

COVER LETTER BEST PRACTICES

1. **Conduct some self-assessment.** Review your StrengthsFinder assessment report and consider completing other self-assessment tools that will assist you in objectively describing your strengths and skills. Reflect on your academic and professional experiences that will illustrate your interests and abilities. Think about how you can articulate your potential fit for a legal position.
2. **Research the position and employer.** Before writing your cover letter, research the organization to which you are applying. Try to understand the mission, practice areas, clients, and structure of the organization. Identify alumni who work there and talk to current students who previously interned for that employer. Read the summer employment surveys in Symplicity if available.
3. **Create an original letter for each application.** You want to showcase your interest and personality, so avoid the temptation to use the same letter for every employer/position. Take the time to customize a letter for every position to which you apply. Make sure each cover letter is properly addressed to the designated employer contact. Simply changing the employer name in a letter prior to submitting it to a new employer can lead to careless errors that may disqualify your application.
4. **Address the letter appropriately.** Take the time to do your research about who will be reading your letter. If you are unable to find specific information about whom to address your letter in the job posting or online, call the employer and ask for the name (and spelling) and title of the person making hiring decisions for the position. Take the extra step to personalize the letter.
5. **Make a good first impression.** Follow formatting conventions. Begin your cover letter with a strong opening statement. Explain who you are and why you are interested in the position and the particular employer.
6. **Start your second paragraph with a strong topic sentence.** The second paragraph of your cover letter should outline your qualifications, skills, and experience. Start this paragraph with a topic sentence that highlights two or three main strengths or skill sets that you know will be required to do the job successfully. You can then include examples that demonstrate you possess those attributes.
7. **Don't rehash your resume.** Your cover letter should complement your resume and showcase your personal qualifications for the job. Read the job description and qualifications for the position, and then connect the description with your qualifications. Mirror the language used by the employer in the listing if applicable. Discuss how you fulfill the employer's needs, and list specific projects you worked on or things you have learned from past positions. Use your cover letter to describe a few items in more depth than what is noted on your resume.

8. **Convey enthusiasm.** Make it clear why you want the position. Draft a letter that makes you stand out from other applicants. If you know about a specific project or initiative, talk about it and why you are excited to contribute. Legal employers do not expect you to have legal expertise at this point, but they do want to hire candidates with strong foundational skills who are enthusiastic, curious, and full of potential.
9. **Keep it short and sweet.** Your cover letter should not be longer than one page. (There are some exceptions to the one-page rule. If you believe they apply in your case, please discuss your cover letter with your career advisor.) Sign your letter or insert an electronic version of your hand-written signature.
10. **Proofread your cover letter.** One spelling or grammatical error could ruin your chances at getting the position. Give yourself enough time to proofread your letter, and then send it to your career advisor for proofreading. An extra review will improve your chance of submitting a strong letter.