

Preparing a Cover Letter

Cover letters are not mere recitations of resumes. Rather, a cover letter is an opportunity to provide a prospective employer with specific details about your skills and background. A cover letter introduces the applicant, explains the applicant's purpose for writing, highlights a few experiences or skills relevant to the position being sought, and requests an opportunity to meet personally with the potential employers. It is also a chance to explain to a prospective employer why an applicant wants to work for them. Therefore, cover letters must be tailored based on the type of position and the individual employer. Employers often use cover letters to gauge writing ability and to get a better sense of the applicant's personality. It is crucial that the cover letter is professional, free of errors, and reflective of the individual applicant's style.

A. Brainstorming

Review the job description and select a few items from your personal, academic, and professional experience to expand upon that demonstrate the requisite skills for the position.

Research the employer thoroughly. Visit the employer's website. Most websites will provide you with basic knowledge about the employer such as the employer's history, the size and backgrounds of the staff, the types of cases handled, success stories, etc. Be sure to read any of the employer's publications (i.e. Annual Pro Bono report) that are available online. This will help you tailor your cover letter to the employer and also begin to prepare you for an interview.

B. General Formatting

Length: 1 page
Margins: Margins should be no smaller than .5, but 1" is preferable
Font Style: Same as resume
Font Size: Same as resume
File Format: When submitting cover letters electronically, be sure to convert the document to a PDF unless otherwise indicated. If mailing, be sure to print on resume paper.

C. Content

Header: Same as resume
Subject Line: Reference the job position or job title
Salutation: Direct letter to the appropriate contact person; *avoid* "Dear Hiring Manager" or "To Whom It May Concern"
Body: 4 – 5 paragraphs (see attachment for model cover letter)
Closing: Avoid overly familiar closings like "Regards" or "All the Best;"
Sign-off with "Sincerely," "Very Truly Yours," or "Respectfully."

D. Finalizing

Tone: Personal, but professional
Editing: Proofread, proofread, proofread, and have a CPD counselor review your cover letter.
Email your cover letter in Word format to Junsen Ohno, ohnoj@seattleu.edu.

STUART DENT

12345 Broad Ave. • Somewhere, WA 90000 • (206) 399-1212 • Stuart.Dent@yahoo.com

[Date]

Name of Contact
Title of Contact
Company/Firm
Address
Address

Re: [Position Title]

Dear Mr./Mrs.:

Paragraphs 1-2: Identify who you are (i.e. a first-year law student at Seattle University School of Law) and the position you are applying for. If you heard about the position from someone potentially influential, you should indicate that here. Mention how you learned about the employer or the job opening. Include a short sentence or two that summarizes why you are the right person for the job. Explain why you are interested in the position. Some reasons include an employer's reputation in the legal community, something you learned about the employer from a contact, the employer's reputation for mentoring his/her staff, the employer's commitment to public service, etc. Be specific. You need to do your research and tailor this paragraph to the employer. You may also discuss your desired practice area and how the position fits in to your long term career goals.

Paragraph 2-3: This is where you sell yourself and market your skills. **Focus on your strengths and highlight any skills or experiences (professional and/or academic) that make you the right person for this job.** You can devote one paragraph to work experience and one paragraph to academic experience (undergrad, grad, and law). Both paragraphs should conclude with a line that relates your skills/experiences to the responsibilities of the job you are seeking.

You need to convince the employer that you will be a benefit to him/her. Do not just state that you are a hard worker or are detail-oriented. Illustrate these skills with specific examples from your experience/background. Some skills/background to highlight can include:

- 1) Skills:
 - a. Strong legal research and writing skills
 - b. Incredible work ethic
 - c. Detail-oriented
 - d. Ability to work well under pressure/produce quality work under tight deadlines
 - e. Organized
 - f. Strong communication skills
 - g. Background pertinent to the position (i.e., bankruptcy, family law, mediation, etc.)
 - h. Personable/able to get along with a variety of individuals and work as part of a team.
- 2) Prior work experience (stressing what you learned from that experience).
- 3) Relevant coursework, exceptional grades, accomplishments.
- 4) Other activities that indicate initiative or ability to multitask or ability to work well in a group, etc. Any background that requires precision or attention to detail (i.e., accounting, engineering, finance, etc.).

Paragraph 4: The closing paragraph is where you reiterate your interest in the position, summarize your qualifications, and request an interview. You should also thank the employer for his/her time and consideration.

Respectfully,

[Your signature here]
Stuart Dent