

The Purpose of an Attorney Cover Letter

By Vanessa Vidal

An attorney cover letter serves two purposes: to cover the gaps left by the resume, and to make your case to a potential employer as to why you should be considered for the position.

A good legal cover letter should highlight strengths and skills you have that are specific to the position. It should also make an effective argument as to why your experience, skills, and other traits make you an ideal candidate for the position.

Let's take a look at the basic elements that should be included in your attorney cover letter.

1. Formatting

The formatting of your legal cover letter should be identical to your resume. Both the legal resume and cover letter should be on neutral tone paper, either white or ivory. You should use a traditional black 12-point font, either Times, Arial, or Verdana. Finally, your attorney cover letter should not exceed one page.

2. Salutation

Your attorney cover letter should always be addressed to a specific individual, never "To Whom It May Concern." You should use the formal salutation of "Dear Ms. Doe" or "Dear Mr. Doe." If you don't have the details, call the company or law firm and obtain the name of the hiring manager or recruiting coordinator for the position. If those details are absolutely impossible to obtain, then use "Dear Sir/Madam." Again, this should only be used as a last resort.

3. Introduction

The key to a good attorney cover letter is to provide clear, concise, and persuasive arguments regarding your intentions for applying for the position, your interest in the employer and its particular industry or focus, and your skills, strengths, and personal traits that make you well suited for this particular job.

When starting your attorney cover letter introduction, be sure to provide a quantitative description. For instance, rather than writing, "My name is John Doe," briefly provide an indication of your level of experience. For example, "I am a 5th year corporate associate with Latham & Watkins in Dallas, Texas,

and I am interested in being considered for your corporate associate position in Houston, Texas.”

3. Body

You need to do some research and due diligence before writing your attorney cover letter. Remember, a well-informed applicant will come across as a serious and motivated candidate.

You need to highlight the particular attributes of the employer that attract you and inspire you to take up the job. It is not enough to tell a prospective employer that you are “an accomplished corporate lawyer interested in pursuing a position with Wilson Sonsini in Palo Alto, CA.” Rather, you need to let the firm know that ‘your extensive merger and acquisition experience representing mid-cap high-technology firms and start-ups with a focus on life sciences, (makes you) especially well-suited for Wilson’s merger and acquisition practice group in Palo Alto, CA.’

4. Closing

When closing your legal cover letter, be sure to reiterate your interest in the position and your availability. If you plan on visiting the employer's city on a certain date, you should indicate this fact on your legal cover letter. Otherwise, let your potential employer know that you are available via phone or email, and that you are willing to travel if necessary. Finally, when using email, be sure to send the legal resume and cover letter as separate attachments, properly labeled “Jane Doe Resume,” and “Jane Doe Cover Letter.”