

THE COVER LETTER

A good cover letter is vital! It is truly the best chance that you will have to initially show your writing ability to an employer. Many firms look at the cover letter as a writing sample. Remember, the written word is the bread and butter of lawyers. The best attorneys must regularly draft correspondence to their clients, to opposing counsel, and judges. So get comfortable with the prospect that the business letter will be a universally acceptable means of communication within the legal and business communities!

COVER LETTER PURPOSES

Your cover letters should have 3 purposes:

1. To introduce yourself and explain your interest in the organization/firm;
2. To tie your specific abilities and/or skills with the employer's goals or areas of specialty; and
3. To establish a means of future communication and explain what you are asking the employer to do next.

To elaborate, cover letters should demonstrate your interest in the firm or business, highlight some important points in your resume, and stress particular aspects of your background that might be important to an employer.

Also, you can use a cover letter to ask for an informational interview (i.e., have coffee and pick that person's brain for ideas). The best way to search for a job you will have in the future is to develop connections right now. That way, when the time comes, you will have a network of relationships already developed.

Before you start writing, do your homework. In order to tailor your letter to a specific employer, you must first do some research on the firm or business. Take a piece of paper and make some notes. Try to match the interests and specialties of the employer to your interests and talents. If the employer is looking for certain skills, explain how you can be of service, but do it by citing examples of what you have done. Do not merely state, "I can be a great help to the firm." Instead, state *why* and *how* you can be of help.

THE STATIONERY

The general rule is to use the same color, size, and quality of paper for the cover letter as you used to write your resume. The cover letter, resume and envelope should all be the same neutral color. The letter should be typed in a conservative font, in black ink.

If emailing, we recommend using a PDF format for your attachments as not everyone has compatible word processing software.

COMPOSING THE COVER LETTER

FORMATTING: Formatting is as important as content. Fully justify the paragraphs of your cover letter so that it is pleasing to the eye. There are two ways to format your cover letter. If you are using modified block format, the first line of each paragraph is indented and the date and closing will be on the right side of the page (although not right justified). If you are using block format, all lines in all paragraphs are aligned to the left, including the date and closing. Refer to the sample letters in the back of the Guide to see the difference.

LETTERHEAD- THE SENDER: Conform the heading on your stationery to match the heading on your resume. Make sure to update your address so that the employer has your current information and can contact you quickly and easily.

THE DATE: If you are using modified block format (where the first line of the paragraph is indented), place the current date on the right side of the page. If you are using block format (where all lines in all paragraphs are aligned to the left), place the date on the far left of the page.

ADDRESS- THE RECIPIENT: Before typing the address of the firm or business, list the name and title of the person to whom you are sending your cover letter. If writing to an attorney, Esquire should be added after the name. Omit titles such as Mr. or Ms. in the address block.

THE SALUTATION: Your cover letter should always be addressed to an individual member of the organization. Look at the posting for the name of the hiring contact. When sending an unsolicited application or if the posting is silent, it will be necessary to consult the organization's website or contact the employer's office and ask the receptionist for the name and title of the person responsible for hiring.

Do not ever address the letter "Dear Sir or Madam", "Dear Managing Partner" or "To whom it may Concern" unless absolutely necessary (such as a blind posting on Craigslist). This tells the employer that your letter is part of a mass mailing and that you have not researched the employer. Also, make sure to correctly spell the recipient's name.

As noted above, the correct form when writing to attorneys as part of the address block is: Gary Weiss, Esq. (or Esquire). In contrast, in the salutation or greeting, the correct form to use is (Dear Ms. or Dear Mr.). Do not use Mrs. when writing to a woman unless she refers to herself in that manner; Ms. is the accepted norm for a business setting. Additionally, do not use Esquire in the greeting. Lastly, do not use both the person's first and last name, unless you are unsure if you are writing to a man or woman and were unable to find out through due diligent research.

Lastly, take note of the use of the colon versus comma after the person's name. The use of a colon is more formal than the use of a comma. Therefore, use a colon in your cover letter.

GENERAL LETTER LAYOUT

Your letterhead (include your name, address, phone and e-mail; copy the resume header)

[space]

Date

[double space]

Name of recipient (include Esquire if attorney)

Title of recipient

Firm/organization

Address

[double space]

The Salutation (use Mr./Ms., but not Mrs.)

[double space]

The Body of the letter with double spaces between paragraphs

[double space]

Closing

[four spaces]

Your name

[double space]

Enclosure

COVER LETTER GUIDELINES

FIRST PARAGRAPH - INTRO AND CONTEXT: Do not use “My name is . . .” One way to introduce yourself is to let the employer know which law school you are attending, what year you are in law school (or that you are a graduate) and what position you seek to be considered. If you are writing at the suggestion of someone known to the employer, *always* state this in the first sentence of your letter (e.g. “Professor X recommended that I contact you”). If you are responding to a job listing found through the Career Services Office, newspaper, or website posting, you should state this fact. Keep this paragraph short and to the point.

It is important that you provide reasons why you are interested in this particular employer. Some of the reasons may include practice areas, location, particular clients or types of clients. Make sure to research each employer and show off your research in your cover letter. Do not use “your firm” in the letter unless you are writing to a shareholder or managing partner. Identify the firm by using the firm name instead. Lastly, if you have ties to the geographic area (e.g., you were raised in Texas and intend to return after graduation), advise the employer. If you are a native of the firm’s office location, let the employer know.

SECOND PARAGRAPH- CONNECT THE DOTS: You want to think like an employer. Re-read the job posting or rethink the conversation where you learned of the position opening. What is being asked of this position? What are the primary attributes they want? Look at the business or firm website, if known. What is the area of focus or the direction the firm is taking with its clients?

The second paragraph is the body of your letter, the section in which you sell your experience and qualifications to the employer. You can do this by adding more detail and substance to the experiences listed on your resume. Call attention to those responsibilities, activities, long-term goals, relevant courses, academic honors, and/or attributes that make you qualified for the position you are now seeking. Let the employer know how your skills complement the type of law they practice and how you can make a contribution to the firm. A word about core competencies: A core competency refers to a behavior or trait an employer seeks while a benchmark refers to a milestone that an employee has achieved to master the core competency skills. For example, if oral communication is the core competency, taking a public speaking class would be the benchmark. In the context of a cover letter, core competencies would be transferable skills you possess while the benchmarks would be the experiences you had where you gained those skills.

Do not generalize your talent by stating that you are “industrious”, “a hard worker”, or “thorough” without backing up these conclusions with solid evidence. Give an example of how you have demonstrated your hard work through successive promotions. Tell about a project that was especially challenging but because of your thorough management the outcome exceeded expectations. It is far better to describe your accomplishments and let the reader draw his or her conclusions that you are industrious, a hard worker, thorough and enthusiastic. Additionally, your cover letter should fill any relevant gaps (six months or more) in your resume. This is also a place to explain that you are holding down employment while in law school, etc. Call attention to your strengths, but do not reiterate everything on your resume. Be brief and concise.

Be enthusiastic but avoid a too casual tone. The word “love” should *never* appear in your letter!

CLOSING PARAGRAPH- ASK FOR SOMETHING: Take one last opportunity to briefly express your interest and/or credentials. Your final paragraph anticipates a positive response from the reader. State what you seek, whether an interview for a position or a meeting to discuss an area of law. You may want to mention that you will follow up with a phone call regarding your application. A follow-

up call demonstrates real interest in the firm and you can find out whether an opening exists and, if so, whether interviews will be scheduled. Furthermore, a follow up call suggests that you are assertive - a desirable trait for most attorneys. However, be sure to follow up if you say you will. Literally requesting an interview in the closing paragraph is another option. However, you should be aware that employers may find this approach too aggressive if you are writing unsolicited. Thus, research the employer before you decide to employ this tactic. If requesting an informational interview, be specific about how much time you will need. If you are applying for a position out of town, mention in the closing paragraph when you plan on being in that location and when you will be available to meet. Finally, remember to thank the employer for his or her time and consideration.

THE CLOSING: The closing should be aligned with the date placement in your letter. Accepted closings for a cover letter are “Sincerely,” or “Sincerely yours,”; save “Very Truly Yours” for people you know. Between the closing and your name, leave 3 blank spaces so you have ample room for your signature. Don’t forget to sign your name if you are mailing out your cover letter! If you are e-mailing your cover letter, type “/s/” or your name in cursive font to show the reader that you did not forget to sign your cover letter. Again, we recommend using a PDF format for your attachments when you email; not everyone has compatible word processing software. If you have enclosures such as a writing sample and list of references, type the word “Enclosures” at the left margin, two spaces below your typed name.

FINISHING TOUCHES- PROOFREAD AND GET FEEDBACK: Hiring managers are unlikely to view an applicant in a favorable light, or even review the resume, when faced with misspelled words or poorly written sentences in a cover letter. We strongly suggest that you read your cover letter out loud. This will enable you to consider the appropriateness of the words and the flow of the sentences, helping you to identify any redundancies, run-on phrases or other composition problems. Take advantage of another’s perspective and ask a fellow student to give you feedback on your letter. Finally, make an appointment with the Career Services Office. We will be happy to review your cover letters with you.

ADDITIONAL APPLICATION MATERIALS

When submitting your application, you may be asked for additional application materials. The following sections expand on the following:

- Writing Sample
- Transcripts
- Letters of Recommendation
- References
- Thank You Note/Letter

WRITING SAMPLE

WHAT IS A WRITING SAMPLE? A writing sample is a sample of your writing which is provided to a potential employer, usually upon request, so that your writing skills can be assessed as part of the hiring process. It is a reflection of your ability to organize your thoughts, analyze, and write clearly and succinctly. These skills are the core of the lawyering process and most lawyers view the writing sample as an excellent example of your legal potential.

WHICH SAMPLE SHOULD I USE? The most important thing about a writing sample is that it is well written. In addition to the quality of the writing, to some extent, the sample you choose may depend on where you are applying. For example, if you have performed research on an area of law or subject related to a practice area of a firm/agency, consider using that as a sample. If you are providing a sample for your first legal field job, submit a sample of a memo from an LRW assignment to show your ability to present and research on a legal issue. If applying to a judge, submit a sample that shows you can see both sides of an argument.

If you have specific questions, feel free to contact Career Services or speak with your Legal Research and Writing Professor. You should always gain permission from the attorney or judge and redact/remove party information before you use a sample from a non-academic setting.

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR RECENT GRADS: For expediency, when using a work-product writing sample, consider using a document that was filed with the court (would be considered public information). However, it is still suggested that you redact the party names. If you want to submit a sample that highlights the full spectrum of your writing skills, such as a demand letter or client letter, you again should obtain permission from the attorney and then redact the names, addresses and personal information, and alter any other facts that might indicate the identity of the parties involved.

WRITING SAMPLE GUIDELINES:

1. Select a writing sample of your best work that is generally between 5-15 pages (unless instructions indicate otherwise). 8 pages is the most common length.
2. Proofread before you make copies for employers. Be sure it is free of edit marks and comments. Be sure there are no typos or mistakes!
3. List your name and contact information on a cover page, in the header section on each page, and/or the introductory page. You want to make sure your information is connected to your sample at all times.
4. You may extract an excerpt from a longer document you have written. However, if you choose to use only part of a document, include an introductory page with a fact paragraph introducing the material and placing it in context for the reader. Further, indicate that you can provide the entire sample upon request.
5. If the writing sample is based on a law school assignment and characters from fiction/television/movies are used, change all of the names to something generic. You want the reader distracted by your amazing writing skills, not by names.
6. If using work-product, you must first secure your employer's permission to do so. It is also imperative that you redact and substitute all confidential information including anything that may be identifiable to the reader. Redact = to put into suitable literary form; revise; edit.
7. Keep your writing sample pure. Employers want to see your writing in a polished format but only if it's your writing. Avoid using a version that has been co-authored or highly edited by another person.
8. Be prepared at every interview to give a writing sample to each person with whom you interview. Also, bringing more than one writing sample will demonstrate that you are not afraid to write and will highlight your abilities.

TRANSCRIPTS

Students should request an updated transcript (unofficial) after each grading period. By having it ready and available, you will be able to respond to job opportunities in a quick fashion by making photocopies for inclusion in an application.

For most job applications, unofficial transcripts are accepted by the employer and are recommended versus an official transcript.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Generally, a letter of recommendation is not included with an application submission unless it is requested; you wait for an employer to request a letter.

REFERENCES

Your references should never be listed on your resume. Instead, you should create a list of references that can be provided to an employer when requested. The format of a reference list is simple. Start with your name and contact information at the top (typically the same letterhead format as on your resume), followed by the names and contact information (name, work address, telephone number, e-mail, and relationship to you) of three to four people. Your references should be diverse, preferably a combination of professors and former employers. They should also be people who know you well enough to recommend you to other professionals. Always obtain permission from your references prior to each application and wait for the employer to ask for your list. Why? Because it could be that you submitted your reference list to employer A in February then accepted a job with employer B in March. After calling all of your references about new job with employer B, employer A calls your references. This might cause your references to be confused. Also, it could be that after you interview with an employer you prefer not to work there but, the person who checks references does not know that you have withdrawn your candidacy and calls them anyway. To avoid the confusion, at the end of an interview and only if you are still interested in taking the job, offer to provide references and/or give a copy of a recent recommendation letter.

THANK YOU NOTE/LETTER

A thank-you letter, or note, reminds the employer that you are still interested in the job and that you have remembered to thank him or her for taking the time to meet with you. You should also send a thank-you note after an informational interview. Yes, a note should be handwritten. It is important to send the thank-you letter/note immediately after the interview. Try to personalize your letter/note as much as possible but keep it formal and concise.

If you are interviewed by more than one person, you may send a thank-you letter to the person in the most senior position who interviewed you, requesting that he/she also extend your gratitude to the other named interviewers. However, you should consider writing a separate note to each of the other interviewers as well. You never know who might especially appreciate your considerate note and end up being the swing-vote person in the group of interviewers.

Thank-you letters are short and generally composed of three parts, divided up as follows:

1. Begin your letter by thanking the interviewer for taking the time to meet with you. Mention the date of the interview and position to refresh the reader's recollection.
2. Reaffirm your interest in the firm or business by pointing out particular issues mentioned during the interview that appeal to you. Try to personalize the letter by referring to some topic or common interest that was discussed during the interview.
3. Close the letter with another word of appreciation, and offer to provide more information, and a statement that you look forward to hearing from them in the near future.

Thank-you letters/notes are not just reserved for formal interviews. If you meet with an attorney or other professional for an informational meeting, you should send a thank-you note following your meeting. Again, remind the reader where/when you met as well as what was briefly discussed. Showing a bit of research about the area of law/firm is a nice touch, though not necessary at this point.

One last tip: think about pre-stamping and pre-addressing the envelope before the interview even takes place. This will help in getting out the thank you note as quickly as possible. We recommend that you send a thank-you or letter note the same day as the interview, or as close to it as possible.

SAMPLE COVER LETTERS (PAGES FOLLOWING)

THERE IS A REASON THIS PAGE IS IN LARGE FONT.
READ IT

It is important to remember that actual letters must be adapted to reflect your particular circumstances, your intentions, and geographical focus. The following samples are designed to give you general ideas.

I must warn you, however, that you should NEVER copy one of these letters and use it as your own. No matter where in the country you search, the legal community is small. We are embarrassed (and you should be as well) at the thought of law firms or businesses receiving cover letters from Barry University School of Law students which are strikingly similar. This is especially so for firms in the central Florida area. They will know what you have done and this will reflect badly on you and Barry Law.

Please resist the temptation to copy. Instead, think about your strengths and sell yourself in your own way. Lastly, highlight your best and show your personality but keep the tone business-like. Keep it simple!

Jennifer Sosa
15 Orlando Court
Orlando, FL 32814
(407) 311-3488 · Jennifersosa@aol.com

September 20, 2012

John Green, Esquire
Director of Legal Services
Kidz Best
10 Burd Road
Miami, FL 33022

Dear Mr. Green:

Professor Baker recommended that I contact you. I am a first-year law student at Barry University School of Law in Orlando. Currently, I seek a position with a non-profit organization for the summer of 2011 in Miami, and I am particularly interested in Kidz Best. Upon research, I see that the organization's mission is focused on the welfare of children, which is my passion. Following law school, I plan to work as a public interest attorney helping children in need.

While at Barry, I have gained extensive legal research and writing skills. Specifically, I received a "high pass" in my Legal Research and Writing class. Additionally, I am advanced certified in both Lexis Nexis and Westlaw. In terms of my commitment to children, I am currently an Orange County Volunteer ad Litem and help an attorney represent the best interests of children. In this role, I communicate with parents, foster parents, therapists and children to assess the needs of each child and assist the attorney in presenting these findings to the judge. I believe that this experience as well as my research and writing skills can be a benefit to Kidz Best.

Enclosed is a copy of my resume for your review. I plan to be in Miami during the first week in March and would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you to learn more about Kidz Best and share more about myself. Please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Sosa

Jennifer Sosa

Enclosure

Darrell Lowe
10 Water Street · Orlando, FL 32814
(407) 200-2399 · D.lowe@mymail.barry.edu

September 20, 2012

Michelle Star, Esq.
Hiring Committee Chair
Myers, Hoffa & Shawl, P.A.
100 South Lemon Avenue
Tampa, FL 32444

Dear Ms. Star:

Having worked in Tampa for over five years, I am familiar with the fine reputation of Myers, Hoffa & Shawl. It is quite an accomplishment to have at least five partners deemed Florida Super Lawyers in each of the last three years. And, I am particularly impressed with Myers Hoffa's commitment to community service.

In May, I will complete my first year of law school at Barry University School of Law. I will be returning home to Tampa between semesters, and I am seeking a summer associate position. I am very interested in working at a firm with a broad range of litigation practice areas, like Myers Hoffa.

Prior to law school, while a paralegal at Blueflower & Associates, I gained practical experience researching and preparing cases for administrative hearings and appeals. In addition, as a member of Barry University's Student Trial Advocacy Team, I regularly practice courtroom presentation techniques. The analytical and research skills I have developed, both as a paralegal and as a law student, have helped me to excel in school and secure a position in the top 25% of my class. I trust these skills would be an asset to Myers Hoffa.

A copy of my résumé is enclosed for your review. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the firm's summer associate program. I will make myself available for a personal interview at your convenience, and am also available by telephone.

Sincerely,

/s/

Darrell Lowe

Enclosure

Peter O'Donnell
5 Peace Lane · Austin, TX 74432
(327) 177-2349 · Podonnell@yahoo.com

September 20, 2012

NOTE: This is a sample of WHAT NOT TO DO!
See our comments on next page.

Office of State Prosecuting Attorney
100 South Street
Austin, Texas 77861

Dear State Prosecuting Attorney:

I am a first year student at Barry University School of Law in Orlando, Florida. I am interested in working as an intern at the Office of State Prosecuting Attorney based on the job posting on the Office's website.

I would be an asset to the Office of State Prosecuting Attorney as I was a Criminal Justice major and because of my love of criminal law. In terms of my background, I have worked in the restaurant industry for years. As a server, I communicated with patrons of all types to ensure they had a satisfactory dining experience. Also noteworthy is my ability to well prioritize demanding responsibilities as I held a full-time job as a server throughout my four years at University of Texas.

I have enclosed my resume for your review. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

/s/

Peter O'Donnell

Enclosure

Peter O'Donnell
5 Peace Lane · Austin, TX 74432
(327) 177-2349 · Podonnell@yahoo.com

September 20, 2012

Office of State Prosecuting Attorney
100 South Street
Austin, Texas 77861

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I have enclosed my resume for your review. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

/s/

Peter O'Donnell

Enclosure

Comment [a1]: Make sure to find out to whom the letter should be addressed (and include Esquire after the person's name if writing to an attorney). Then, include the individual's title below his/her name. Call the firm or business if necessary.

Comment [a2]: Again, find out to whom the letter should be addressed.

Comment [a3]: Use a colon instead of a comma in the greeting line as it is more formal.

Comment [a4]: Make sure to state when you are looking for the position. The summer of 2011?

Comment [a5]: Why are you applying in Texas when you are at a Florida school? Do you plan to move there after graduation? Do you plan on being there over the summer? You need to tell the employer. Don't force them to make assumptions based on your resume.

Comment [a6]: Stay away from using the word "love" in a cover letter.

Comment [a7]: You brought out two good points of your background. A third example might be a nice addition.

Comment [a8]: Good job reiterating your geographical ties to the area.

Comment [a9]: Ask for what you seek in the past paragraph. Also, if you happen to be visiting Texas, let the employer know when you will be available.