



Chapter 4 Resource

Writing Effective Cover Letters and Resumes

The purpose of the cover letter is to illuminate the elements of your resume that identify you as a good fit for the position, and relate how those elements will contribute to the accomplishment of the potential employer's objectives. A well-written cover letter often eliminates the need for the reader to comb through your resume looking for the information.

The most helpful cover letter contains the following:

- Specific skills you possess that will be required to excel in the position
- Previous experiences that support your ability to perform at a high level in the practice area
- Your mindset and approach to work, facing challenges, and solving problems that indicates that you will be successful in the job
- Results you have obtained in the past that suggest that you can obtain positive results in the job
- Reasoning and perceptive abilities that make you a strong fit for the position
- Habits that will facilitate your success in the position

Three Tips for Writing Your Cover Letter

1 Focus on Reader

If you want the reader to make it past the first sentence, focus on what you can do for the company rather than what you would like it to do for you.

Avoid openings like:

I am a third-year student and am interested in pursuing a career in litigation.

I would like to be considered for an associate position.

I am writing to express my interest in the associate position.

I am interested in working with your firm because of your firm's focus on environmental regulatory counseling.

Instead, tell the reader what you can do for the organization.

Following are two examples:

My work experience as a paralegal for two years in an environmental law practice **will enable me to contribute right away** to your practice. As a paralegal I was involved in helping to finalize and in some cases prepare memos, motions, and other documents involved in rulemaking, consulting with clients or defending enforcement actions.

My academic background and in particular, my focus and excellent performance in corporate classes including securities regulation, business combinations, and corporate income tax will allow me *to become an immediate contributor* to your mergers and acquisitions practice.

② Get a Sponsor

A sponsor can figuratively open doors for you. He or she adds credibility to your application and increases the attention the reader pays to your letter. A sponsor can be a professor, a firm client, or someone who works or worked at the firm.

The examples that follow illustrate the “strong start” a sponsor’s recommendation gives to your cover letter.

③ Explain the Benefit You Bring to the Employer

Be succinct. If a word or sentence is not necessary to make your point, delete it. Following are three examples.

I understand from speaking with one of your associates that many of your clients are Fortune 100 companies who are constantly audited by the IRS. It sounds like one of the reasons they became clients was because they were using lots of in-house counsel time dealing with tax matters instead of working on other major issues affecting the company’s day-to-day operations. If this rationale is accurate, I believe I can help attract new clients and add value to the existing ones. Having worked at the IRS and being a CPA as well as an attorney, I speak the agency’s language such that I may be able to help resolve these audits quickly and favorably without expensive and time-consuming litigation.

I understand that you are looking for someone with strong writing skills and relevant experience to join your litigation practice. I am that person. I have developed and refined my writing and legal analysis skills through participation in my school’s clinical legal writing program. It provides one-on-one assistance with letter writing, pleading, and discovery drafting. In addition, I have gained hands-on experience with representing low-income clients as part of my school’s legal clinic, D.C. Law Students in Court. The position has given me an opportunity to handle court cases and depositions and, most importantly, to know what to expect on the job.

I understand from speaking with one of your current associates that many of your clients are Fortune 500 companies whose business practices have been challenged as unfair to consumers by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and who find that they have difficulty managing the negative press associated with these challenges, especially when protracted. Having been a legal clerk in the FTC’s Bureau of Consumer Protection, my understanding of the FTC’s mindset and knowledge of consumer law, may help ensure swift resolution of these matters that maximize their ability to achieve their long-term business goals without unnecessary downtime.

Following are three succinct sample cover letters that keep the reader engaged.

Sample 1

522 21st Street, N.W., Apt. 905
Washington, D.C. 20007
(202) 887-6165

December 1, 2017

Mr. David Schroll, Partner
Hogan Lovells US LLP
Columbia Square
555 Thirteenth Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Mr. Schroll:

Tax Professor Hay at Georgetown Law suggested I (a 2L at the school) contact you regarding your firm's need for an associate in your tax controversy practice. She thought it made sense to reach out given my strong performance in her Federal income tax course, CPA background, and experience this past summer (and currently) working in the IRS Office of Chief Counsel.

I understand from speaking with one of your associates that many of your clients are Fortune 100 companies who are constantly audited by the IRS. It sounds like one of the reasons they became clients was that they found they were using lots of in-house counsel time dealing with tax matters as opposed to working on other major issues affecting the company's day-to-day operations. If this rationale is accurate, I believe I can help attract new clients and add value to the existing ones. Having worked at the IRS and being a CPA with accounting experience, I speak the agency's language such that I may be able to help resolve these audits quickly and favorably without expensive and time-consuming litigation.

I am very interested in learning more about your practice and your needs, and the kinds of qualities and experiences an ideal candidate would possess. I look forward to the opportunity to interview for the position.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

John Waller

Sample 2

40 Washington Sq. South, Apt. 509
New York, N.Y. 10012
(212) 998-6100

November 1, 2017

Ms. Alison Scio, Partner
Curtis, Mallet-Prevost, Colt & Mosle
101 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10178-0061

Dear Alison Scio:

Professor Ponte at New York University Law School suggested I (a 2L at the school) contact you regarding your need for an associate in your international law practice. He thought it made sense to reach out given my strong performance in his international law course, experience as his research assistant, undergraduate degree in International Relations, and experience while living in France.

I understand that your firm has a strong presence in France and numerous French clients. I think my background and experience could be helpful to these clients. Having lived and studied in Paris for one year during college, and having served as a teaching assistant for French courses, I am fluent in French and knowledgeable about French culture. In addition, my degree in International Relations has provided me with an understanding of some of the complex issues facing businesses with the increase in globalization. I plan to further my understanding of these issues as a member of the *Journal of International Law*.

I am very interested in learning more about your practice and your needs, and the kinds of qualities and experiences an ideal candidate would possess. I look forward to the opportunity to interview for the position.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mack Gilt

Sample 3

580 Massie Road, Apt. 302
Charlottesville, VA 22903
(434) 924-7354

November 1, 2017

Ms. Jeanne E. Cole-Amos
Assistant Director of Personnel & Planning
Office of the Attorney General
900 East Main Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Ms. Cole-Amos:

Assistant Dean Stanek at Virginia Law School suggested I (a 1L at the school) contact you regarding your Civil Litigation Division's need for a 2017 summer intern. He thought it made sense to reach out given my undergraduate experience as a counselor for the University Judiciary Committee where I interviewed and prepared witnesses for hearings, and as a student judge where I analyzed the facts of cases and drafted opinions, and my strong ties to Virginia both through the law school and my family residing in Arlington.

In addition to my experience with the trial process and long-standing connection to the Commonwealth, I followed with interest your office's fight for marriage equality and Attorney General Herring's successful argument that Virginia's ban on marriage for same-sex couples should be struck down as unconstitutional. This issue is very important to me and my family as my brother Ian and his long-time partner Alex live in Virginia and can now get married here. Thank you for all your office's efforts on behalf of my brother, Alex, and all LGBTQ Virginians.

I am very interested in learning more about the work your office does, and the kinds of qualities and experiences an ideal intern candidate would possess. I look forward to the opportunity to interview for the position.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa Senter

Tips for Writing Your Resume

If you have written an effective cover letter, the reader does not have to spend much (if any) time looking at your resume. Nonetheless, there are a couple things to keep in mind when crafting your resume.

First, they are a historical accounting of what you've done, not what you can do, and not necessarily what you want to do next.

Second, your resume should address what the employer considers to be critical skills and attributes required to be a high performer in the role. You may find it helpful to use the same or similar words or concepts the employer used to describe those skills and attributes.

With those two points in mind, here are three keys to effective resumes:

- Keep it succinct
- Target your audience
- Be specific as to your role

Short and sweet

Keep the resume to one page. If you have been practicing for less than 10 years you probably do not need a two-page resume. Be brief and highlight the most recent school and work experience. Leave out experience that is not law related (unless you have nothing else). Also, consider dropping personal interests and places where you are licensed. These items do not add much in my opinion and take up valuable space.

Target your audience

Again, you want to write it from the reader's perspective not you, the writer's perspective. Rather than a list of everything you have done, target the material to items that your specific audience would care about. If you are seeking a tax associate position and you have a CPA, add that designation up front right after your name so it catches the reader's eye immediately.

Be specific

Distinguish yourself in any way you can. When describing work experience, discuss successful cases and projects and specifically how you contributed. If you worked on a litigation matter, for example, you may state that you were part of a team that obtained valuable concessions necessary to reach settlement.

Be precise and give relevant details. If you are providing bullet points, make them count. Keep the reader interested by being succinct and specific. Again, using litigation as an example — you were part of a team that developed a novel legal theory which led to successful defense against the Government's motion for summary judgment.

Following are sample resumes that illustrate these three items. The resumes correspond to the sample cover letters previously presented.

JOHN B. WALLER

522 21st Street, N.W., Apt. 905 • Washington, DC 20007 • (202) 887-6165 • john.waller@gtlaw.edu

EDUCATION

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY LAW CENTER, Washington, D.C.

J.D. expected, May 2018

Activities: *The Tax Lawyer*, Editor

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, Charlottesville, Virginia

B.A., summa cum laude, History and Economics, December 2012. GPA 3.8

Honors: Phi Beta Kappa

CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT, licensed in Virginia, February 2013

EXPERIENCE

IRS OFFICE OF CHIEF COUNSEL, Washington, D.C.

Aug. 2017 - Present

Extern. Provide the IRS and taxpayers with guidance on correctly interpreting Federal tax laws, represent the IRS in litigation, and provide all other legal support required, including drafting memorandums, motions, and advisory opinions for Revenue Agents and Officers.

PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS LLP, National Tax Office, Washington, D.C. April 2013-August 2016

Tax Associate. Assisted in the preparation of corporate, partnership and large-scale personal tax returns for both federal and state. Audited and reviewed the provision for income taxes for large public corporations. Calculated and prepared carve out financial statements of a spun-off segment as loaned staff at a large client. Organized and referenced workpapers used in the preparation of returns to aid supervisors and provide an audit trail. Led the audit of the combined deferred income taxes and APB23 calculations of a newly acquired subsidiary and additional purchase accounting tasks related to the merger of two large public corporations through collaboration with the rest of the tax team and merger and acquisition specialists.

MACK A. GILT

40 Washington Sq. South, Apt. 509 • New York, NY 10012 • (212) 998-6100 • mack.gilt@nyu.edu

EDUCATION

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL, New York, New York

Candidate for J.D., June 2018

Activities: Journal of International Law

BROWN UNIVERSITY, Providence, Rhode Island

A.B., *summa cum laude*, International Relations, May 2015

Honors: Phi Beta Kappa

Activities: Brown Daily Herald, Staff Writer

Brown Community Outreach Program, Volunteer

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY REID HALL PROGRAM, Paris, France

Junior Year Abroad August 2013-August 2014

Studied French language (fluent) and culture in cooperation with the University of Paris.

EXPERIENCE

PROFESSOR TOM A. PONTE, New York University School of Law May 2017 - Present

Research Assistant. Edited, proofread, and researched various projects related to a forthcoming international law casebook and in preparation for International Law course.

MATH IS FUN, Providence, Rhode Island June 2015-August 2016

Cofounder and President. Developed program to improve math skills of fourth and fifth graders. Wrote program manual, hired instructors, and provided training on program's teaching technique. Supervised instructors' tutoring sessions. Wrote, secured, and administered grant from Math Foundation to fund the program.

DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH STUDIES, Brown University Spring 2015

Teaching Assistant. Taught beginning and intermediate French to 30 undergraduate students. Graded exams and papers, conducted small group interactive sessions for students, and met one-on-one with students for additional training.

LISA C. SENTER

580 Massie Road, Apt. 302 ▪ Charlottesville, VA 22903 ▪ (434) 924-7354 ▪ lisa.senter@uva.edu

EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, Charlottesville, VA
Candidate for J.D., June 2019

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, Charlottesville, VA
B.A., *summa cum laude*, History and Economics, May 2017. GPA 3.89
Honors: Phi Beta Kappa
Duncan Clark Hyde Award for Highest GPA in Economics Department
Distinguished Majors Program in Department of History
Thesis: *Extremism in the Pursuit of Liberty: Activism in the ACLU in the Late 1960's*
Activities: Jefferson Literary and Debating Society

EXPERIENCE

UNIVERSITY JUDICIARY COMMITTEE, University of Virginia Sept. 2016- May 2017
Student Judge. Heard cases, conferred with counselors, drafted rulings, and implemented sanctions for violations of the University Standards of Conduct.

Counselor Sept. 2015-2016
Counseled students accused of violating University Standards of Conduct through trial process. Investigated facts, interviewed and prepared witnesses, and determined case strategy in preparation for trial. Represented students at trial by examining witnesses and arguing before the judiciary committee.

SOUTHEASTERN RURAL MENTAL HEALTH CENTER, University of Virginia Summer 2015
Research Assistant. Revised and critiqued articles in preparation for submission to professional journals. Collaborated with researchers investigating physical and mental health care among rural, minority and impoverished populations in Virginia.