

## **Tailoring Your Legal Cover Letter**

*By Leslie White*

If you are an attorney or law student applying for a legal position, your application should always consist of both a legal resume and a legal cover letter. A legal cover letter provides an opportunity to inform a potential employer of your fit in relation to the position description. In your legal cover letter you can cover items that go well beyond your resume, including how your experience relates to a specific position, how certain skills would make you a good fit for the job, and how your career goals match the opportunity. In short, you should provide a legal cover letter that is well written, clear, organized, and most importantly tailored to the position you are applying to.

### **Why is tailoring your legal cover letter important?**

Most legal professionals tend to send the same form cover letter and resume to all the positions they are applying to. That's a mistake. If you are planning to apply to more than one position, your legal cover letter should be drafted specifically for each position you are applying to. Granted this will take more time than mass mailing the same cover letter over and over again, employers can tell the difference between a form cover letter and a tailored legal cover letter. The true value of the legal cover letter resides in its specificity vis-à-vis the position. If you don't tailor your cover letter to the position you are applying for, you shouldn't bother sending one at all, as all of the value of your legal cover letter will be lost.

### **What should your legal cover letter look like?**

The first paragraph of your legal cover letter should include a line or two describing what position you are applying for, why you are interested in the position. Think of the first couple of lines as the theme of your legal cover letter, which you will be developing in the subsequent paragraphs.

The second and third paragraphs of your legal cover letter are where you will develop the theme you created in the first paragraph. I call this the "proof section." In other words, this is where you will provide specific examples with respect to your work history, legal experience, skills, and accomplishments that relate specifically to the position. If you are a junior attorney or a law student, this is where you should include specific details about your education, internships, or volunteer experience and describe how these experiences make you well suited for the job.

The key to these paragraphs is to pick no more than four or five key examples, and relate them specifically to the most important elements of the job description. You want to make your examples as relevant to the job requirements as possible. Remember to keep your sentences to the point, and to dedicate no more than two sentences per example. Consider this your opportunity to prove to a potential employer that you have the skills and the experience required for the position.

The final paragraph of your legal cover letter should include one line of text that

synthesizes again why you are right for the job. The rest of the paragraph should be used to reiterate your interest in the position. You should request a call to set up an interview, and let a prospective employer know when you will be in town if you are applying for an out-of-state position. You should also thank the employer for his or her consideration, and end your legal cover letter with a courteous closing.

The key to tailoring your legal cover letter is to take the time to study and dissect the job description, and to conduct research on the organization you are applying to. The more you know about the position and the organization, the more likely you will be able to draft a legal cover letter that has impact. You need to think about the content of your legal cover letter the way a prospective employer will. Assuming an employer receives hundred of resumes and cover letters for a position, what do you think he or she will be looking for when making a selection? It's not only about meeting the minimum requirements listed on the job description. It's about the depth and quality of your experiences and skills and how they relate to those requirements that will make a difference. These are things you can only convey in detail in your legal cover letter.

### **Conclusion**

Legal cover letters are an important part of your application. To make a real impact they need to be tailored to every single position you are applying to. They require that you spend time studying the position description, conduct research on the organization, and write specifically about how your experience and skills relate to the position. A well-written cover letter can get you noticed by a potential employer, which is the first step to getting through the hiring process.

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