



# Boston College Law School

## Office of Career Services

---

### **THE SIX BASIC RULES OF COVER LETTERS AND ONE BASIC RULE OF LIFE**

**1. MAKE NO TYPOS, GRAMMATICAL ERRORS OR ERRORS IN DICTION.**

Don't rely on spell check; spell czech is knot your friend. Proofread your letters, or better yet, have a friend do it.

**2. PERSONALIZE THE RECIPIENT.**

Write to a person, not a place or a title (e.g. Hiring Partner). Spell the name and the title correctly.

**3. PERSONALIZE THE TEXT.**

Have a clear idea of why you are sending your resume to this place, and express it. Form letters sent en masse in a legal job search only give the impression of laziness and/or lack of sophistication. Remember to include reasons why the employer should choose you, and not just reasons why you have chosen the employer.

**4. KEEP IT SHORT.**

Cover letters should be one page and generally three paragraphs: (1) Who you are and what you are writing about (including referral names); (2) A BRIEF explanation of why you are applying to this employer with a few (four, maximum) reasons why this employer should be interested in you, and (3) Conclusion and contact information.

**5. USE THE APPROPRIATE TONE.**

There's a fine line between professional self-confidence and arrogance, and law students often find themselves unintentionally crossing that line in the text of their cover letters. On the other end, you want to avoid sounding too obsequious and meek. If you have not applied for jobs with judges, law firms, government agencies, etc. before, have Career Services take a look at your text before your letter goes out.

**6. SEND COVER LETTERS ON PAPER WITH RESUME ENCLOSED.**

Don't email job applications unless you are specifically invited or instructed by the employer to do so

**7. KNOW THYSELF**

The single biggest reason why law students, who generally have little difficulty in writing other things, find cover letters hard to write is because they do not know why, in a specific, personal way, they are applying for the job. Generic reasons like, "it's a large firm in New York" do not afford enough impetus for an effective letter, but rather lead to bland, generic text that can be as dull to read as it is to write. You need to make the effort to understand your professional motives and how this particular job matches your personal goals and desires.

The second biggest reason is, they know what they want, but they can't think of any reason why the employer should want them. Again, you need to do some serious self-

reflection. What is it about you and your background and experiences that will appeal to this employer? If you really can't think of anything, you have a number of options, all of which begin with talking to someone at Career Services. We can help you see that aspects of your background that may not have occurred to you are actually useful credentials. We can also offer suggestions for things you might do (courses, volunteering, networking) that will enhance your credentials. Finally, we may help you see that, in some cases, the reason for your difficulty is that you may not, in fact, have made a choice that will really suit you.

It is actually quite easy to write a cover letter to an employer when you know why you want to work for them, and why they should want you. Once you have those facts in place, the rest, as lawyers say, is "just a drafting problem." Getting to that point takes time and work, but your career is worth the investment.