

The Essentials of a Great Cover Letter

A well written cover letter does the following:

- Tells the employer who you are (e.g., a first-year student at SLS) and what you are seeking (e.g., a summer associate position).
- Shows that you know about the particular employer and the kind of work the employer does. This is particularly important with smaller law firms who specialize in a particular practice area such as bankruptcy, intellectual property, direct client service, etc.
- Demonstrates your writing skills and emphasizes any other experience or skills you have that relate to the employer's work.
- Helps you stand out by providing information highlighting your individuality.
- Tells the employer how to get in touch with you by mail and phone.
- Uses active tenses with clear and concise.

The First Paragraph – the Introduction/why you are interested in that firm

Tells who you are and why you're writing to them. You can show that you've done your homework and mention where you learned about the employer: you talked with another student who worked there; you went online and learned about an important, recent case or transaction; you attended a panel during which they gave a presentation; and, so on. Of course, a referral from an important colleague whose opinion is revered should never be passed up.

The Second Paragraph – what you bring to the table

Here's where you tell the employer why they should hire you. Call attention to specific points you want to highlight in your resume. Select two or three marketable skills that you wish to highlight and use your experiences to underscore your mastery of those skills. For public interest and public sector positions, include some statement regarding your social vision, commitment to an issue and how they are linked to the mission and work of the employer.

The Final Paragraph – closing and follow up

The final paragraph should explain: 1) what action you expect from them, and 2) how you plan to follow up. If you say that you will call them, you retain some of the power and all of the responsibility. Also, if you're applying to employers outside the Bay Area, you should mention when you're going to be in their area. Employers are sometimes reluctant to invite students for a screening interview if they think that the student will have to fly out for it.