

Office of Career Services
St. Thomas University School of Law
16401 N.W. 37th Ave., Miami Gardens, FL 33054
(305) 623-2351

**ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF LAW**

COVER LETTER GUIDE

COVER LETTER GUIDE

Introduction

A cover letter offers you an opportunity to make a positive first impression. This is why it is so important to create a personal, well-crafted cover letter to accompany each resume sent out to a potential employer.

A cover letter has two objectives: 1) it is a marketing tool, which allows you to highlight your skills; and 2) it is a writing sample, which allows you to demonstrate your writing and editing skills.

A cover letter should include information that explains your interest in an employer and relates your specific qualifications and experience to the employer's type of work and hiring needs. A cover letter also serves as a written introduction to your resume, enabling you to elaborate more fully on your most relevant skills and explain your interest in the sought-after position. Just like your resume, your cover letter should be clear and concise.

Basic Cover Letter Guidelines

There is no single way to set up a cover letter. However, there are some general rules you should keep in mind:

- Recognize that your cover letter is the first, and possibly only, writing sample an employer will read.
- Be prepared to carefully plan out, edit, and revise each paragraph.
- Create an individualized and customized cover letter for each employer.
- Research the employer before writing. Show that you have researched your potential employer by communicating something that you have learned about that specific organization.
- Employers want to know how you can help them. Tell the employer why you will be an asset.
- Indicate your specific interest in the particular position or organization.
- Sell yourself. Words matter. Word choice is a crucial skill and will showcase your ability to write persuasively.
- Be specific and concise.
- Check your cover letter over and over again for typos, grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- Leave the employer with an impression that you expect to speak with them, and remember to always say thank you.

The Format

The **first step** in composing your cover letter is to read over your resume and identify which of your experiences are most relevant to the position for which you are applying.

Consider the personal strengths required by those experiences, the types of training they gave you, and the kinds of talents and skills you acquired. **Second**, you will want to draw on information you gathered from your research. Identify the needs of the organization given its size, location, area of legal specialization, etc. The more you know about the prospective employer, the more effectively you can market yourself as a potentially valuable contributing member of the organization. This leads directly to the **third step** in drafting your cover letter – to express how you plan to use the talents, skills, and training you acquired from previous experiences to contribute to the organization you have targeted.

Note: Vary your sentence structure to keep the employer interested. In other words, do not begin every sentence with “I (verb)”. The more customized your letter is, the better it will make an impact.

Writing the Cover Letter

Before You Write

Think about the skills, abilities, background, and experience that make you a good candidate for an employer, and then communicate those things in an engaging manner. Focus on two or three selling points you want to convey to the potential employer, and give concrete examples. Focus on what you have to offer the employer, instead of what the job will do for you. Research each potential employer. Think about the qualities employers are looking for, and what they are likely to find valuable. Be professional!

When You Write

Keep the cover letter to one page. Write in a business letter format; the date, address block, salutation, paragraphs, and closing should be aligned left. The paragraphs should be justified. Write a personalized letter. Proofread your letter and thoroughly check for accuracy in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Be clear, concise, flawless, and positive. Answer any obvious questions raised by your application (such as geographic location). Tailor your cover letter to the specific posting and employer. Send and reference all required information with your cover letter (resume, transcript, references, writing sample). Make sure you have used the same font and paper as your resume.

After You Write

Once you have sent your cover letter to an employer, you may not get an immediate response. You may have to contact the employer again. If this is the case, wait about two weeks before following up with an email or telephone call to ensure the employer received your resume. Persistence in follow-up is considered a positive quality. Being a pest is not. If you receive a negative (we do not have any openings) response, then remove that employer from your list. If you receive a “putting off” response (we’ve been too busy), ask when you should call back and then follow up.

The Outline

Though the contents will vary depending on the job search, a standard three – four paragraph format for cover letters is well-recognized in the professional community and extremely effective.

Heading

The heading of your cover letter contains your contact information, and must include your name, address, telephone number, and email address. Your email address should not have a hyperlink. Your heading should be the same as what is on your resume, this way your documents will have a consistent look.

Salutation

When sending out cover letters, each cover letter should be addressed to an individual. Use the complete and correct name, title, organization, and address. Always personalize your cover letter.

Opening Paragraph

The first paragraph of your cover letter should state why you are writing, name the position for which you are applying, state why you are interested in working for the particular employer, and which documents you have included for them to review. Specify your interest in the type of work the firm does and what is particularly appealing to you about the employer. Where possible, mention who referred you to the job or how you learned about the organization, or about the specific job opening, whether it was from a friend, a previous intern, an article, or a job posting. Remember, the opening paragraph should be short and to the point, and should convey to the reader your purpose in writing.

Body Paragraph(s)

The body paragraph(s) should establish a logical link between you and the employer by focusing on the talents and skills you possess that are of use to the employer. You should stress those experiences which are most relevant to the position, without merely regurgitating the descriptions in your resume. Use the body of the cover letter to highlight and supplement items on your resume. Be sure to point out achievements in the employer's field or type of work. Indicate why you are qualified for the position. Focusing on how your skills fulfill the employer's needs will not only show you recognize your own capabilities, but that you have also done your research.

Conclusion Paragraph

The last paragraph should be concise, thanking the employer for their time and consideration. Remind the reader of your interest in, and availability for, an interview. If it is an out-of-town interview, indicate your willingness to interview personally by stating when you will be in the area or by offering to make yourself available to the employer's convenience. Provide the reader with a telephone number and email address so that they may contact you to request additional information or set up an interview

APPENDIX A
SAMPLE COVER LETTERS

Sample Cover Letter

Scout Finch

123 NW Thomas Ave.
Miami Gardens, FL 33055
305-625-6000
sfinch@stu.edu

DATE

CONTACT NAME

CONTACT TITLE

ORGANIZATION NAME

STREET ADDRESS

CITY, STATE ZIP

SALUTATION: Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name: *OR* Dear Sir or Madam:

OPENING PARAGRAPH: Identify yourself, why you are writing, the position for which you are applying, your interest in the position, how you learned about the opening, your connection if any, and list documents that are enclosed/attached.

BODY PARAGRAPH: State your qualifications and why you are interested in this organization. Use your resume entries as starting points, and flesh them out in your cover letter. This is your sales pitch. It should tell a brief story that explains your background, and ends with why you are seeking work with this particular employer. State why the organization should hire you. Tell the employer about your experience, how you will meet the employer's needs, and why you are the best candidate for the particular job. Use meaningful specifics based on your research about the employer. State why the organization should hire you. This is an opportunity to highlight the skills, interests, and experiences on your resume, without restating that information verbatim.

ADDITIONAL BODY PARAGRAPH: An additional body paragraph might be needed depending on your experience, education, or other qualifications. Otherwise, just the one body paragraph will do. Under no circumstances should your cover letter include more than four paragraphs. Remember that cover letters are typically skimmed; thus, they need to concisely deliver the information that the employer needs to know.

CLOSING PARAGRAPH: Indicate your desire for an interview. Request for action or promise to follow-up. And remember to thank the employer for their time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Signature

YOUR FIRST AND LAST NAME

Enclosed/Attached

Sample Cover Letter: Request for Informational Interview

Scout Finch

123 NW Thomas Ave.
Miami Gardens, FL 33055
305-625-6000
sfinch@stu.edu

December 1, 2011

Felix Howe, Esq.
Partner and Recruiting Attorney
Geter, Pino, Portwood, & Howell, P.A.
6789 Gallows Road
Miami, FL 34567

Dear Mr. Howe:

Samantha Jones of Wilson Manufacturing suggested that I contact you. I am very interested in labor and employment law and she thought you might be the ideal person to provide me with tips about labor practice in your region, if you have time.

I will graduate from St. Thomas University School of Law this May and take the Florida Bar this summer. I will be visiting Tampa, March 3-8. Would you have time to meet with me while I am in town? I know you have a busy schedule and would be happy to come in early or late in the workday if that would help. I would enjoy meeting you. If a visit is not convenient, might I call you to get ten or fifteen minutes of your advice? Starting a career in today's market presents both challenges and opportunities and I am sure I would benefit from your advice.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Scout Finch

Scout Finch

Sample Cover Letter: Request for Informational Interview

MARY JONES

123 Main Street, #1, Miami, FL 33333

(305) 555-1234

Mjones@stu.edu

December 1, 2011

Felix Howe, Esq.
Partner and Recruiting Attorney
Geter, Pino, Portwood, & Howell, P.A.
6789 Gallows Road
Miami, FL 34567

Dear Mr. Howe:

I am a first-year student at St. Thomas University School of Law, and I am interested in learning more about labor and employment law. While conducting research, I came across your name and news articles about your career.

I would appreciate the opportunity to talk with you and obtain first-hand information about what a labor and employment law practice is really like, as well as any advice that you might have on how to focus my time in law school to best prepare for a career in labor and employment law. I can be reached at (305) 555-1234 or Mjones@stu.edu, and can arrange an appointment at a time most convenient for you. Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

Mary Jones

Mary Jones

Sample Cover Letter: Firm

SEAN R. SMITH

1122 Southwest 36th Avenue • Miami, Florida 33112 • (305) 888-9999 • s.smith@gmail.com

December 1, 2011

Felix Howe, Esq.
Partner and Recruiting Attorney
Geter, Pino, Portwood, & Howell, P.A.
6789 Gallows Road
Miami, FL 34567

Dear Mr. Howe:

I am a second-year student at St. Thomas University School of Law, and I am responding to your firm's posting about a 2012 Summer Associate Program with Geter, Pino, Portwood, & Howell, P.A. I am particularly interested in securing a position in the summer associate program because I hope to become a corporate attorney and working in your office would be an invaluable opportunity. I believe that my knowledge, skills, and experience would make me a valuable addition to your firm. Enclosed please find a current resume, writing sample, and transcript for your review.

I believe that my strong analytical, research and writing skills would make me a valuable addition to your summer class. Last summer, I worked as a legal intern assigned to the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization at the Pax Romana, United Nations. There I drafted official memoranda and correspondence for Ambassador Bhagwat-Singh. Currently, I am a research assistant for Professor Gilbert and am an active learning instructor for Dean Hernandez. As a research assistant, I conduct legal research relating to immigration issues and assist with editing Professor Gilbert's pending law review article. I found the variety of topics I have researched to be interesting, and have gained further confidence in my legal search and writing abilities. I am also certified in both Westlaw and LexisNexis research. I am confident that my background and experience will enable me to make a positive contribution to your clients.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you. Should you wish to schedule an interview or require additional information, please contact me at (305) 888-9999 or s.smith@gmail.com. Thank you for time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Sean Smith

Sean Smith
Enclosed

Sample Cover Letter: Judicial Clerkship

Sam S. Rodriguez

ssrodriguez@stu.edu

(212) 111-2222

Local Address:

3654 South 200 Avenue
Ft. Lauderdale, Florida 33332

Permanent Address:

166 East Cain Drive
Richmond, Virginia 11223

December 1, 2011

The Honorable Felix Howe
US District Court
Southern District of Florida
6789 Gallows Road
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 34567

Dear Judge Howe:

Please accept this as my application for a clerkship position beginning in fall 2012. I am a third-year law student, in the top 5% of my class, at St. Thomas University School of Law, and am expecting my degree in May 2012. At present, I am seeking a judicial law clerk position and am very interested in clerking in your chambers. I am particularly interested in securing a clerkship position because it will give me valuable insight into the legal decision-making process while allowing me the opportunity to further hone my research and writing skills. I have attached my resume for your review.

Currently, I am the managing editor of the *Intercultural Human Rights Law Review*, and the president of the Moot Court Board. As the attached resume indicates, I have committed myself to serving my community. As a Florida Bar Foundation Public Service Fellow at the Department of Children and Families, I researched current legal issues and analyzed new cases for legal sufficiency to proceed to trial. I also wrote motions to terminate parental rights, motions to compel party to submit to a mental examination, motions to adjudicate child dependent, memoranda of law and judicial review orders. In addition, I have served as a legal intern with the Immigration Clinic at St. Thomas University School of Law. Both positions have helped improve my legal writing and research skills, my ability to analyze and interpret the law, and my interpersonal and communication skills. I believe these experiences can be well utilized in the public interest context and am eager to gain exposure in a courtroom setting. I look forward to applying my research and writing skills to work for you.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss a possible clerkship with your Honor. If offered this opportunity, I believe that I could make a substantial contribution to your chambers. You can reach me at any time at the cell number or email address listed above. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sam S. Rodriguez

Sam S. Rodriguez
Attached

Sample Cover Letter: Public Interest

MICHAEL E. ROE

1234 College Ave. • Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314 • (954) 444-2963 • michael.e.roe@gmail.com

December 1, 2011

Felix Howe, Esq.
The Law Office of the Public Defender
Broward County Courthouse
6789 Gallows Road
Fort Lauderdale, FL 34567

Dear Mr. Howe:

I am writing to express my interest in an assistant public defender position with the Broward County Public Defender's Office. Recently, I was admitted to the Florida Bar in October of 2011 and graduated, *cum laude*, from St. Thomas University School of Law in May 2011. Upon the completion of my judicial clerkship, I hope to become an assistant public defender and working in your office would be an invaluable step toward that goal. Furthermore, my background and interests are well suited to the work conducted by your office.

I believe strongly that my education background and practical work experience would allow me to make an immediate contribution to the Broward County Public Defender's Office. As you will see from my attached resume, I am currently a judicial clerk with the Honorable Marcia G. Cooke with the US District Court, Southern District of Florida. There I have gained valuable trial experience. For example, I prepare weekly civil and criminal dockets, attend court daily, and draft legal opinions for Judge Cooke's approval. I have continued to develop my research and writing skills through my pro bono project with the Broward County Bar Association.

Additionally, during the summer of 2010 I was a summer associate with Holland and Knight. This position required me to communicate effectively with clients, work under deadline pressure, and prioritize multiple responsibilities. These experiences have greatly contributed to my desire to pursue a career as a trial attorney, in part because I witnessed the crucial role that attorneys play in ensuring justice for all parties in need of representation in legal proceedings. Due to my strong desire to pursue criminal defense work, I am confident that I would make a positive addition to your staff.

My resume, law school transcript, writing sample, and references are enclosed. I would appreciate an opportunity to interview with your office. Broward County is especially appealing to me because I have family and close friends in the Fort Lauderdale area. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss my qualifications and interest with you during an interview. I can be reached at any time at the cell number or email address listed above. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael E. Roe

Michael E. Roe
Attached

Sample Cover Letter

Scout Finch

123 NW Thomas Ave.
Miami Gardens, FL 33055
305-625-6000
sfinch@stu.edu

December 1, 2011

Felix Howe, Esq.
Partner and Recruiting Attorney
Geter, Pino, Portwood, & Howell, P.A.
6789 Gallows Road
Miami, FL 34567

Dear Mr. Howe:

I am a second-year law student at St. Thomas University School of Law. Last week, I had the pleasure of meeting one of your associates, Samantha Jones, at a Young Lawyers Division of the New Jersey State Bar Association Reception. After talking to her about my particular interest in working for a firm, she suggested that I contact you regarding opportunities in your firm.

As you will see from my resume, prior to attending law school, I was a legislative intern with the NJ Association of Homes for the Aging and am employed as an administrative assistant with Ausley and McMullen Law Firm. I found these experiences to be an invaluable one in terms of exposing me to a law firm setting and allowing me to develop strong interpersonal and communication skills. I also had the opportunity to learn a little about probate law and found this to be an area that I am interested in exploring further. Although my first year coursework is already set for me, I look forward to this year when I am able to take classes in areas of law that I am interested in. I am seeking a position that is in New Jersey, where I plan to relocate upon my graduation in May 2013 in order to remain close to my family.

I would very much welcome the opportunity for an interview to discuss how I can best put my knowledge and skills to work for you. I will be returning to New Jersey the week of January 12th and would welcome the chance to speak with you during that time. I will contact your office the week of December 9 to confirm receipt of my application, answer any questions you may have, and determine if an interview can be arranged at your convenience. If there is any additional information that I can provide to you in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me at the phone number or email address listed above. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Scout Finch

Scout Finch
Encl.