

# HOW TO WRITE A COVER LETTER THAT WILL IMPRESS AN EMPLOYER

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If an employer has requested a cover letter as part of the application, that means they *want* to read one. They want to hear more from you and learn more about you than what they can find on your resume.

So why do you want to work for me?

That is the most important question an employer will want you to answer when they read your cover letter. And, as someone who has worked in a law school career planning and placement office for more than 10 years, from the letters I have reviewed for students and alumni, this is most often the piece that is *missing*.

Employers receive countless applications from candidates, so when you are given the opportunity to write a letter, take that opportunity to stand out. Here's how.

## Cover Letter Writing Basics

Of course, grammar and spelling are important. Even if you address that one key question the employer wants answered, if your cover letter has grammatical or spelling errors (maybe even just one error), your letter may land in the trash or at least at the bottom of the pile.

Your cover letter should be grammatically perfect. You should have zero spelling errors. One of the frequent spelling errors I see that slips through spellcheck, since technically it is spelled properly, is that the candidate excels in *costumer* service—which is very different from *customer* service. Triple-check your work as though it were a memorandum you were submitting for your first-year legal writing class.

A cover letter should also be structured and formatted properly. This means starting with a header at the top that should have your name and all your contact information—your mailing address (unless you have a strong reason or preference to omit that),

phone number, and email address. Your header should be identical to the one you have on your resume. Here's an example:

Jessica Michelle Ciminero, Esq.  
123 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Miami, FL 56789  
###-###-#### email.com

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That should be followed by the date you submit your application and the employer's address block. You can often find this information within the job posting. Unless the posting directs you otherwise, use the contact person who posted the job (for example, in your school's online job posting system). Include their full name, their job title, the employer's name, and their mailing address. It is always best to address your letter to a human instead of "To whom it may concern."

If the job posting does not tell you whom to write to, it is time to do some research. Often, the contact person you should be looking for has a title along the lines of the recruiting director, recruiting manager, or recruiting coordinator. Here's how that block should look:

January 1, 2024

Jane Doe, Legal Recruitment Coordinator  
Law Firm A  
456 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite B  
Miami, FL 89123

## The Content of Your Cover Letter

Your letter should catch the employer's attention from your first paragraph—going back to answering that key question of why you want to work for this specific employer. Do you know someone who works at that firm? Did someone recommend that you apply there? Are you particularly interested in one of their niche practices?

This first paragraph is where you want to share these key details. The employer needs to see that you are not just writing one generic cover letter and sending that out to any and all employers with an active job posting.

Once you have told that part of the story, you can share why you are qualified for this position. Use the job posting as a guide. Employers will generally tell you exactly what

they are looking for in their job post, from the hiring criteria to the job duties.

Weave your experiences, positions, and skills into your sentences to show why you are capable of (and interested in) doing tasks A, B, and C that they laid out in the posting. They know that working for them would be a great learning experience for you, that it will benefit you to gain new legal research and writing experience, and so on. You do not need to tell them that. What they want you to show is the benefit you will contribute *to them*.

And do not repeat exactly what you have on your resume. This is your chance to expand on those points in your resume, particularly since both your resume and your cover letter should each be only one page.

You need a closing paragraph to wrap everything up. One common sentence I see that I suggest omitting is telling the employer they can reach you at ###-###-#### or abc@def.com. Your phone number and email address should be in the header at the top of the page—you do not need to repeat it here. (Side note: For this same reason, the first sentence of your cover letter should not be, “My name is \_\_\_\_.”)

## Where Does AI Fit into a Cover Letter?

One new factor to consider today is the role of artificial intelligence. I know there are many AI resources that aim to help you draft various things, but my advice would be to proceed with caution before using AI to draft your cover letter.

Law school career planning and placement teams have heard rumblings from law firms discovering this new practice. And your advisors have also likely started noticing that cover letters being submitted are starting to sound very familiar to each other. Your letter should sound like you—not like a robot and not like everyone else who has decided to use AI. The employer wants to hear your voice.

Use this one page to the very best of your abilities to show the employer in your own voice why you want to work for *them*.