

EFFECTIVE COVER LETTERS

The goal of a cover letter is to persuade the employer to read your resume and extend an interview invitation. Cover letters are formal business correspondence and should be formatted as a business letter. A well written cover letter will use action verbs and varied adjectives, avoid overuse of the word “I”, and be free of grammatical and spelling errors. Have a friend or a strategist in the Career Center read your cover letter before sending to employers.

Regardless of your prior work history, **your cover letter should not exceed one page**. Your resume and cover letter should complement each other without being repetitive.

A well written legal cover letter will:

1. **Introduce yourself to the employer:** The first paragraph of your letter should identify your graduation year (*i.e.*, “Class of 2021” or “second year student”) and law school and state the position you are seeking (*i.e.*, summer associate, judicial law clerk). For example:

“I am a second year student at Washington University School of Law, and I am writing to apply for a summer associate position at Lowenstein & Jackson for summer 2020.”

“I am a first year student at Washington University School of Law and am seeking a 2020 summer legal internship at Chicago Legal Aid.”

2. **Establish a geographic connection to the employer:** State any ties you have to the employer’s location. This is typically included in the first paragraph of your cover letter. If you do not have any ties to the area, state your commitment to practice in that location during the summer and following graduation. For example:

“I am committed to remaining in St. Louis following law school.”

“I completed my undergraduate degree in Miami and look forward to returning next summer and following graduation from law school.”

“I am committed to practicing in Los Angeles following graduation. I will be in the city from July 21st through July 23rd and would appreciate the opportunity to meet.”

If you are applying to multiple offices of the same firm, note the other offices where you are applying. For example:

“I grew up outside of Boston and look forward to practicing in New England following graduation. In addition to your Boston office, I am applying to your Providence, Manchester and Bangor offices.”

“I am open geographically and am applying to your Los Angeles, Denver and Miami offices.”

3. **Express genuine interest in the particular employer:** Research the employer prior to drafting a cover letter. At a minimum, review the employer’s website, Martindale-Hubbell and/or the NALP Directory form (if applicable). Based on your research, draft tailored language that shows you have researched the organization and are interested in the organization for a specific reason. For public interest employers, it is important to show that you identify with the employer’s mission. For example:

“I am particularly interested in Lowenstein & Jackson because of its highly regarded trusts and estates practice.”

“Your organization’s mission of providing tax representation to low income individuals aligns with my interest in tax law and my commitment to pursuing a public interest career.”

4. **Highlight your relevant skills and abilities:** A cover letter should not simply reiterate what is already stated on your resume. Your cover letter should identify the skills, abilities and traits you possess that will benefit the organization and allow you to succeed in the position you are seeking. Provide examples from your experience as evidence of these skills, abilities and traits. For example:

“My attention to detail helped me excel in my legal writing class where I received the highest grade in my section.”

“I believe my strong work ethic will enable me to provide high quality work on tight deadlines. This past semester, I achieved a 3.85 GPA while taking a full course load and working 20 hours a week.”

“My role as a judicial intern allowed me to hone my legal research and writing skills by analyzing case law and preparing legal memoranda.”

Remain positive in your cover letter – avoid statements that are negative, apologetic or defensive.

5. **Thank the employer and invite follow up:** The last paragraph of your cover letter should thank the reader for his/her time, and invite follow up. If you will be in town on specific dates, note those dates for possible meetings. For example:

“Thank you in advance for considering my application. I will be in the Los Angeles area several times throughout the summer and would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you in person. I look forward to hearing from you.”

If you do not receive an initial response, it is acceptable to follow up with employers. Your phone call or email may be the reminder they need to move forward.

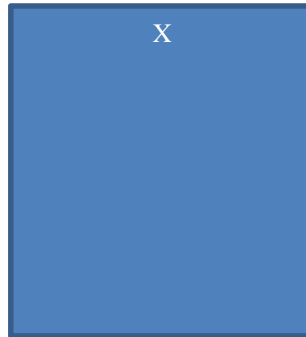
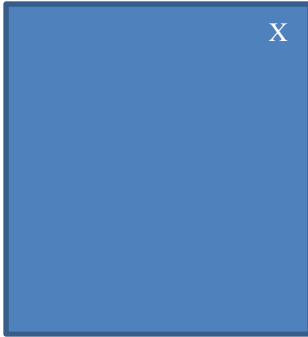
For your records, email yourself a copy of each cover letter you send to employers. Remember to update your cover letters routinely as you progress through law school and your summer internships.

Sample cover letters are provided by the Career Center, but you should not copy the language in these letters. Your experience will be unique. Be distinctive! Emphasize what makes you uniquely qualified.

COVER LETTER FORMAT

When you are submitting your cover letter in person or bringing it to an interview, cover letters should be printed on the same paper as your resume.

1. **Your Name and Address:** Make sure your name, address, phone number and email address appear at the top of the page. You should use the same contact information format that is on your resume. If you are applying to a position in St. Louis, be sure to include your local address. If you are applying to a position in your hometown, include your permanent address in order to establish a firm connection to the location. Place your name and contact information in one of these three locations:



2. **Date:** The letter should be dated above the address block of the recipient (generally centered on the page or justified on the left side).
3. **Employer Address:** The address block should be left justified and formatted as follows:

Individual Name
Title (where available)
Name of Employer
Address
City, State Zip Code

4. **The Salutation:** Cover letters should always be addressed to an individual. Do not use “Dear Sir or Madam” or “To Whom It May Concern.” Research the organization’s website and the NALP Directory to identify the appropriate addressee. If you have trouble finding the correct addressee, contact the Career Center for assistance. Use Mr. or Ms. Do not use Mrs. or Miss. Use a colon (not a comma) for business correspondence. For example:

“Dear Mr. Smith:”
“Dear Ms. Zimmerman:”

5. **Your Closing:** Use professional closing phrases. For example:

“Very Truly Yours,”
“Sincerely,”
“Respectfully”
“Regards”

6. **Signature:** If mailing a cover letter, sign it in blue or black ink and type your name under your signature. If sending a cover letter electronically (either by email or upload), type your name in the appropriate signature spot. You may include “/s/” before your typed signature. For example:

Very Truly Yours,

or

Sincerely,

Doug Winchell

/s/ Doug Winchell

Doug Winchell

Doug Winchell

The closing and signature should be left justified or tabbed to the right margin.

- 7. **Enclosures:** Your cover letter will include a resume as an enclosure, but may also include a transcript, writing sample or other materials required by the employer. After your typed signature, use "Enclosure", "Enc." or "Encl." if you are enclosing only one additional item. Use "Enclosures", "Encs." or "Encls." If you are attaching two or more.

SAMPLE COVER LETTER FORMAT

Your Name
 Street Address
 City, State Zip
 Phone Number
 Email address

Date

Contact Name
 Title
 Organization Name
 Street Address
 City, State Zip

Dear Mr./Mrs. Surname:

Body (3-4 paragraphs)

Sincerely,

Your Name

Your Name

Enclosure

Your Name
 Street Address
 City, State Zip
 Phone Number
 Email address

Date

Contact Name
 Title
 Organization Name
 Street Address
 City, State Zip

Dear Mr./Mrs. Surname:

Body (3-4 paragraphs)

Sincerely,

Your Name

Your Name

Encl.

The date can be centered or left justified and should be placed above the employer's address block.

June 15, 2019

Lauren Bacall
9823 Delmar Avenue, Apt. 3
St. Louis, MO 63130
(314) 555-5500
laurenbacall@wustl.edu

Include your name, address, phone number and email address at the top of the letter. Consider using the same format as your resume. Your name and contact information can be placed at the left margin, the center or the right margin.

A NOTE ABOUT YOUR ADDRESS: If you are applying in St. Louis, use your school address. If you are applying in your hometown, include both your school and home address to show the connection.

Ms. Jane Smith, Esq.
Director of Legal Recruiting
Marsh, Lowe & Jennings LLP
101 South 45th Avenue, Suite 340
New York, New York 10010

The address block should be left justified and include a contact name, if possible.

Dear Ms. Smith:

Do not use first names. Do not use Miss or Mrs. The salutation should be followed by a colon, not a comma.

I am rising 2L at Washington University School of Law, and I am writing to apply for a summer associate position at Marsh, Lowe & Jennings for the summer of 2020. I plan to practice in the New York area following graduation, and I am particularly interested in your firm because of your highly regarded and diverse corporate law practice.

Through my prior work experience, I have developed strong research and writing skills that will enable me to make an immediate and positive contribution as a summer associate at Marsh, Lowe & Jennings. This summer I am working as a legal intern for the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA). In this role, I have gained exposure to the rules governing the broker-dealer industry, participated in investigations and enforcement actions against violating firms and brokers, and honed my legal research and writing skills by drafting memoranda analyzing and applying FINRA rules. As a research assistant for the renowned Harris World Law Institute, I had the opportunity to further develop my legal research and writing skills by performing an extensive review and summary of international case law. In addition, through my position as a writing center consultant, I developed strong interpersonal skills, including the ability to tailor presentations and communications to accommodate unique audiences and to collaborate with a diverse group of peers.

My strong work ethic is evidenced by my academic success. I graduated *magna cum laude* from American University, and my thesis received high honors. I have also excelled in law school, finishing my first year with a 3.65 GPA (top 1/3 = 3.66). I particularly enjoyed my contracts and civil procedure class, and look forward to taking corporations and commercial law during the upcoming fall semester.

I will be in the New York area on July 7th and would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you in person. Additionally, I will be applying to your firm through Washington University's OCI program. I strongly believe that my enthusiasm, experience, and academic success will be a benefit to your firm and the summer program. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Very Truly Yours,

/s/ Lauren Bacall

Lauren Bacall

Use standard business closings, such as Sincerely, Truly, Regards, and Respectfully.

The signature block can be centered, left justified or closer to the right margin.

Encl.

If you are enclosing only your resume, use "Encl." If you are enclosing more than one other document (e.g., resume and transcript), use "Encls."