

## V. COVER LETTERS

A cover letter must accompany each resume you send to an employer. This letter will be the potential employer's first exposure to you and your work. It introduces you, expands on important points on your resume or parts of your background not mentioned in your resume, and requests an interview or a personal meeting. A cover letter should generally be no more than three paragraphs on one page. Think of your cover letter as a writing sample - it is the first indication of how clearly and concisely you can express your thoughts and ideas on paper. Therefore, your cover letters should always be well written, professional, and interesting.

**A. Purpose of cover letters.** The purpose of a cover letter is to introduce you to the potential employer and to highlight and emphasize some of your most outstanding qualities, skills, and experiences that you can bring to that employer. To write an effective cover letter, you should research an employer. You should gather all of the information that you possibly can before you write a cover letter to any prospective employer and then use that information in the cover letter to relate your background more directly to the employer's specific needs and specific law practice and to convince the employer that you are truly interested in working for that employer.

**B. Tone of cover letters.** Your cover letters should always exude enthusiasm, sincerity, and genuine interest in the particular employer to whom it is addressed.

**C. Format of cover letters.** In general, a cover letter should be three paragraphs long. Each of these paragraphs has a distinct purpose which you should always keep in mind when drafting your correspondence. The basic format is as follows:

### Paragraph 1:

The goal of the first paragraph is to get the reader's attention. Tell them why you are writing the letter and why the reader should bother reading the rest of your letter. The first sentence of your first paragraph must grab the reader's attention. "I am currently a second year student at Duquesne Law School" does not compel your reader to continue. Compare that very bland opening sentence to the following: "Dr. John E. Murray recommended that I contact you because of your expertise in contract law." Or if you don't have a personal contact within the firm try something like this: "I was fascinated to read your profile in the August issue of the Allegheny County Bar Journal". Or use something that you learned in your research of the particular employer to lead off your first paragraph.

In the first paragraph, you should also let the reader know very directly the purpose of your letter. The second and third sentences of your opening paragraph should introduce you as a law student and indicate the type of position for which you are applying - a summer law clerk position or permanent employment, as well as why you are applying specifically to that employer. In this first paragraph, you should also mention the employer's substantive area of practice and why that interests you and/or any geographic ties that you have to the region in which the employer is located.

### Paragraph 2:

The second paragraph should tell the reader why they should meet you. Elaborate on your background and how it relates to the needs of the employer's organization. Show the reader why they should give you a chance – tell them how can you contribute to their firm or organization. Here is the place where you should write about any elements of your background that would benefit the employer, such as academic achievements and job experiences and the transferable skills that you have acquired. Your research of the employer comes into play here in allowing you to link your background with their law practice. Be careful not to just repeat everything that is on your resume - go beyond your resume and expand on areas that would be of particular interest to this specific employer. You should also discuss things that may not be appropriate for the resume such as high grades in particular courses.

Back up an assertion of skills and abilities with examples. For example, if you state that you have excellent research and writing skills, provide your grade in LR&W, list published articles, or discuss work experience that has enabled you to hone those essential skills. The second paragraph is also the place in your cover letter to show and support your interest in the city where the employer is located. **Convince the employer that a meeting with you is essential!**

### Paragraph 3:

In the third and final paragraph, you should directly request a personal interview or meeting. Make it easy for the employer to schedule a meeting. Provide telephone numbers where you can be reached and an email address. And always include a line of gratitude. For example: "I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss how my background and experiences may fit your needs for an associate. I look forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you for your consideration of my application materials."

OR

"I look forward to hearing from you soon to arrange a personal meeting. You can reach me at the phone number and address listed above."

OR

If you are writing to an out-of-town employer, let them know that you will be in their city or town if you're traveling there for a semester break or for a long-weekend.  
"I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the possibilities of a summer law clerk position. I will be in the Philadelphia area from November 20-24. If you have time to meet with me then, I would greatly appreciate it. Thank you for your consideration."

There are an endless number of configurations for closing your cover letters. There is no one correct way. Use whatever format you feel most comfortable with. If you have not heard from the employer after waiting two weeks for a response, it is reasonable to contact the employer via telephone or email and repeat your interest, asking if you can provide additional information.

The cover letter examples at the end of this section are designed to assist you in your initial drafting of a cover letter. Of course, the cover letters that you send will be more detailed and the information that you present will be geared toward the specific employers that you are targeting.

**D. Some final, but crucial words on cover letters:**

- Be descriptive, not conclusory. Be authentic.
- Use active voice, not passive voice.
- No typos or grammatical mistakes - *proofread very carefully*. You must do more than a standard spell check.
- Personalize the letter. Don't address the letter to "hiring partner" or "To Whom It May Concern" - always send it to a specific person.
- If you're writing to multiple employers at the same time, be sure to change employer specific information in each letter. For example, a letter addressed to Ms. Hiring Partner at ABC Law Firm should not have the XYZ Law Firm's address on it, or say Dear Mr. Managing Partner (from firm XYZ Law Firm), etc., etc.
- If you know someone at the firm, use that contact.
- Limit it to 1 page - good legal writing is always concise -- your cover letter should be too.
- Make it clear from your cover letter that you have researched the employer.
- Never point out negative things about yourself - don't apologize - accentuate the positive.
- Use the same header (your name and contact information) as you have on your resume.
- Have the CSO staff review your letters before you send them out.

*The following samples should not be used verbatim. A good cover letter should be personalized and reflect your work. The samples are to be used as frameworks from which you can build your personalized letters.*

## SAMPLE COVER LETTER

Henry L. Charles  
155 Carson Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15227  
(412) 111-2222  
hcharles@gmail.com

April 12, 2017

Ms. Hire Me  
General Counsel, Legal Department  
Wayne General Hospital  
725 Main Street  
Wayne, PA 16224

Dear Ms. Me:

I am a first year evening law student at Duquesne University School of Law. I am writing to apply for a summer internship position at your law hospital's legal department. I am gravitating towards a career in health care law based upon my work prior to law school.

I was an admissions group coordinator at South Park Hospital until shortly before I entered law school. This was the last of three progressively responsible positions that I held. By working with patients, their families, and other hospital staff, I developed the ability to calmly and effectively answer questions, troubleshoot, and deescalate difficult situations. My experience at a hospital with such exacting professional standards has contributed directly to my success at law school thus far, and I am eager to learn about the corporate legal aspect of hospital administration.

I will be visiting Wayne from March 12-15. I would appreciate the chance to meet with you then if your schedule permits. Thank you in advance for your consideration, I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Henry L. Charles

## **SAMPLE COVER LETTER**

**Joseph A. Edwards  
521 Riverview Street  
Washington, PA 15301  
(724) 555-5555  
JAEwards@gmail.com**

January 27, 2017

Mr. David Stone  
Stone, Weaver, and Clay, PC  
2251 Main Street  
Washington, PA 15301

Dear Mr. Stone:

As a graduating law student, I am writing to express my interest in an Associate position with Stone, Weaver, and Clay, PC. I am committed to starting my legal career doing civil litigation. Competitive advocacy was the high point of my time in law school.

My experiences in Duquesne's Trial Advocacy Program, beginning in my 2L year, caused me to develop a passion for litigation. I competed in the ABA Trial Competition during my 2L year with my peers, where we finished as a regional semi-finalist. During my 3L year, my team finished in first place in the Gourley Trial Competition, and I was named Best Advocate. I served as a Student Advocate in the Law School's Veteran's Clinic, where I represented veterans charged with misdemeanors or felonies. In addition to learning about trial tactics and evidence through competition and the Veteran's Clinic, I also was a law clerk at the Jack Law Firm in Canonsburg where I drafted numerous pleadings, motions, and briefs for the lawyers at the firm.

I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you regarding a position at your firm. If you have any questions or require additional information about my qualifications, please contact me at (724) 555-5555 or [JAEwards@gmail.com](mailto:JAEwards@gmail.com). Duquesne Law Professor Will Lecture, (412) 555-6111 and Judge Law, (412) 555-4444, may both be contacted as references. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Joseph A. Edwards

## **SAMPLE COVER LETTER**

(Note: Firms that participate in Fall Recruitment/OCI tend to refer students as “Summer Associates” while other firms usually refer to students as “Law Clerks.” Be sure your letters include the correct term. Ask the CSO if you’re not sure.)

Millie L. Student  
1982 Fifth Avenue, Apt. 2B  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219  
(412) 333-9999  
StudentSL@duq.edu

August 1, 2017

Ms. Janet C. Coates  
Director of Recruiting and Professional Development  
Moya & Lucas, PC  
9945 Forbes Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Dear Ms. Coates:

Please accept the enclosed resume as application for a position as a summer associate with your firm. I had the pleasure of meeting two of your firm’s Associates, Mr. John Lawyer and Ms. Michele Attorney, at the Fall Recruitment Meet & Greet held at Duquesne Law in April. I was intrigued to learn about your Summer Associate Program, which allows students to get experience in a number of practice areas, as well as the types of cases they now handle as attorneys at your firm.

As a Marketing Management major at Undergraduate University, I developed key strengths in research, organization, and verbal and written communication. I founded the Marketing Student Association on campus. I met with campus administrators to start the semester-long process of creating this organization. That involved researching similar groups on other college campuses, organizing a plan for student outreach, and convincing the administrators that the group would be beneficial to the campus population. I brought that same conviction to succeed to law school this past year. Through hard work and determination, I finished twelfth in my class.

When I met Mr. Lawyer and Ms. Attorney in April, they commented that you look for candidates who have a positive demeanor, a self-starter attitude, and a strong work ethic. I believe I have those qualities, and I hope to have the opportunity to work at Moya and Lucas, PC, this summer. Thank you for your consideration of my application materials. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Millie L. Student

## SAMPLE COVER LETTER

Patricia L. McDoogie  
531 Beach Street, Apt. 4A  
Bethel Park, PA 15102  
(412) 902-5328  
mcdooglep@duq.edu

September 25, 2017

John A. Sullivan, Esq.  
Gilbert & Sullivan, LLP  
222 Penzance Street, Suite 832  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Dear Mr. Sullivan:

I am a third year student at Duquesne University School of Law, and I am applying for the part-time Law Clerk position you advertised. Your job description attracted me because I have experience in criminal law, and I am eager to find a position as a Law Clerk where I can further pursue work in this area.

Your firm's work on behalf of criminal defendants is of particular interest to me. While attending Duquesne University as an undergraduate student, I interned at the Allegheny County District Attorney's Office. I organized files, assisted with victim and witness interviews, and attended hearings and trials. Last summer I returned to the office as a legal intern, and I worked primarily in the Appeals Unit, writing and researching appeals to criminal convictions. While I thoroughly enjoyed working for the prosecution, I obtained a position at the Pennsylvania Innocence Project during the academic year. At the Innocence Project, I corresponded and interviewed potential clients, researched issues, and discussed case strategy with my supervising attorneys. After these experiences, I realize I want to focus my work on behalf of criminal defendants

In your job posting, you asked for applicants to inform you of the amount of hours they can work during the school year. With my credit load of 15 credits, I can work up to 20 hours per week. Enclosed is a resume for your review. Should you have any questions or require additional information, please call me at (412) 902-5328 or email me at mcdooglep@duq.edu. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Patricia L. McDoogie

## **SAMPLE COVER LETTER**

Will D. Good  
2298 Peace Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222  
(724) 623-8888  
WillDoGood@earthlink.net

October 20, 2017

Mr. Law Advocat  
Westmoreland County Legal Services  
404 South Main Street  
Greensburg, PA 15601

Dear Mr. Advocat:

As a second-year law student and native of Westmoreland County, I am very interested in a legal internship in your office this summer. I intend to return to Westmoreland County to practice law upon completion of my legal studies at Duquesne University School of Law. Because I have lived in this area my entire life, I understand the great need to provide legal assistance and address issues such as poverty, homelessness, medical care, as well as educational needs. I am aware of the growing concerns for the changing population due to the closing of various mines and the opening of new industry such as the Sony Plant.

Since starting law school, I have had the opportunity to receive practical legal skills from my volunteer work and internship at Neighborhood Legal Services Association in Pittsburgh. I sharpened my research and analytical skills through the drafting of motions and complaints related to family and landlord tenant law, and I learned about the realities of public interest work through working with clients. Learning such skills has been beneficial to my development as a law student and has helped me to understand the great need to provide legal assistance to those members of the community who cannot otherwise afford legal representation.

I believe I possess the client focus and intellectual curiosity to be a successful intern at your organization. I hope to meet with you to discuss my application materials. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Will D. Good