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Cover Letters and Other Correspondence for LL.M. Students

Graduate Professional Development Program
Office of International and Non-J.D. Programs

law.fordham.edu | 140 West 62nd Street | New York, NY 10023

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Resources

- Always begin with the GPDP Cover Letter Guide, and be sure to review the template cover letter at the back of the document
- Available on GPDP academic resources page:
[link here](#)

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Cover Letter Overview

- **Purpose:**
 - Provides an **introduction to your resume**, but does not simply restate your resume
 - It is the first **writing sample** the employer will see from you
- **Tailored:**
 - It Should be **tailored** for various types of positions and employers, specifically tying **your skills** to the **employer's current needs**
- **Concise:**
 - Cover letter should be brief and to the point

Cover Letter Length

- Three paragraphs
- Two-thirds of a page maximum



A long cover letter will not be read

Cover Letter Format

- **Heading:**
 - Use your “letterhead” from your resume
- **Business Letter Format:**
 - Date, addressee
 - Subject line optional – use if the letter is being sent in response to a job posting with a position title
 - See the cover letter template in the GPDP Mini-Guide
- **Salutation:**
 - “Dear Mr. Jones:” or “Dear Ms. Jones:”
 - Never “Miss” or “Mrs.”
 - Colon follows the name
 - “Dear Sir or Madam:” only if you cannot find the name of the person to whom the letter should be addressed

Cover Letter Format

- **Body – 3 paragraphs maximum**
 - Introductory paragraph – introduce yourself and purpose of letter
 - Body paragraph – draw a connection between your skills and the employer’s needs
 - Closing paragraph – thank the reader, restate your enthusiasm, indicate your ability to send more information if needed
- **Closing**
 - “Best regards,”
 - “Sincerely yours,”
 - Add a signature



It is ok to read sample cover letters, but resist the temptation to copy!

Your cover letters should each be tailored to *your* qualifications and experience and to the specific needs *of the employer* to which you are applying, so a copied cover letter will be of little use to you

Cover Letters: Introductory Paragraph

- **State your purpose**
- **Who are you?**
 - Think about how you want to market yourself
- **Why this position:**
 - Be as specific as possible, drawing on your skills and experience
- **Answer the following:**
 - Are you responding to a job posting?
 - Position sought -- temporary or permanent employment? Internship?
 - Are you writing on the recommendation of a mutual contact or on the basis of some previous contact with the employer?

Cover Letters: Body Paragraph

- Address no more than 2-3 points that make your strongest case for being a competitive candidate for the position
- Tie your skills to the job requirements
- It is more effective to *demonstrate* your qualifications, rather than summarize them in a conclusory fashion
 - Bad: I am a highly-skilled transactional lawyer.
 - Better: I have four years' experience as an attorney in Brazil representing clients making in-bound private equity investments.
- Always focus on *why you would be good for the employer*, and not the other way around

Cover Letters: Closing Paragraph

- Call attention to your resume and any other documents you have included with the application (consider adding "Enclosure" or "Enclosures" at bottom of letter, though this is no longer customary for applications that are sent electronically)
- How you can be reached (this should be clear from your header, which will have your contact information)
- Thank the reader



Cover Letter Drafting Tips



Tip #1: Direct Letter

- Direct letter to real person
 - Get the gender right!
- Avoid “Dear Sir or Madam:” if possible
- Scour the information in the relevant job posting or website to find the name of the person to whom the application should be sent

Tip #2: Uniformity



Use the same font for your cover letter and resume

Use the same paper if printing

Use the same header on your resume and cover letter (and on any other documents that you submit)

Tip #3: Add Value



- Your cover letter should not just restate resume
- Highlight specific points to make the reader want to see your resume
- Be specific and tie letter to the particular employer and position



Tip #4: Good Transitions

- Make sure that your paragraphs and the sentences within flow well
- Avoid paragraphs that sound like a list of experiences
- Try reading the letter aloud to yourself to identify areas for improvement



Tip #5

Be concise – “less is more”



Tip #6: Proofread

Care with letter will reflect quality of work the employer can expect from you

Even a single typo or grammatical error is likely to seriously impair your candidacy

Following Up?

- Some career counselors recommend following up via email 7-10 business days after sending the application
- However, not all counselors recommend this, particularly for job positions that are likely to receive dozens (or even hundreds) of applications
- There are differences of opinion - use your judgment and make your decision according to the context

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Other Communications



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Emails

- Use the same level of formality and professionalism as a letter
- Do not use slang, contractions or emojis
- Proofread an email just as you would proofread a final paper for a class – mistakes in your email correspondence will be noticed and will reflect poorly on your professionalism and/or English skills
- Double-check for attachments before sending

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Telephone Communications

- Acceptable if you are contacting a recruiter or HR office
- Not acceptable if you are reaching out to attorneys directly – email will be preferable
- For most people these days, telephone communication feels intrusive; be careful of when and how you use it

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A Few Notes About Social Networks

- Check your Facebook privacy settings
- Google yourself on a friend's computer to double check what is visible
- Treat your LinkedIn profile with the same level of care you give to your resume and cover letter – employers will look at this!

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QUESTIONS?

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