
Alumni Cover Letter Guide

Your cover letter, along with your resume, is likely the first opportunity a potential employer will have to see your written work. While your resume focuses on what you have done in the past, your cover letter should reflect what you hope to accomplish in the future, what you have to offer the employer and your commitment to the work of the organization. In essence, the cover letter is a persuasive document that in a well-reasoned manner convinces the employer to interview you.

COVER LETTER TIPS

- Tell the employer who you are
- Demonstrate your knowledge of the employer and the work they do
- DO NOT simply recite your resume
- Highlight one or two experiences that reflect the skills you bring
- Relate those experiences and skills to the work the employer does
- Demonstrate that you would be a good fit for the organization

Something to Keep in Mind

Employers often use cover letters to narrow the candidate pool. Cover letter issues that may eliminate a candidate include:

- Grammatical errors, typos and misspellings (especially of the organization name or the name of the contact person)
- Lack of knowledge about the organization and their work
- Inability to demonstrate the value of the skills and experiences you bring
- Inability to demonstrate geographic ties or reason for interest in location of employer

Before you begin writing

Take some time to research the employer. This can easily be done through an internet search. Search using Google, Martindale.com, PSJD.org, LinkedIn.com and of course, the employers own website. If you know who you will be interviewing with, do a search on the interviewer as well. When you are searching, focus on the following:

- Location of the employer
- Number of attorneys (If you're a masters grad, number of employees)
- Practice areas (for masters, focus of the organization)
- Focus of the practice in general
- Philosophical outlook of employer – do they have a mission or vision statement
- Are there any VLS alums employed there?
- Review past projects, important cases, ongoing initiatives to reference in your cover letter

Writing Your Cover Letter

As mentioned above, your cover letter, along with your resume, are two documents that an employer will use to determine whether or not to interview you.

Make sure you proofread your letter, read it out loud to yourself, have a friend read it, and/or send it to a counselor at Career Services for review.

Basic rules for setting up your cover letter

Be consistent in your formatting. Use the same font and font size as your resume. Some recommended fonts are: Times New Roman, Garamond or Perpetua. Use the same margins throughout. If you choose to use block format paragraphs, make sure all the paragraphs are formatted this way. If you choose to indent the first line of your paragraphs, do the same for the rest of the paragraphs.

THE ADDRESS BLOCK

If you have not already, set up a letterhead in the heading of your document, centered at the top of the page, and use for both your resume and your cover letter:

Your Name
Address
Email Address and phone number

Date

Mr. John Smith, Esq.
Name of the law firm
Street Address or PO Box
City, State, Zip

If there is no contact person listed on the posting, do some online research to determine the name of the hiring partner, supervising attorney, or the human resources/hiring manager.

Sending a Cover Letter by email

If the employer has requested that application materials be sent via email, there are two options for how to send your application documents:

1. Send the cover letter as an attachment. Keep it separate from your resume which should also be attached. Give your documents a name that will easily identify the content.
2. Use the letter as your email message. Begin your email with the salutation "Dear Ms. ____" and make sure to include your contact information at the bottom in your signature block.

THE BODY

Introduction

If you are writing at the recommendation of someone known to the reader, say so in the first sentence. If you are contacting the employer for another reason (for example, you have recently read an article about their involvement in a certain type of law that interests you), let them know it. Although it is a bit more basic, it is always a good idea

to let the reader know (briefly) who you are and why you are writing. Let the reader know if you are responding to an ad, asking for an informational interview, etc. This first paragraph can be very brief (2-3 sentences).

1. I am a 2016 graduate of Vermont Law School and would be honored to be considered for the position of _____;
2. As a recent graduate of Vermont Law School with a concentration in _____ law, I am writing to submit my application for an associate position with your firm.
3. As an experienced _____ litigator, I am excited to submit my application for an associate position with your firm.
4. As an experienced _____, I am excited to submit my application for the position of _____ with your organization.

Core Paragraph(s)

This is where you will highlight your skills and experiences.

Remember to focus on what value you can bring to the organization rather than what you value.

Explain in greater detail why you want to work with this employer. Make sure to explain what is appealing to you about the organization. In order for this paragraph to be effective, you must first learn something about the organization. The closer you match your interests with their needs, the more interested they will be in you. It is also important to address the organization's location, particularly if you are planning to relocate.

Review the job posting and make yourself a checklist of what the employer is looking for. Use that checklist to make sure you discuss your experiences in those areas as best you can. Demonstrate your knowledge of the employer's work even if the posting is vague. Do your research!

Address why you are the person for the job by focusing on your academic and experiential background. Include your academic strengths (solid grades, solid writing skills, course work in a specific area, etc.). The goal is to demonstrate to the audience that you have the necessary preparation to perform the responsibilities of the job. To the extent that you have relevant experience, this is the place to discuss it. Avoid conclusory statements ("I am a self-starter") without also providing specific examples that substantiate the statement. In addition, try to avoid simply repeating what is on your resume. Rather, take the opportunity to explain how your education and experience so it is clear why and how your background has prepared you for this job. **Incorporate the employer into your letter and relate your skills to the work the employer does.** Take care not to start too many sentences with "I" and "My".

CONCLUSION

Thank the reader for their time and consideration. If appropriate, propose a next step (i.e., let the reader know if you intend to be in the area during a certain time period, or indicate that you will call within a certain time frame to set up an appointment, to determine a convenient time for a telephone interview, or to confirm your plans to visit when you are in town).

Closing Salutation

It is appropriate to use “Sincerely,” and “Regards.” If you are sending your letter electronically, include an address block below your nametype your full name and return address under the closing salutation. If it is being sent by mail or fax, sign the letter in ink, between the salutation and your typed name.

Recent Graduate Sample

ROBERT DYLAN

PO Box 154, South Royalton, VT 05068 | (555) 123-4567 | bobydylan@vermontlaw.edu

July 17, 2017

Kyle Moody, Esq.
Moody & Moody
22 East State Street
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Mr. Moody:

As a recent graduate of Vermont Law School, I am looking forward to commencing my legal career after taking the bar exam in July. I would be pleased to have the opportunity to discuss a possible association with your firm upon graduation.

An associate position at Moody & Moody is appealing because of my strong interest in your firm’s environmental law practice. I have a particular interest in energy and natural resources work, but I believe serving as an associate in your office would expose me to a broad array of environmental issues as well as the general practice of law at a commercial law firm. I also respect your firm’s philosophy and historical dedication to diversity and pro bono work. Moreover, I welcome the chance to join the vibrant Washington, DC legal community.

My academic and work experience has prepared me for you’re a position as an associate. I was ranked in the top twenty percent of my class and was selected as a staff editor for the *Vermont Law Review*. During law school, I was able delve into areas such as ethical client representation, alternative dispute resolution, alternative energy development and climate change response. Prior to law school, I developed strong interpersonal skills and the ability to perform in a high pressure environment as a result of my positions in sales. Those skills have served me well in many arenas, including my internship this past summer with the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Minneapolis. I enjoyed that work immensely and believe it has helped prepare me to work on challenging environmental issues with a firm such as yours.

Enclosed you will find a copy of my resume, writing sample and transcript. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your consideration. I welcome the opportunity to discuss my candidacy with you further.

Sincerely,

Robert Dylan

Robert Dylan

RACHEL DEEMER

P.O. Box 6, South Royalton, VT 05068
(802) 763-6666 email@gmail.com

August 30, 2017

Sarah E. Allen, Esq.
Allen and Associates
11 Hubbard Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Ms. Allen:

As an experienced attorney admitted to practice in New York, I am writing to apply to the mid-level litigation associate position at Allen and Associates. I learned of this position through an associate in your New York office, Jane Doe, whom I met at a Vermont Law School alumni event.

I was interested to read a recent article in the Wisconsin Law Journal highlighting your firm's general civil practice - particularly its commitment to serving the needs of the working poor. Throughout my career, I have focused my practice on landlord/tenant issues, employment law, and litigation. At Johnson & Hayes, where I am currently an associate, I have managed over twenty personal injury cases, several employment cases, and a number of landlord tenant disputes. My practice has included drafting motions, taking and defending depositions, settlement negotiations and representing clients at trial. Having had the opportunity to live in Milwaukee in the past, I am eager to return to the area. I believe the opportunity to practice with a firm committed to the diversity of a general practice in such an environment would provide me with an excellent beginning to my professional career.

My broad legal experience, extensive client counseling skills, and focused practice has prepared me well to contribute to a general practice firm. Through this experience, I have honed my legal research and writing skills, strengthened my public speaking ability, and gained a detailed understanding of personal injury litigation, employment law and landlord tenant issues. I am excited to use these skills as an associate with your law firm.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss a possible association with your firm. I will contact you during the week of September 15 in this regard. I greatly appreciate your consideration of the enclosed resume and look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Sign your name here

Rachel Deemer