



Washington University School of Law
CAREER CENTER

Cover Letter Guide



EFFECTIVE COVER LETTERS

The goal of a cover letter is to persuade the employer to read your resume and extend an invitation to interview. 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, will avoid overuse of the word "I," and will be free of grammatical and spelling errors. Have a friend or a strategist in the Career Center read your cover letter before sending it 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.

An effective legal cover letter will:

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."

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."

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.”

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.

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.

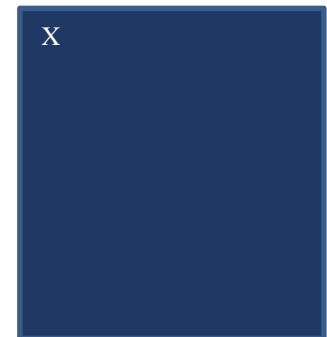
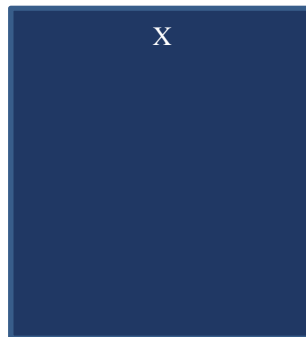
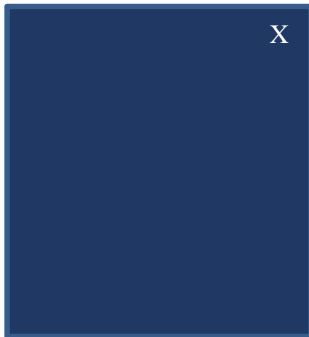
For your records, email yourself a copy of each cover letter you send to employers. Remember to update your cover letters routinely as you progress through law school and your summer internships.

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.

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:



Date: The letter should be dated above the address block of the recipient (generally centered on the page or justified on the left side).

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

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:”

Your Closing: Use professional closing phrases. For example:

“Very truly yours,”
“Sincerely,”
“Respectfully”
“Regards”

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.

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./Ms. Surname:
Body (3-4 paragraphs)
Sincerely, <i>Your Name</i> 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./Ms. Surname:
Body (3-4 paragraphs)
Sincerely, <i>Your Name</i> Your Name
Encl.

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.

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

June 15, 2019

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.

In this paragraph: (1) identify your class year and school; (2) mention any geographic ties to the area; and (3) include information about why you are interested in the specific employer.

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.

If you are applying to multiple offices, indicate that here. For example: "In addition to your Washington, D.C. office, I am also applying to your Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York offices."

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.

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.

Very Truly Yours,

Lauren Bacall

Lauren Bacall

The last paragraph should thank the employer and provide for future contact. For example, if you are direct applying in a city where you are not located for the summer, if possible, offer a date you will be in town for a potential meeting. Alternatively, simply state "Please feel free to contact me at the phone number listed above."

If you are direct applying and applying through OCI, state that here or in the first paragraph.

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 "Encs."

The second paragraph (and if applicable, the third) is an opportunity for you to market yourself. Do not regurgitate your resume. Talk about the skills and abilities you possess and back it up with examples from your prior work experience and academic studies.

If you do not have prior work experience, look to your extracurricular activities to convey your skills. The skills you reference can be legal in nature and/or general (e.g., research and writing, attention to detail, communication, diligence, work ethic).

If you are a 2L, you should lead with your legal experience - both your 1L summer position and your law school performance.

Anne M. Walsh

2455 Waterman Blvd. Apt #1
St. Louis, MO 63108
annewalsh@wustl.edu
(903) 555-0055

December 10, 2019

Mr. John Markerson
Legal Recruiting Manager
Chicago Legal Clinic
2928 East 91st Street
Chicago, Illinois 60617

Dear Mr. Markerson:

I am a first year student at Washington University School of Law in St. Louis, and I am writing to apply for an internship with Chicago Legal Clinic for the summer of 2020. I have extensive family ties in the Chicago area and plan to practice in Chicago following law school. I hope to pursue a career in public interest, serving those of greatest need, and I am inspired by your mission of providing community-based legal services to the underserved as a means of promoting justice.

My prior experience and academic coursework have given me the skills and practical abilities necessary to make a meaningful impact as a summer intern in your office. My work experience has provided many opportunities to develop and enhance my research, writing and communication skills. As a paralegal for Portman & Wayne, I participated in discovery and trial preparation for personal injury defense cases. In this role, I was responsible for case law research regarding California personal injury protection coverage and drafting legal briefs. My work as a public interest fellow at the ACLU sparked my desire to attend law school and pursue a public interest career, but also provided the opportunity to write high level reports on pressing criminal justice issues and to enhance my interpersonal and communication skills through client intake and community outreach work. In addition, as a research assistant at Pepperdine, I was responsible for extensive research and statistical modeling regarding terrorist activity. This project required that I synthesize and analyze large amounts of data to determine and predict patterns and present my findings in a written report and oral presentation. With respect to my academic studies, I graduated with honors from Pepperdine University and have excelled in my first semester legal coursework at Washington University.

I am confident that my background, experience, and commitment to public service will enable me to succeed as an intern with Chicago Legal Clinic. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

/s/ Anne M. Walsh

Anne M. Walsh

Encl.

Ryan Smith

2341 Delmar Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63108
314-555-5555
ryan.smith@wustl.edu

December 1, 2019

Ms. Jane Adams
Recruiting Manager
Mason, Smith & Hayes LLP
1589 West Third Street
Memphis, Tennessee 38018

Dear Ms. Adams:

I am a first year student at Washington University School of Law in St. Louis, and I am seeking a summer legal internship with Mason, Smith & Hayes. I am from Memphis and am committed to returning to the area this summer and following graduation. I am specifically interested in your firm because of its highly regarded commercial litigation practice.

I am confident that my strong work ethic, experience and eagerness to learn will allow me to make a positive contribution to your firm. Through my experience as a waiter and dishwasher at Roma's Diner, I developed strong interpersonal and problem solving skills. In the fast-paced restaurant setting, it was necessary to assess, analyze, and solve disagreements between colleagues and customers while remaining positive and proactive. As a camp counselor for the YMCA, I was given increasing responsibilities each summer as a result of my hard work and dedication. Eventually I assumed a leadership role, mentoring junior counselors and developing camp curriculum and activities. In addition to my work experience, my academic coursework has given me the opportunity to develop my research and writing capabilities. At Bowdoin College, I researched and authored an undergraduate thesis examining bureaucratic authoritarianism in Argentina, and during my first semester of law school, I have excelled in my legal research and writing course.

Enclosed please find a copy of my resume. Thank you for considering my application. Please feel free to contact me if I can provide any additional information.

Respectfully,

Ryan Smith

Ryan Smith

Encl.

Thomas Cruise

3567 Forsyth, Apt 4D
St. Louis, MO 63130
314-550-0055
tcruise@wustl.edu

June 21, 2019

Mr. John Craft
Senior Recruiting Coordinator
Delaney & Wright, LLP
1551 M Street, Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Mr. Craft:

I am a second year student at Washington University School of Law and am interested in a 2020 summer associate position with Delaney & Wright. I am attracted to your firm's global presence and strong consumer products litigation practice; however, I would welcome the opportunity to gain experience in any practice area. Having spent several years after college in Washington, D.C., I have strong ties to the mid-Atlantic region and plan to return next summer and following graduation. In addition to your Washington, D.C. office, I am also applying to your Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York offices.

I am confident that my experience and enthusiasm will be a benefit to your firm. As an intern at the St. Louis Circuit Attorney's Office, I had the opportunity to enhance my legal research and drafting skills by preparing research memoranda and pretrial motions. Through second chairing a robbery trial, I acquired a practical perspective on courtroom practice and custom, and learned first-hand the preparation needed to successfully try cases. Prior to entering law school, I was a fourth grade teacher in Washington, D.C. In this role, I developed strong organizational and interpersonal skills. Parent-teacher conferences required effective and careful communication with people from varied backgrounds, and the training sessions I presented helped me to become a confident public speaker.

In addition to my work experience, I am proud of my strong academic record. I graduated *summa cum laude* from Bellarmine University, while serving as captain of the varsity tennis team. At Washington University, I have excelled in my coursework and was chosen to participate in the Appellate Clinic for my 2L spring semester. Further, I was selected as a staff editor for the Washington University Law Review.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. If you have any questions or need any additional materials, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

/s/ Thomas Cruise

Thomas Cruise

Encl.

Percy Jackson
percyjackson@wustl.edu

School Address:
222 Lordshill
St. Louis, MO 63119
(314) 550-0055

Permanent Address:
89 Kettering Drive
Corona, CA 92877
(951) 230-0011

June 16, 2019

Ms. Emily Kramer
Office Administrator
California Immigrant Aid Project
31 South Main Street
Riverside, CA 92503

Dear Ms. Kramer:

I am a second year student at Washington University School of Law and am writing to express interest in a summer internship with the California Immigrant Aid Project for the summer of 2020. I am originally from Corona, California and intend to return to California next summer and following graduation. My goal is to work for a public interest organization providing legal services to disadvantaged communities. I am inspired by your mission of ensuring that immigrants in your community have access to competent and compassionate legal representation and would be honored to work in your office next summer.

My dedication to a career as a public interest attorney began through my volunteer activities at Tufts University. Throughout my undergraduate career, I dedicated five hours each week to service at the Jackson Mann Community Center, where I was responsible for providing after-school programming for elementary school students from low income households. I have continued my dedication to service in law school. This summer, as a legal intern at Legal Services of Eastern Missouri in the elder law division, I worked with low income elderly residents to address a variety of legal issues, including access to housing, healthcare and benefits. In this role, I have had the opportunity to practice my legal research and writing skills by analyzing relevant statutes and case law regarding housing benefits eligibility and applying the law to the unique facts of each case. I have also had the opportunity to hone my communication skills through my client intake duties, which require actively listening to each client's story and then effectively communicating next steps to address pending legal issues.

In the fall semester, I am excited to participate in the Immigration Law Clinic at Washington University, where I will have the opportunity to provide legal representation to the St. Louis immigrant population. I am also proud of my academic accomplishments. I graduated with honors from Tufts University, and my GPA at Washington University places me in the top 25% of my class.

I am confident that my background, experience and commitment to public service will enable me to make a positive and meaningful contribution to your office and mission. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Percy Jackson

Percy Jackson

Encl.

Joseph Zhang

1234 Clayton Road, Apt. 2E
St. Louis, Missouri 63105
jzhang@wustl.edu
(314) 987-6543

September 2, 2019

Ms. Janet Smith
Director of Recruiting
McKenzie & Jones, LLP
1234 Pine Street
Los Angeles, California 90210

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am a third-year student at Washington University School of Law interested in an associate position with McKenzie & Jones, LLP following graduation in May 2020. Having spent four years in Southern California attending the University of California, Irvine, I am excited about the possibility of beginning my legal career in Los Angeles with your firm. Specifically, I am interested in working in a mid-sized firm where new associates are given significant responsibility early on in their careers, and I know that McKenzie & Jones offers that opportunity.

This past summer, my interest in litigation was confirmed by the valuable hands-on experience I gained working in a small Orange County firm. I assisted attorneys at Smith & Smith, a firm that performs general litigation work for a variety of small businesses and private individuals. I researched and drafted legal memoranda on a wide range of substantive and procedural issues and was able to participate in many depositions and motion hearings. In addition to my summer experience, I can offer your firm strong academic credentials. I performed solidly my second year in law school, earning a GPA that would have placed me just outside the top third of my class. I also did very well in my undergraduate studies, graduating *magna cum laude* from the University of California, Irvine with a degree in economics. My combination of strong academic and practical experience will allow me to make an immediate contribution at McKenzie & Jones as a litigation associate.

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

Very truly yours,

Joseph Zhang

Joseph Zhang

Enclosure