

COVER LETTERS

“Why do you want this job?” Hiring managers will want an answer to this question *before* they invite you to an interview, and often the answer cannot be discerned from your resume, especially if you have no directly relevant prior experience. Thus a good cover letter, first and foremost, provides the WHY that is missing from the resume.

Legal employers want to hire law students who can explain why they want the job, and do so in a way that is detailed, specific to the employer, and credible. For example, it is not enough to express interest in public interest work generally, you need to say something *specific* about the organization, either about its substantive legal work, the clients it serves, or ideally, both.

Examples from 1L cover letters, without prior legal experience, answering the *why this job* question:

Maryland Public Defender’s Office:

In college, I took a seminar on Contemporary Issues in Social Justice during which we explored the development of mass incarceration as a system of racial and social control. I had already decided to attend law school due to my commitment to social justice, but this class sparked my interest in being a public defender.

Business Law firm:

Although I am not sure exactly what type of law I would like to practice, I do know that I would like to work with business clients. In college, I majored in Business Administration, and enjoyed most a class called The Business of Law. It focused on how lawyers create and capture value for businesses using knowledge of contracts, business organizations, and intellectual property, and it involved a number of case studies and simulations. This led me to consider a career in law instead of business management given how much I enjoyed the challenge of tackling complex business law issues. I am interested in Saul Ewing’s summer associate program because it is one of the region’s preeminent business law firms, and enjoys a reputation not only for excellence but also collegiality and teamwork.

Public Interest Organization:

I would welcome the opportunity to intern with Senior Legal Services. My interest in elder law began after witnessing the myriad of legal and economic issues faced by my family when my grandfather, a small business owner, developed Alzheimer’s disease. Visiting him in assisted living facilities, and meeting other families like mine, opened my eyes to the challenges that seniors face, especially those living on fixed incomes or in poverty, and the degree to which they are underserved by the current system. I understand that Senior Legal Services represents clients in a broad range of civil legal matters, including trusts and estates, guardianship, consumer and debt collection issues, and landlord/tenant disputes. This opportunity would be ideal for me, as I could help a population I care deeply about, and gain experience in many different practice areas.

Overcoming Writer's Block.

Writing a cover letter can be daunting, and faced with a blank page, it may be tempting to copy something you find on the internet. Don't do that. Instead use this exercise, which many students have found very helpful for overcoming writer's block when tackling a cover letter:

- Complete the *Cover Letter Information Worksheet*, on the next page, organize your thoughts.
- Then take out a notepad and pen. Imagine that you have the hiring contact on the phone. You know you need to tell him or her why you want the job, and briefly highlight the reasons that you would be good at it. What would you say? Just write out what you would say longhand.
- Then type it up, cleaning up the language, and you have your first draft. Congratulations!

Good writing is rewriting. Revise your draft multiple times, so that it is as crisp, clear, and direct as possible. You will need to add topic sentences to your paragraphs and organize your argument logically, just as you do in legal writing.

Formatting Tips:

- Follow standard business block text format (see the examples on the following pages). Always include the date, the name of the recipient, his or her title, the name of the organization, and its full address.
- **Always address your letter to a person.** You may have to do some research. If you cannot find a hiring contact, then address the letter to the managing partner, the general counsel, the practice group head, the human resources director, or the office manager.
- **Sign your letters.** If you are applying to a judge, you will *always* hand sign your letter, and mail it to his or her chambers. For most other employers, you will submit your materials by email, and thus you will need an image of your signature.
 - **Creating an image of your signature:** Scan a document with your signature. Then take a screenshot of the document. Paste your screen shot image into a new document. Crop it so you get an image with just your signature. Size it if necessary, then save it. Going forward, you can simply paste it into your cover letters, above your typed name.
- **Keep it short.** The actual body of your letter should take up half the page.
- **Proofread!** Your cover letter is your first writing sample. So it must be well written. Be simple, direct, and brief. If your cover letter contains grammatical or spelling errors, your materials will quickly be moved into the pile of rejected applications. If you are unable to produce a one-page document without errors, an employer can hardly expect that your work for them would be any better.
 - Read it out loud, or backwards from the bottom up. This will help you catch grammatical errors.
 - Take out any word or phrase that is so awkward or archaic that you would never actually say it to someone, such as “honed my skills.”

Cover Letter Information Worksheet

(Copy this page & use it for each cover letter that you write)

Paragraphs 1 & 2 – Brief introduction to who you are and an explanation of *why* you want *that job*.

What are your biggest selling points? What are the “sweet spots” - the place where your background most clicks with the employer? You want to reference them right way, in your introduction.

(This could be prior academic achievement or experience, a prior professional career, related experience or volunteer work, or a geographical or personal connection.)

Why do you want that particular job, with that particular employer?

(Reference something about the employer that demonstrates you did your research!)

Paragraph 3 – Write about your qualifications

What are the key skills and abilities valued by the employer? Review the job description or the relevant part of the website, i.e., the internship page. Usually employers will identify what is most important to them – and these are the skills and abilities that you should address in the cover letter.

(For judicial internships or clerkships, as well as summer associate positions with business law firms, you may not have a job description to work from. In that case, you should talk about your legal research, analysis, and writing skills, as well as your good judgment, attention to detail, and work ethic.)

Identify which of your experience/skills “match” the skills and qualities that are desired by the employer, and jot down some supporting examples:

Paragraph 4 – Closing Paragraph

Reiterate your interest in the position, and ask for an interview. Thank the employer for their time and consideration. Provide your contact information.

Cover Letter Examples

1D without experience

Internship with a government agency

PIPER CHAPMAN

1415 Maryland Avenue · Baltimore, MD 21201
(410) 837-4404 · piper.chapman@ubalt.edu

December 15, 2015

Ms. Ronda Kirk, Esq.
Internship and Training Programs Specialist
Maryland Office of the Attorney General
St. Paul Plaza
200 St. Paul's Place
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Ms. Kirk:

I am first-year student at the University of Baltimore School of Law, with a strong commitment to public service, and I would welcome the opportunity to participate in the Maryland Office of the Attorney General's Summer Law Clerk Program.

In college, I majored in Political Science, and wrote my senior thesis on the Consumer Protection Financial Protection Bureau's efforts to regulate payday lenders. I would love to gain regulatory and enforcement experience at the Attorney General's Office, given its critical role in protecting Maryland's citizens from exploitation by the unscrupulous. Although I am not sure what type of law I would like to practice, I enjoyed my Criminal Law class and would be open to working in any of the offices within the Criminal or Consumer Protection Divisions.

Although I have not yet acquired many legal skills, I have so far enjoyed my Introduction to Lawyering Class, and I did well on the first assignment of researching and writing a legal memorandum on strict liability. I am confident that I possess the professional skills required to succeed as a law clerk. During college, I served as a Resident Advisor, a position that required a high degree of maturity, good judgment, reliability, and excellent interpersonal skills. In addition, I worked part-time as a server in a very busy restaurant during the academic year to help finance my educational expenses, demonstrating my work ethic and ability to effectively manage my time and responsibilities.

I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my qualifications and your hiring criteria in greater detail. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (410) 443-1234 or piper.chapman@ubalt.edu. Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,



Piper Chapman

Cover letter example: 2D with some legal experience

Summer associate position with a law firm

ALEX VAUSE

1415 Maryland Avenue · Baltimore, MD 21201

(410) 837-4404 · alex.vause@ubalt.edu

July 22, 2015

Ms. Karen Paglia
Director of Human Resources
Semmes, Bowen & Semmes
25 S. Charles Street, Suite 1400
Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear Ms. Paglia:

I am writing to express my interest in working at Semmes, Bowen & Semmes (“Semmes”) as a summer associate in 2016. I am a second-year law student at the University of Baltimore, with a 3.83 G.P.A., two years of graduate training in History, extensive teaching experience, and strong interests in complex litigation and regulatory issues.

I am interested in Semmes because the firm has both a diverse litigation practice and regulatory expertise. The summer before starting law school, I worked for defense counsel in a civil suit brought by the Securities and Exchange Commission, and this experience led me to believe that I would enjoy the challenges of complex commercial litigation. My work this summer at the Maryland Office of the Attorney General gave me a keen interest in regulatory compliance issues as well. Working at Semmes would allow me to explore these areas of law in more depth, and determine which one of them is the best match for my skill set and interests.

I will bring several strengths to a summer associate position with Semmes. As a graduate student in History, I developed the ability to critically analyze complex problems and clearly communicate my analysis in writing. I refined my legal writing skills by writing research memoranda during my internship at the Office of the Attorney General, and I will further develop these skills as I participate in the *University of Baltimore Law Review* during the upcoming academic year. As a legal research assistant, I further refined my research skills and proofread antitrust publications. My experience as a teaching assistant makes me very comfortable speaking in public and working on collaborative projects. Finally, as I have extensive experience teaching students at the college level, I can present challenging information in a clear, concise, and engaging manner.

I look forward to meeting with you or others at Semmes to discuss my qualifications and the details of the summer program in greater detail. Please contact me at your earliest convenience. Thank you for your kind and thoughtful consideration.

Regards,



Alex Vause

Cover letter example: 3D with some experience
Judicial clerkship

SUZANNE WARREN

1401 North Charles Street · Baltimore, Maryland 21201
(410) 837-4404 · Suzanne.warren@ubalt.edu

September 1, 2015

The Honorable Karen Friedman
Circuit Court for Baltimore City
Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr. Courthouse
111 North Calvert Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Judge Friedman:

Please accept my enthusiastic application for the 2016-2017 Judicial Clerkship with your chambers. I am a third year law student at the University of Baltimore with a strong interest in litigation. My diligent work ethic, coupled with my excellent research and writing skills, make me a competitive candidate for the position.

My interest in clerking stems predominantly from my experience as an extern for Judge Vicki Ballou-Watts in Baltimore County. In this position, I researched case law, drafted memoranda and opinions, and observed court proceedings. This was an invaluable experience, in which I assisted the Judge and her chambers with the interpretation and application of the law, and saw the litigation process through the “other side” of the bench. By applying my research, writing, and analytical skills to assist Judge Ballou-Watts, I acquired the skills necessary to succeed as a law clerk in your chambers.

My other work experience and academic achievements make me particularly qualified to serve as your law clerk. As a Staff Editor for the *University of Baltimore Law Review*, I have refined my research and writing skills in an academic setting. Additionally, as an intern for the Legal Aid Bureau in Baltimore City, I sharpened both the written and soft communication skills necessary to communicate with counsel, *pro se* litigants, and other courthouse staff. I regularly drafted pleadings and papers, which required me to analyze issues and formulate arguments to the court. I wrote letters to opposing counsel and accompanied the attorneys in meetings with clients. My work experience and academic success exhibit my dedication to the law, and demonstrate that I will be successful in completing the tasks required as your clerk.

I would very much appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss in greater detail my qualifications for the clerkship position in your chambers. I can be reached at (410) 837-4404 or suzanne.warren@ubalt.edu. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,



Suzanne Warren

Cover letter example: 3D with substantial relevant experience

Public interest policy fellowship

SOPHIA BURSET

1415 Maryland Avenue · Baltimore, MD 21201

(410) 443-1234 · sophia.burset@gmail.com

October 6, 2015

Ms. Carolyn Jones
Director, Law Fellowship Program
Environmental Law Institute
2000 L Street, NW, Suite 620
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Ms. Jones:

I am writing to apply for the 2016-2017 Public Interest Environmental Law Fellowship with the Environmental Law Institute (ELI). I am a third year law student at the University of Baltimore, with substantial environmental litigation and enforcement experience, including broad exposure to climate change matters such as emissions trading, clean energy projects and enforcement actions filed pursuant to the Clean Air Act. I would welcome the opportunity to help advance the cause of environmental protection by assisting ELI with the programs of its Research and Policy Division.

Having worked in a non-profit, a government enforcement agency, and an environmental law firm, I have come to share ELI's commitment to bringing an independent approach to solving environmental problems. While the adversary system does have its strengths, on its own it cannot adequately address the complex and pressing issues raised by global warming. I would like to use my legal education and experience to help strengthen the institutions needed to ensure environmental protection.

Besides my commitment to environmental protection and my experience in this area of the law, my greatest strength is research and writing. My undergraduate thesis explored the environmental consequences of war. In law school, and during my internships and clerkships, I focused on developing my legal research and writing skills. In professional settings, I have researched and drafted a dozen memoranda in support of dispositive motions, as well as discovery motions, and have recently completed my first appellate brief as a Rule 16 student attorney. I am also serving as the Notes and Comments Editor for the *University of Baltimore Law Forum*, a position that has improved my writing skills and has given me the opportunity to gain experience as an editor. As an ELI Law Fellow, I am confident that I would be able to complete outstanding research and writing projects across the range of your project areas.

I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my qualifications and your hiring criteria in greater detail. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (410) 443-1234 or sophia.burset@gmail.com. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,



Sophia Burset