

**HOW TO CREATE  
THE PERFECT  
COVER LETTER**

**CAPTURE** the employer's attention

**HOLD** the employer's attention

**CONVINCE** the employer that he/she needs  
what you have to offer

USE SAME HEADER FOR COVER LETTER THAT YOU USE FOR RESUME

## FIRST M. LAST

1234 Anywhere Ave., City, State Zip • (555) 555-5555 • student@email.com

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Date *(left justified)*

Name *(If person is an attorney do not use Ms./Mr. but place Esq. after the name.)*

Organization

Address

City, State ZIP

Dear (Mr./Ms.)(*last name only*) (“Sir or Madame” *only if you cannot get a name*):

Paragraph and signature format *(left justified and signature left aligned)*

DO NOT EXCEED ONE PAGE.

### **Section One: Why should the reader bother reading the rest of your letter?**

#### **Who are you and why are you writing this letter?**

“I graduated from Valparaiso University Law School this past May and am writing to explore the possibility of working at your firm.”

“I am a second-year student at Valparaiso University Law School in Indiana and am interested in applying for a [blank] position with [organization].”

“[name] recommended that I contact you because of my interest in family law.”

“I was excited to see your posting for a summer clerkship, as I am extremely interested in environmental law.”

“I am a 2010 graduate of Valparaiso University Law School and am relocating to Seattle to be closer to family. I was admitted to the Washington Bar this November.”

#### **Why are you interested in the firm or organization?**

Do you have an interest in the type of law the firm practices? Did you read a recent article about the firm? Do they have a strong reputation in the community? Maybe the size of the firm/environment appeals to you. Maybe you have ties to the community. Are you passionate about the organization’s mission? Are you dedicated to public service? Maybe you are looking for hands-on trial experience.

## **Why should I hire you?**

Be concise. Again, this does not have to be presented as a separate sentence and can be rolled into your interest for the firm. The point is to hook the reader in within the first two to three sentences.

“Given my passion for and commitment to the field of intellectual property law, I am confident that I would be a valuable addition to your legal team.”

“My work ethic, strong writing and research skills, and passion for litigation make me an excellent candidate for the position.”

“I have very much enjoyed my first-year classes and am eager to put my skills to practice.”

“Your job description attracted me because I have a strong background in civil litigation and am interested in civil rights issues.”

Although these are presented as three separate ideas/sentences, you can combine them as you see fit.

## **Section Two: Why should they meet with you?**

This is your opportunity to sell yourself. Choose two or three skills or qualities that are best suited to the employer. This means you should research the employer and customize this section of the letter to meet the employer’s needs. Once you have chosen your particular skills/qualities, highlight them in topic sentences followed by illustrative examples.

This section should supplement the resume, not mimic it. It is your opportunity to provide details that the resume cannot convey. Remember, “show, don’t tell”.... this means back up everything you say. You can highlight a variety of things, including:

- Work experience or law school activities relevant to the employer’s practice
- High grades or classes relevant to the employer
- A demonstrated enthusiasm for working with a particular issue or populations relevant to the employer
- Research or specific interests relevant to the employer’s work
- Any significant achievements
- CLE’s or conferences you’ve attended related to the employer’s work
- Non-law-related qualities that employers will value
  - Interpersonal and leadership skills
  - Time-management skills
  - Organizational skills
  - Hard-working /paying your own way through school

- Ability to deal with people and reach out to the community, i.e., volunteer work (shows your potential to generate business)
- Ability to work well under deadline pressure

**Here are some helpful phrases to get you started:**

“I have been fortunate to gain extensive experience in...”

“My work at \_\_\_\_\_ strengthened my \_\_\_\_\_ skills”

“As you can see from my background, I have concentrated on obtaining experience in [area] with my ultimate objective to obtain a position in [field].”

“My background in \_\_\_\_\_ might be of particular interest to you.”

**Here are some examples of “show, don’t tell.”**

“As a law clerk, I was frequently trusted to perform complex research and drafting without supervision. I played a critical role in a products liability case, as my findings resulted in a significantly reduced settlement for the plaintiff.”

“As a law clerk, I worked on a contract dispute that I can truly call my own. I was almost exclusively responsible for all aspects of it; meeting with the client and witnesses, ascertaining the facts, vacating a default judgment, pleading an answer to breach of contract claims, and asserting 16 counterclaims.”

**Section Three: What do you want to happen next?**

*You are grateful to be considered and you want an interview.* There are plenty of ways to say this, some examples of which are highlighted below. This is also a good opportunity to recap why you are an excellent candidate for the position.

“I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my qualifications. Thank you for your time and consideration”

“I will be in [City] between [dates] and hope to have the opportunity to meet with you at that time.”

“I appreciate you taking the time to review my resume, and I look forward to hearing from you.”