



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, and have a trusted friend look at it with fresh eyes. Be sure to use business letter format.

2. PERSONALIZE THE RECIPIENT.

Write to a specific person, not a place or a title (e.g. Hiring Partner). Spell the name and the title of the individual correctly. Call employer to confirm proper recipient.

3. CUSTOMIZE THE TEXT.

Have a clear idea of why you are sending your resume to a particular employer, and express it. Form letters sent en masse in a legal job search give the impression of lack of focus and professionalism. Remember to include reasons why you can make a meaningful contribution to the employer, and not just reasons why you like the employer.

4. KEEP IT SHORT.

Cover letters should be one page, size 11 or 12 font on bond paper. They typically contain 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 up to three reasons why this employer should be interested in you; and (3) a conclusion with contact information.

5. USE THE APPROPRIATE TONE.

There's a fine line between professional self-confidence and arrogance, and law students must not cross that line in the text of their cover letters. However, you do not want to sound obsequious or meek. Should you be unsure of the difference, please feel free to drop off your draft cover letter for a Career Services staff member to review.

6. SEND COVER LETTERS ON BOND PAPER WITH RESUME ENCLOSED VIA U.S. MAIL

Email job applications only when 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 difficult 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 to draft an effective letter. Make the effort to understand your professional motives and how this particular job matches your personal goals and desires. If you reflect in this manner, your cover letter will convey your focus and enthusiasm, and the writing process will flow smoothly.

The second biggest reason that cover letters can be challenging is that they require serious self-reflection. What is it about you and your background and experiences that will appeal to this

employer? Invest the time to think deeply about what you can offer the employer. It will be well spent.

If you really can't think of anything the employer may find appealing about your candidacy, you have a number of options, all of which begin with talking to someone at Career Services. We can help you understand those aspects of your background that may not have occurred to you are actually useful credentials. We can also offer suggestions for courses, volunteer opportunities and 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 suits you. A conversation of this nature is often just the catalyst you will need to successfully produce a compelling and professional cover letter.