

How to Write an Effective Cover Letter

Purpose of the Cover Letter

- To GET YOU AN INTERVIEW
- *To tell employers how you can benefit them*
- To express interest in the job
- To demonstrate your writing skills.

Four Types of Cover Letters

1. Response to a job posting
2. Mutual Acquaintance - most effective
3. Targeted Mailers – identified employers through research
4. Mass Mailer – least effective method

Marketing Yourself

Before writing the cover letter:

- Research the organization: know what they do and what interests you about them!
 - Review the website
 - Google the organization and the interviewer and confirm spelling, address, and gender of recipient from website or a phone call to the organization
 - Contact alumni who are or have been employed by the organization
 - Contact students who have clerked for the firm
 - Contact other attorneys in the community who are familiar with the organization
 - Read the organizations NALP form

Marketing Yourself

Before writing the cover letter:

- Research the person to whom you are writing.
- Know the best way to get in the door:
 - Job application
 - Informational Interviewing
 - Networking Opportunities
- Review your own accomplishments and decide what is unique and important and should go in the letter. Synthesize your background in a different way from your resume.

Marketing Yourself: What do Legal Employers look for?

- Research and Writing ability
- Advocacy Skills
- Creative Problem Solving
- Goal-Orientation
- Entrepreneurial Skills
- Team Player
- Independent Workers
- Quick Worker
- Good Judgment
- Time Management Skills
- Initiative
- Poise
- Presence
- Client Relations Skills
- Timely Response
- Efficient Work
- Understanding Legal Process
- Interview Skills

Marketing Yourself:

What do Public Interest and Government Employers look for?

- Commitment to Public Service
- Strong interest in their goals and mission: Show your passion for the work!
- Can be longer and more detailed if the information is directly related to why you want to work for them.
- Essential to talk about past community service and volunteering to show this is a long term interest.

Marketing Yourself:

How to Convey these qualities in a cover letter.

- Support statements with facts and examples.
- Describe how you accomplished what is on your resume.

Example: if you worked for a prosecutor's office . . .

Don't say this: " I can assist you with your pre-trial preparation."

Say something like: "Through my work as an intern at the Philadelphia District Attorney's office, I gained experience crafting pre-trial documents."

Tone of Cover Letter

- Be polite, confident and professional.
- Avoid negative implications.

Although I do not have any legal experience,....

The client interview skills I learned at X job can be applied to a legal setting.

- Don't sound too much like a salesperson.
- Be assertive, but not overbearing
- Don't try to be humorous or clever.

Format

Keep it in a Standard Business Format

- either formal business letter or with your resume header at the top
- include:

Your identifying information

Date

Employer's information

Dear Mr. Smith:

Not: To Whom It May Concern
Dear Sir/Madam" or "Dear Hiring Partner

- **Keep it to ONE page!**
- Use the same paper as your resume. Type envelopes.

Critical Cover Letter Guidelines

- Do not overuse the word “I”.
 “ I believe, I feel, or I am confident that...”
- Use Active Voice.
- Vary Sentence structure.
- Be concise and accurate.

Inside the Letter

- Length should be 3-4 paragraphs
- Introductory paragraph should grab attention and make the reader want to keep reading it.
- Referrals
- Bring up key points:
 - geographic connection
 - alum connection
 - dedication/commitment to particular area of interest.

217 North 5th Street
Camden, NJ 08102

August 31, 2011

Getmea Job, Esq.
Fairweather, Winters & Sommers
2100 Fountain Square Plaza
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Dear Ms. Job:

As a second-year law student at Rutgers Law School in Camden, I am concentrating my job search for summer 2012 in the Philadelphia area. I hope to practice commercial law in the Delaware Valley upon completing my legal education. Enclosed is my resume for your review.

I have developed both the legal skills and a record of volunteer involvement that are essential to a successful law practice and business development. Consistently throughout college and law school I have devoted significant time and energy to volunteer activities, including the Pro Bono Domestic Violence Project and Big Brothers. Through these experiences, I have demonstrated the capacity to work both collaboratively and independently and to manage time efficiently. I am, moreover, goal-oriented: because I had little opportunity to travel prior to college, I fulfilled a need to finance my education and a desire to travel by working for Amtrak. I am looking for a firm that values the teamwork, initiative, and motivation that my background reflects.

This past summer, I analyzed complex issues in areas of the law with which I had no prior familiarity. That facility for learning quickly will serve me well as I tackle sophisticated legal issues this coming summer. Interacting with prosecutors, defense attorneys, and witnesses also enhanced my sensitivity to lawyers' ethical obligations and the importance of judgment and discretion--traits that are essential to all lawyers regardless of practice area or type of employer. Having frequently visited Philadelphia, I appreciate its ethnic diversity and neighborhood orientation. I am excited about the opportunity to contribute personally and professionally to the city.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to demonstrating my abilities in an interview and to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Charles W. Brown

Enclosure

Address/Date Upper
Left

Addressee

Use of Esq.

Use of Colon

Use of Enclosure (s)

First Paragraph

- Who are you?
 - class year
 - School
 - geographic ties
 - personal or networking connections to the organization or recipient of the letter
- Why are you writing?
 - Type of position you are looking for (part time, full time, academic year, summer).
 - How you learned about the organization or what sparked your interest about them!

As a second-year law student at Rutgers Law School in Camden, I am concentrating my job search for summer 2012 in the Philadelphia area. I hope to practice commercial law in the Delaware Valley upon completing my legal education. Enclosed is my resume for your review.

First Paragraph

Compare these two opening paragraphs:

I am a second-year law student at Rutgers-Camden School of Law and am seeking employment for the summer of 2011. Enclosed is my resume for your review.

As a second-year law student at Rutgers-Camden School of Law with a demonstrated commitment to community and professional service, I am concentrating my job search for summer 2011 in the Philadelphia area. Enclosed is my resume for your review.

Second/Third Paragraph

What makes you qualified for the job?

Give examples: DO NOT REWRITE RESUME, but find an example of something from a past job that demonstrates your skills.

I have developed both the legal skills and a record of volunteer involvement that are essential to a successful law practice and business development. Consistently throughout college and law school I have devoted significant time and energy to volunteer activities, including the Pro Bono Domestic Violence Project and Big Brothers. Through these experiences, I have demonstrated the capacity to work both collaboratively and independently and to manage time efficiently. I am, moreover, goal-oriented: because I had little opportunity to travel prior to college, I fulfilled a need to finance my education and a desire to travel by working for Amtrak. I am looking for a firm that values the teamwork, initiative, and motivation that my background reflects.

Second/Third Paragraph

What makes you qualified for the job?

If you say you have good writing skills, then back that up with a statement about something you wrote at a particular job, or if you say you are a multi-tasker, give examples such as:

“While I was at the FTC I was required to tend to consumer inquiries, draft legal memoranda and attend numerous meetings on a weekly basis.”

Second/Third Paragraph

What do you know about the organization/ firm?

- Past work with this organization
- Information you got from a website
- Information obtained from an informational interview etc.

Then incorporate why, based on this information, your skills would be a good match for this employer.

This past summer, I analyzed complex issues in areas of the law with which I had no prior familiarity. That facility for learning quickly will serve me well as I tackle sophisticated legal issues this coming summer. Interacting with prosecutors, defense attorneys, and witnesses also enhanced my sensitivity to lawyers' ethical obligations and the importance of judgment and discretion--traits that are essential to all lawyers regardless of practice area or type of employer. Having frequently visited Philadelphia, I appreciate its ethnic diversity and neighborhood orientation. I am excited about the opportunity to contribute personally and professionally to the city.

Final Paragraph

- Close the Letter
- Thank them for considering you and tell them you look forward to hearing from them soon.
- Tell them how you can be reached (phone and email)
- Provide any other important information the employer might need to know.

“I will be in Chicago in mid-October and would be available to meet with you at that time.”

Final Paragraph

COMPARE:

Please contact me if you require additional information. I look forward to hearing from you.

I will be in the area in mid-October and would be happy to visit your office at my expense. If another time frame is more consistent with your hiring timetable, please let me know. I look forward to demonstrating my abilities in an interview and to hearing from you.

When it's done

- Don't forget to sign your letter.
- Run it through spell check and proofread, proofread, and ask someone else to proofread it !
- Make sure the format is correct.
- Double check the spelling/gender of the person you are writing to.
- Don't be afraid to call to follow up about the status or to provide updated information.
- Remember to write a thank you note after you get the interview!

Common Mistakes on Cover Letters

- Typos and grammatical errors
- Overkill: sending awards and certificates, repeating the firm name too many times or overstating the firms “excellent reputation”
- Address letter to “Hiring Partner” or “Dear sir”
- Not Researching the Employer
- Focusing on why **you** want the job
 - “opportunity to learn about”
 - “your well-regarded training program for new associates”
 - “ideal environment for me to...”
- Making conclusions for the reader such as “I am a hard worker”, without backing up.
- Avoiding obvious hooks; don’t be afraid to use names

Common Mistakes on Cover Letters

- Being arrogant; “I’d be perfect for you...”
- Lying or exaggerating your skills
- Being Boring – show your passion!
- Being Cute- resume on a wine bottle – NOT for legal job
- Structuring letters chronologically-you **should** state strengths first
- Focusing on what you don’t have: “Even though I do not have good grades.....”
- Beginning letter with “Allow me to introduce myself” or “My name is...”
- Repeating everything from your resume in detail

Final Tips

1. Research the firm or organization
2. Limit to one page
3. Make sure it is an employer-oriented letter, not a personal statement; what's in it for **them**
4. Spark an interest in you and use an enthusiastic tone
5. Demonstrate why you are sending your resume to this particular employer
6. Employers are concerned with whether you will stay
 - State geographic ties or reason to relocate to area
 - List your high school if you are in the city of the employer
6. Review job description and website - try to use similar language
7. Back up your skills with evidence

Final Tips

8. Persuade the reader to pay attention to your resume
9. Show how your credentials match the employers needs
10. If your grades are not great, sell your practical experience, rainmaking ties or commitment to serving the poor
11. Make the letter as targeted as possible
12. Use good quality paper that matches your resume and references
13. Be sure to sign your letters
14. Proofread, proofread, proofread - by at least two others
15. Be certain the letter contains no typos, mistakes or grammatical errors and **do not** depend upon spell-check.