

## **How to Write an Effective Cover Letter for an Attorney Job**

*By Karen Anderson*

When it comes to hiring legal professionals, most hiring managers at law firms and law department tend to have exacting standards when it comes to attorney resumes and attorney cover letters. Therefore, a well-written cover letter is a vital element to getting an interview for an attorney job. Your cover letter is a critical ingredient in your search for an attorney job because it can be used to convey important information that simply doesn't fit on your legal resume.

Most attorneys are aware of the importance of having a great legal resume, but the majority of candidates searching for attorney jobs often don't realize how important a legal cover letter can be. Drafting a professional and mistake-free cover letter can be one of the most effective ways to introduce yourself to a potential employer.

Your attorney cover letter serves the following purposes:

- To introduce yourself to the hiring manager and let him or her know what position you are applying for, and why you are applying for the position.
- To fill in the gaps that your resume does not cover, such as connections to the organization, current employment status, explanation of a gap in employment, etc.
- To effectively convey your interest in the position, and convey why an organization should consider you for the position.
- To highlight pertinent parts of your resume, such as skills and experiences that make you particularly well suited to the position.
- To provide the organization with a sample of your writing, advocacy skills, and overall professionalism.

Your cover letter is a critical ingredient in your search for an attorney job because it can be used to convey or highlight important information that either does not fit on your resume, or is better explained outside of the resume. For instance, your attorney cover letter can be used to emphasize other skills in addition to your legal experience, such as business, management, or research skills. Your attorney cover letter can also be used to highlight specific areas of your resume that are most relevant to the position you are applying for. It can be used as a quick roadmap to the most relevant information on your resume. Finally, an effective attorney cover letter can allow you to personalize your application, in a process that can often be very impersonal. This is an opportunity for you to convey your interest in the position, and demonstrate how your professional and personal values are aligned with those of your potential employer.

Your cover letter should contain just enough highlights from your resume to make the hiring manager want to meet you. However, be careful not to copy and paste text directly from your resume, otherwise, it will just appear lazy and render your attorney cover letter useless. At minimum, a good attorney cover letter should aim to distinguish you from other candidates with similar credentials and backgrounds. A great attorney cover letter will convey your experience and accomplishments in a manner that inspires potential employers to contact you immediately before they've even considered other candidates.

When conducting an attorney job search, you can start with an all-purpose cover letter to serve as your basic template. However, each time you apply for an attorney position, you will need to modify your attorney cover letter in accordance with the position and organization you are applying to (See: "Tailoring Your Legal Cover Letter"). An attorney cover letter must be a professional letter, but it does not mean that it has to be dull. Make sure to use active verbs, provide information that is relevant to a prospective employer making a hiring decision, and make sure that it reflects your own "voice." Correct spelling, accurate grammar, and immaculate proofreading are all crucial. Minor grammatical errors or typos can create an impression of carelessness and lead an organization to decide against calling you in for a job interview.

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