



Your Cover Letter

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Employers do read the cover letter, don't they? Well, yes, but briefly. Since employers only spend about a minute looking over all application materials and most of that time is spent on the resume, an employer will probably only spend 10 to 20 seconds reading your letter. Make it succinct. This is your chance to quickly inject some of your personality into your application package. After reading your cover letter, an employer should feel that he or she knows you a little better. This is also your chance to demonstrate the writing ability you honed in law school or through years of writing briefs. Just keep one thing in mind: The cover letter is a brief supplement to your resume. It is not the main attraction. Also, when employers spend so little time reading the cover letter, it is not worth it to customize a letter to each firm or company. Instead, make sure your cover letter focuses on your best assets. Essentially, your letter should serve as a short introduction that lets the employer know who you are, what you can do, and how to reach you.

First Paragraph

Identify yourself without sounding trite. Try to lead with your strengths. If you are about to graduate at the top of your law school class, say so. If you have had successes in your current job, but are looking for new challenges, let the potential employer know. Remember, an employer is only going to spend a few seconds reading your letter. Make sure your opening paragraph is an attention-grabber. Show some enthusiasm!

Middle Paragraph(s)

Here, you can go into more detail about your relevant experiences. You don't want to simply rehash what is on your resume, but you should not bring up anything that isn't listed on your resume. Flesh out your background with anecdotes that demonstrate your accomplishments. This is the time to show potential employers why you can be of value to them. Highlight your unique skills and experiences in a concise fashion, and let them draw conclusions about where to place you. You don't want to focus your search too narrowly. Avoid statements like, "My past experience in taxation can make me a valuable asset to your tax department." What if the tax department doesn't have an opening, but the hiring partner thinks you would be perfect for the finance department? If you seem closed-minded, you could miss out on a great opportunity.

There are always exceptions to the "detail" rule, of course. Remember, your cover letter needs to get to the point quickly. If you are a senior associate, or if you have an impressive string of accomplishments, you may find it most effective to use a bulleted list to highlight your achievements. Make it easy for a potential employer to get the main idea before flipping to your resume. The more experience you have, generally, the less explanation you need in a cover letter.

The middle paragraphs also give you an opportunity to explain any inconsistencies or gaps in your resume. Don't dwell on periods during which you were out of work, but do consider giving a brief explanation. That will prevent the employer from assuming the worst. Also, if you have worked for a



firm for many years, but are now seeking an in-house position, explain why. If you have specialized in a particular area of law, but now want to switch your focus, demonstrate how the skills you have learned can be transferable to this new area. Always keep your tone positive, and show the employer how he or she could benefit by hiring you.

Final Paragraph

This is your opportunity to close the deal. Your middle paragraphs should make a persuasive case. The final paragraph should sum up your abilities and stress your interest in working for this potential employer. Say that you hope to meet in person or that you look forward to an interview. However, we do not recommend that you indicate that you will follow up with them. Many employers do not wish to receive calls. Besides, you may be applying to hundreds of firms, making it impossible for you to follow up with all of them in a timely manner. If your cover letter and resume have presented you in the best possible light, employers should be eager to contact you.

Close the letter with a cordial tone. According to Miss Manners, “Yours truly” is the proper way to close a business letter. “Sincerely yours” is used for more personal letters. You may consider other closings, such as “Kind regards,” but closings like “In anticipation” or “Eagerly” can sound silly. Sometimes it’s best to stick with the classics.

Legal Authority has years of experience in crafting dynamic cover letters. We can revise your current letter or create a new one from scratch. Remember, the cover letter is a reflection of you as a potential employee. We use a standardized style sheet for consistent spelling, grammar, capitalization, and formatting. We also ensure that your letter sets a professional tone. Let our expertise work for you.

More Cover Letter Resources

Basics About Cover Letters

An introductory look at cover letters.

Common Mistakes People Make on Cover Letters

A cover letter is an essential tool used to generate interest in you and your resume. Be certain to avoid these common mistakes when composing yours.

Cover Letter Do’s and Don’ts

A relatively comprehensive list of what to do and, perhaps more important, what not to do when composing your cover letter, by Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D., and Katharine Hansen.

Cover Letter Recommendations

A cover letter—done properly—is a selling tool, an opportunity to “stand out among other applicants” and convince potential employers to hire you. Done improperly, it can be a disaster. Which do you want?



Cover Letter Resource Guide

A comprehensive guide to writing cover letters, discussing who needs a cover letter, what makes a good cover letter, a sample cover letter and including links to other resources on the web.

Dynamic Cover Letters That Generate Higher Salaries and More Interviews

It is extremely important to create a cover letter that will “sell” your skills and abilities to potential employers. ProvenResumes.com shows you how.

Guidelines and Suggestions to Improve Your Cover Letter

The cover letter should serve as an introduction to your resume. Follow this outline to write a great one.

Guidelines and Suggestions to Improve Your Cover Letter

The author provides several general guidelines to follow when composing your cover letter.

How to Write a GREAT Letter

A collection of links to articles describing effective letter-writing strategies, including tips on how to organize your thoughts and ideas, common letter-writing mistakes, and how to follow up.

How-to Guide to Cover Letters

A how-to guide to writing effective cover letters, including content, formatting, and writing tips from careerbuilder.com.

Selling Your Skills on Paper

A strong cover letter can establish a personal connection with potential employers before you even meet. Renee Gotcher provides several tips for writing a great letter and examples of what it should look like.