenience.

Information in this section was compiled in part from:

Allen, Jeffrey G. The Resume Makeover. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1995.

Wynett, Stanley. Cover Letters That Will Get You the Job You Want. Cincinnati: Betterway Books, 1993.

For More Information

The following resources are available in the CSO or in the law library:

The Best of the Job Goddess – CSO and Reserve: KF 297 .W342 1999

Job search advice and answers to some of the toughest job search questions from Kimm Alayne Walton, author of Guerilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams

Guerilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams – CSO and KF 297.W34 1995

This book holds all the secrets you need to get the legal job of your dreams.

The Very Quick Job Search – CSO

Get a better job in half the time.

Outline for Cover Letter and Sample Cover Letters

Date

Name

Title

EMPLOYER (all caps or small caps add nice contrast)

Address

City, State Zip Code

Salutation:

Mention a personal interest you have in the employer, a common acquaintance, or contacts you have with employees of the company (such as law school alumni). Tell the employer what position you want and where you are attending school (including your year).

Capture the employer's attention by focusing on the employer rather than yourself. Explain why you are interested in the firm or company. You may also want to research the company and mention something about the company or industry that is exciting to you. In this paragraph explain why the firm or company would be interested in you, i.e., what you have to offer/what you can bring to the company. The information should expand on your resume and bring it to life. Highlight your strengths and accomplishments, quantifying as much as possible. Point out any experience or background you have that relates to the particular area of practice of a firm or industry. Present factual information, and let them draw the conclusion that you are a good match for them. See samples for appropriate length and type of information.

Thank the individual for considering you. If you will be in the area on certain dates, mention when. Indicate the phone number where you can be reached.

Sincerely,

(Leave room for your signature)

Your name

Address

City, State Zip Code

Phone number

E-mail address

Enclosure(s) (depending on the number of documents enclosed)

Joe Student

44 Garden State Park Unit 210, Springville, UT 84055
(801) 999-1111, law.student@gmail.com

September 21, 2010

Mr. Gonzo the Magnificent

Hiring Muppet

Kermit, Piggy & Fozzy

1239 Commonwealth Ave

Boston, MA 56012

Dear Mr. Magnificent:

I am writing at the encouragement Jim Henson who suggested that I apply for a summer clerkship position with Kermit, Piggy & Fozzy. I am an L.L.M. student at Brigham Young University, and am hoping to gain some legal experience.

I first became interested in your firm after seeing the news media's coverage of the Great Muppet Caper. I was impressed by your firm's defense of the accused Muppets, and their eventual acquittal of all charges. I had a long discussion with Mr. Henson about your firm's work with muppet crimes, as well its involvement muppet trade mark infringement. Being born to a single muppet mother I have developed a keen interest in muppet interests, and would love a chance to further my experience in this field.

I have enclosed a resume for your review, and can be contacted at the above phone number or email address. I hope to hear from you soon and am excited by the chance to work for your firm. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joe Student

Law Student

66 West 172 North, Apt. 32, Provo, UT 84602

(801) 400-0000, lstudent@gmail.com

November 13, 2010

Lionel Hutz, esq.

I Can't Believe It's A Law Firm™

Springfield Shopping Mall

Suite #210

KLondike 5-LAWW

Dear Mr. Hutz:

A mutual acquaintance, one Marge Simpson, recommended I contact you concerning a summer externship in your firm. Since I first began watching your inspirational court appearances, I have aspired to one day run my own shopping mall law firm. As a first-year law student, I imagine that spending time at your firm as an extern would provide me with the experience I need to make that aspiration concrete. As a personal injury lawyer in the town of Springfield, you have literally chased thousands of ambulances in your career, and as your card states, you've been "Clogging Courts since 1976." It is that kind of drive, that naked ambition, that I hope to emulate and one day turn into a profitable practice.

Ever since you memorably moved for a "bad court thingy" and successfully persuaded the judge to grant a mistrial when you misplaced your pants, I've been, as you so aptly put it, a "law-talking guy" fan. And sir, the panache you demonstrated when you defended Mrs. Simpson from her DUI charge by boldly downing her bottle of schnapps in court was, dare I say, inspired. I cannot hope to learn from a more seasoned veteran of venue, jack of jurisdiction, legend of the law. I look forward to the day when I can proudly say that I knew Lionel Hutz, esq. You sir, are my hero.

I have attached a resume for your review, and can be contacted at the above phone number or email address. I look forward to hearing from you, and to the chance of working with you in the Center. Again, thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Law Student

Enclosure

Sample Cover E-mail

From: Mary Student
To: John Hiring Partner
Date: xx/xx/xx x:xx PM

Subject: Attached application for summer associate position

I am writing to apply for a position as one of your law clerks for the summer of 2011. I am a second-year law student at Brigham Young University and am on the Journal of Public Law.

I became very interested in your firm after one of the attorneys in your environmental section, Mr. John Doe, spoke as a guest lecturer at the law school. He explained the work your firm does in adjudicating water allocation disputes. Having grown up on a ranch in Southern Colorado, I have firsthand experience with the difficulties of water allocation. While researching tribal water allocation for Professor James Rasband at the law school and as President of the Natural Resources Law Society, I have been able to apply my personal knowledge to complex legal issues dealing with water rights.

I have attached my resume in Microsoft Word format for your review. I will be in Colorado Springs between October 19 and 23 and would be available for an interview during that time. I can be reached at (xxx) xxx-xxxx and look forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,
Mary Student

Permanent Address:

Street Address

Alamosa, CO xxxxx

Telephone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx

E-mail: marystudent@byulaw.net

School Address:

Street Address

Provo, UT xxxxx

Telephone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx

