



**THE OFFICE OF CAREER AND  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

# Cover Letter Toolkit

A RESOURCE GUIDE TO HELP YOU WRITE AN  
EFFECTIVE COVER LETTER



STETSON LAW

# Cover Letters

Your cover letter is one of your first opportunities to leave a good first impression, and it may be the only chance you get. It is also personal – you are different from every other candidate and your cover letter should also be different. Your cover letter is the opportunity to tell the reader (potential employer) your story, in your own voice.

Your goal for your cover letter is to get you in front of and into a conversation with a decision-maker. This means you should begin to convince the reader that you are interesting, unique, and worth the time it will take to meet you and get to know you better. You do not write a cover letter to ask for a job. You may write a cover letter to ask for a meeting, an interview, an introduction to a member of the organization, or information.

Remember a cover letter is a letter to a person and should be prepared accordingly. A formal business letter should be clean and neat – traditional fonts (Arial, Calibri, Cambria, Garamond, or Times New Roman) and formatting. Be sure the font type in

your cover letter matches your resume and the font size is no greater than 12 and no smaller than 10. Margins should be 1 inch around. Below is a rough outline of where some of the above content should be placed:

**First Paragraph:** This is your introduction paragraph, you need to try to capture the reader's attention here or they may not get to the paragraphs where you talk about all the great experience you have. Try to start the paragraph with a sentence about what makes you different from all the other candidates – persuade the reader this is a letter they want to continue reading. Transition into the job you are applying for and/or why this employer (show you've done your research). Also, if you are writing a cover letter on the recommendation of a colleague, the first paragraph is where you would include this information – it is perfectly acceptable to “name drop” providing you have permission to do so. Try to include a thesis statement that outlines the 2-3 reasons (described in the body) why you are the best candidate for the job. No need to state where specifically you heard about the job.

**Body:** The next few paragraphs will be the body of your cover letter where you will discuss your experiences, skills, and what you can bring to the employer that were the focus of your thesis statement in the first paragraph. This is not a five paragraph essay, so don't limit yourself to three body paragraphs – if your story fits better into four, shorter body paragraphs, then write it that way. It's more important that the way the content is arranged makes sense to the reader. Don't just repeat your resume content here. Use it as an opportunity to highlight some key experiences that you want the reader to zone in on.

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## Cover Letters (cont.)

**Last Paragraph:** This is your conclusion. Take the first sentence or two to recap what you discussed in the cover letter – why you may be a good fit for this employer. Tell the reader what you are enclosing (resume, writing sample, transcript, etc.) but do not enclose documents the employer doesn't request (i.e. – if the employer doesn't request references, then don't include them). Thank the reader for their time. Outline the next step, if appropriate – if you are applying through Stetson's On Campus Recruiting program, then the next step is already planned and you do not need to include this. If you include a next step that involved action on your part (i.e. "I will call next Tuesday to follow up") then make sure you follow through.

### [Simplicity Downloads](#)

- Cover Letter Layout Template

Cover Letter Do's	Cover Letter Don'ts
<b>DO</b> have tailored content for each cover letter you send out	<b>DON'T</b> use a cover letter template you find on the internet or get from a friend
<b>DO</b> be specific and provide examples	<b>DON'T</b> use generic terms such as "nice" or "hard worker" without examples
<b>DO</b> research the law firm/business to whom you are sending the cover letter	<b>DON'T</b> copy and paste the name of the recipient into an old cover letter
<b>DO</b> try to find a specific person to address the cover letter to	<b>DON'T</b> address the letter "To Whom It May Concern:"
<b>DO</b> use active voice whenever possible	<b>DON'T</b> use legal jargon (remember the person reading your cover letter might not be a lawyer)
<b>DO</b> proofread and have someone else proofread your cover letter before you submit it to an employer	<b>DON'T</b> count on spell and grammar check to catch a mistake
<b>DO</b> focus on what skills/experiences you can bring to the employer	<b>DON'T</b> focus on what you expect and/or want to gain from the employment
<b>DO</b> have the Career Development Office review and offer feedback on your cover letter	<b>DON'T</b> use a commercial service to draft your cover letter (or resume) for you

## Cover Letters (cont.)

Here are some ideas to help make sure that your cover letter is concise, grammatically perfect, and persuasive:

**Do not use a template.** Each cover letter for each job you apply for should be unique and written only for that job. The good news is, you don't have to completely re-write your cover letter for each job you apply for. You should take 15-30 minutes to edit and revise your cover letter to make sure it's tailored to the job opportunity you are applying for, especially if you do your research and the employer specifies certain skills, experience, or qualities they are looking for in candidates.

**Research** the employer (and position, if applying to a specific position). Your letter should reflect that you have done research and have knowledge of the employer (and the position, if possible) and can discuss why you may be a good fit to join the team.

**Make sure to let the employer know what position you are applying for.** If you are applying to a specific position. If you are applying simply to the firm/office/employer and not pursuing a

specific position, you should announce the reason the firm/ office/employer compels you (show that you've done your research). This should go in the first paragraph of your cover letter.

**Make sure the employer is the main "who" of the letter.** This is about how you would add to them and what you would bring to their team, not a list of what you have accomplished (they can find that on your resume) or what you want to obtain from the experience.

**Show, don't tell.** Instead of telling the reader you are a team player, it is much more powerful and effective to provide an example of a time you cooperated with and/or led a team.

**Proofread.** You probably mean trail advocacy, not trail advocacy. It is most likely that you meant to say martial arts and not marital arts. Don't expect your spellcheck software to be the final eyes on a document - the final editing eyes should be your own. You are trying to sell your skills as a professional; pay attention to detail and proofread. A good trick is to read your cover letter backward – this focuses your brain to

concentrate on the individual words (not the content) so you're more likely to find "trail advocacy" than if you were reading it in context.

**Use active voice whenever possible.** This is much shorter and easier for the reader to read and retain.

**Keep it to one page.** There are no exceptions to this rule.

Each cover letter for each job you apply for should be unique and written only for that job.

**Keep copies of all the cover letters you send.** Be sure to keep a copy of your cover letter on your computer in case you need to reference it later.

**Remember, that drafting a cover letter is a process.** it will take some time and more than one draft.

**Know what your story is and make sure it's told well.** You don't have to be creative to write a good cover letter, just reflective and well written.

## Cover Letters (cont.)

If you are stuck and don't know where to begin drafting your cover letter, take a look at the personal statement you wrote for your law school application. Hopefully this will contain some well thought out statements about who you are, why you chose to come to law school, and where you want to go/what you want to be. Take these thoughts and expand upon them using the experiences you listed on your resume to provide examples of the skills you learned/honed and how those experiences affected your future career goals.

# Anatomy of a Cover Letter

## Sample Cover Letter

Sender's  
Contact  
Information

Student B. Awesome  
1401 61<sup>st</sup> Street South  
Gulfport, FL 33707  
727-562-5555  
SBawesome@law.stetson.edu

June 7, 2019

Employer's  
Contact  
Information

Ms. Jane Doe, Esq.  
Prominent Employer, LLP  
123 Main Street  
Gulfport, FL 33709

Dear Mr. Doe:

Body of letter. Body of letter. Body of letter. Body of letter. Body of letter.  
Body of letter. Body of letter. Body of letter. Body of letter. Body of letter.  
Body of letter. Body of letter. Body of letter. Body of letter.

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Sincerely,

Student B. Awesome

You can, but do  
not have to hand-  
sign your cover  
letter

Be sure the font type  
in your cover letter  
matches your  
resume and the font  
size is no greater  
than 12.

The cover  
letter should  
be one page  
only.