



Career Planning Center

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Writing Effective Letters Guide



WRITING EFFECTIVE LETTERS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Well-written letters powerfully and positively impact your candidacy and are part of your professional branding. The type of letter most frequently associated with a job search is the cover letter (sometimes called “letter of interest” or “letter of intent”). A cover letter is a preliminary or “cover” communication that accompanies and frames your application materials. There are other types of communications you may draft in the course of a job search, including a thank you letter (see, *Guide to Thank You Correspondence* in the *Career Planning Handbook*), a statement of continued interest, or a request for an informational meeting. Always consider the purpose and audience of a letter before drafting it.

Legal employers tend to rely on cover letters when selecting candidates for interviews because writing and reasoning skills are essential skills for practicing attorneys. Failure to meet expectations for quality, structure, and content of letters is likely to impact your candidacy. Using example letters and advice from resources specific to other industries and general online resources may be to your detriment because of the unique and significant emphasis placed on cover letters in the legal profession.

II. APPEARANCE

A. Electronic Submissions of Letters

Most employers request that cover letters be submitted electronically either as email attachments or uploaded into online application systems. As such, the electronic appearance of the letter is important. A cover letter being attached and/or uploaded should be saved as a PDF file before uploading/attaching the document. Doing so preserves the intended format. After you save the document as a PDF, **you should always open the document** and confirm that the font size and style remain as intended, that tabs and bulleted points remain aligned, and that the document retained its single-page status. (Most cover letters should be a single page in length.)

The title of the saved letter needs to be professional and informative. Best practice indicates that you should save a letter using your first and last name and with a term that indicates to the reader the nature of the document. You may also want to include the employer’s name as a quality check to confirm you are attaching the correct letter for the receiving employer (Example: Joseph.Pagel.Letter.Foley.pdf).

When an employer requests an application be sent by email, the email itself should **not** serve as the cover letter unless an employer expressly directs you to use an email for this purpose. A cover letter should be drafted as a Word or Google document, saved as a PDF, and attached. The email should serve as a concise preamble to the attached documents and include brief statements as to your communication's purpose; your interest in the employer and the position; and a notice of the documents included. For example:

Dear Atty. Ruiz:

I am contacting you to apply for the law clerk opening with Jackson, Benn & Williamson, S.C. I am excited about this opportunity because my long-term goals include focusing on family law, and I understand that 90 percent of the firm's practice is family-law related. Additionally, I grew up in New Berlin, so I know exactly where your firm is located.

You will find attached to this email my résumé and cover letter. If you have any difficulty opening either of the PDF documents, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Michelle Hills

Marquette University Law School
Candidate for Juris Doctor, May 2024
414.555.3413
michelle.hills@marquette.edu

B. Hard Copy Letters

It is increasingly rare that you will apply in hard copy, but when you do, the documents you prepare must meet the standards for quality. This means that the paper, the envelope, and the printing must all be top quality. Do not use regular printer paper, but instead use résumé-quality paper in white, off-white, or pale gray. Your cover letter should be printed using a high-quality printer. A laser printer is available for student use in the Career Planning Center. Envelop addresses must be typed, not handwritten.

C. Font Style, Size, and Color

Regardless of a letter being sent in hard copy or electronically, the standard for appearance in terms of font style, size, and color remain the same. The font used for your cover letter should be of a style and size that can be easily read and are considered professional. It is *not* necessary that your cover letter and résumé be of the same style type. Cover letters should be prepared using 12-point or 11-point font, *nothing smaller or larger*. Black font is required irrespective of the document being submitted electronically or in hard copy. Legal documents remain traditional, so highlighting text with font color is not appropriate, with the exception being color in a hyperlinked email address, LinkedIn profile, or published article.

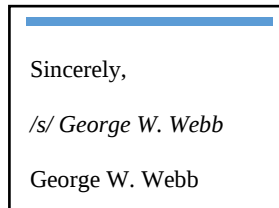
D. Signing Cover Letters

All cover letters require a signature block, including those sent or shared electronically. You have several options to execute an electronic signature:

1. Print the letter, sign it in blue or black ink, and scan it back into an electronic file.
2. Create a signature through the Adobe Acrobat Reader PDF program if you have a compatible version.
3. Create an electronic signature using an app like SignEasy or DocuSign.
4. Use the following to denote an electronic signature: */s/ George W. Webb*

A letter's signature block does not change in format when signing a letter submitted electronically. You still end with a closing followed by three blank lines and then your typed name. Place the signature in the space between the closing and your typed name.

Example electronic signature block:

A rectangular box containing three lines of text. The first line is a blue horizontal line. The second line is "Sincerely,". The third line is "/s/ George W. Webb". Below the box, the text "George W. Webb" is typed.

Sincerely,
/s/ George W. Webb
George W. Webb

E. Spacing

Letters should be **single spaced** with **double spacing** between paragraphs.

F. Error-Free

This should be obvious, but too frequently the CPC team finds students submitting letters with errors and/or employers share with the CPC team errors they found in student-submitted letters. So, we will say it big and bold: **“PROOFREAD YOUR COVER LETTER CAREFULLY.”** Any error is a reason for an employer to disregard your candidacy.

Check your letters for these **COMMON ERRORS**:

- Misspelled proper nouns, including employers’ names, recipients’ names, and names of academic institutions.
- Letters addressed to the wrong employer and/or contact.
- The absence of an inside address and/or date field.
- Use of first names in salutations. (**Never use a first name in a salutation in a cover letter.**)

III. STYLE AND FORMAT

Although the letters you draft will differ in purpose, there are components of style and format that are consistent for all job-related correspondence.

A. Writing Style

The tone of your letter should be professional and personable. It is appropriate to showcase your personality and energy through deliberate choices in vocabulary and sentence structures. **Do NOT copy language from an example letter**, as it may not prove to be a good fit for you. A sentence reading, “I would very much like an invitation to talk with you about the law clerk position,” and a sentence reading, “I am excited to meet with you to discuss the law clerk opportunity,” are both professional and achieve the same goal. Which style is “right” is contingent on your personality and how you want to present yourself to an employer. **Do NOT rely on AI to draft your letters.** AI-generated writing is often easily identifiable. AI-generated letters often include hyperbole, fail to be employer specific, and/or misstate your relevant qualifications in the context of a legal job.

Advanced writing skills are essential for a practicing attorney, so you should assume that employers will scrutinize your cover letter carefully and critically while assessing your writing skills and, to an extent, your reasoning ability.

Letters should be professional and personable. Find your voice and use word choice and sentence structure to convey energy and personality.

B. Length

Your letters should not exceed **one full page** consisting of three or four paragraphs. There are exceptions when longer letters are appropriate, but it is a rare instance for a law student to justify a letter longer than a single page.

C. Sentence and Paragraph Structure

Your cover letter should allow for easy reading. To this end, keep your sentences and paragraphs concise. Avoid redundancy and sharing details that don't add value to the story you are telling. The fundamentals of skillful writing apply to cover letters. Paragraphs need topic sentences that are developed by supporting statements. A topic sentence that reads, "My legal experience, business acumen, and work ethic will allow me to achieve in this position....," must follow with sentences that discuss all three points -- legal experience, business acumen, and work ethic.

D. Page Margins

Use at least one inch left and right margins for your cover letter. Your top and bottom margins can be a bit smaller, *i.e.*, .7 to .75 inches. Margins should balance the use of white space and text on the document. Don't cram text onto the page by reducing margins. The result will be a document that is cluttered and discourages readers from engaging.

E. Format

Lawyers draft letters frequently in practice, so demonstrating an ability to draft a letter that is formatted accurately is important. When writing letters, you have three formatting options: (1) block, (2) modified block, and (3) semi-block. The examples at the end of this Guide should be used as a reference for proper letter formatting.

The most common layout of a business letter is known as **block** format. In block format, the entire letter, apart from the letterhead, is left justified and single spaced except for a double space between paragraphs. **Modified block** is another common format. This format has the body of the letter left justified and single-spaced, and the date and closing are in alignment starting at center of the page. The final – and least used – style is *semi-block*. It is modified block style except that each paragraph is indented instead of left justified.

Your letter should include the same professional letterhead you use on your résumé.



You have three formatting options for your cover letters:

- Block
- Modified Block
- Semi-Block

IV. BEFORE WRITING: RESEARCH

Your letter should be **employer-centered** and **employer-specific**. Accordingly, before you send a letter to any prospective employer, you must thoroughly research the employer. The information you gather will be used in your cover letter to make the employer feel as though you are particularly interested in and are very enthusiastic about working for the organization. If you are responding to a posted job opportunity, the posting often provides insight into the employer and what it values in a candidate. Otherwise, there are a variety of potential resources for your basic research, with online resources and individuals familiar with the employer being the best. When researching prospective employers, look for information such as practice areas, size and growth pattern, location(s), mission, or philosophy statements regarding clients and/or the organization's practice, reputation, history, and awards.

A. Internet Resources

There are numerous websites containing valuable information. Your go-to resources will depend on the employer in which you are interested and the type of information you are seeking. For a discussion of some of the more useful and prominent online resources for information about legal employers, please see the handout titled *Online Research Resources* included in the *Career Planning Handbook*. We encourage you to speak with a member of the CPC team to identify the online resources that best fit your job search needs.

B. Human Resources

Individuals familiar with an employer are excellent sources of information, particularly for employers that do not have prominent online presences. Reliable resources may include a MULS student or alum who works for or has worked for the employer, a fellow student who previously interviewed with the employer, attorneys who managed cases where the employer was involved either as opposing counsel or as a client, and/or a member of the CPC staff. These individuals can be the source of inside information, which is often the best information. Inside information enables you to learn what it's really like to work at an employer and other key information such as the employer's needs and goals and what the employer values in a candidate. Informational meetings are always a go-to option for learning more about your target employers.

C. Other Resources

The CPC maintains a collection of "Employer Critique Forms" in hard copy in suite 240. The forms contain feedback on employers provided by Marquette students.

V. CONTENT

Your letter should include (a) your contact information, (b) the date, (c) the employer's name and address, (d) the salutation, (e) the introduction, (f) the body, (g) the concluding paragraph, and (h) the closing/signature block.

A. Address/Date/Employer Address/Salutation

1. Contact Information. Your contact information is the first content on the page. We recommend using the same letterhead that you use on your résumé to give uniformity to your professional application materials. **You must include an email address and a telephone number. You are not required to include a mailing address** in your letterhead on application materials. If you

like, you may include street address, city, and state, although mailing address information is no longer considered essential. You also have the option to include only the city and state.

2. Date. The current date, with the month written out, should be placed below your header either flush with the left margin or at the mid-point of the page. **The date and closing/signature block must be aligned.**
3. Employer Address and Salutation. The inside address, located below the current date, must include the name and title of the person to receive the letter, the name of the person's organization, the street address, city, state, and zip code.

You must be thoughtful in selecting the recipient of your letter. Whenever possible avoid



Whenever possible,
address letters to a
specific person.

Avoid: *"To whom it
may concern."*

sending a letter addressed to "To whom it may concern." The most effective letters are directed to a specific person. If you are responding to a posted opportunity, always send your application materials to the person identified in the posting. If you are sending a proactive application, the recruiting contact may be identified on the employer's website. If a recruiting contact is not easily identified, you may need to research the organization and/or talk with others who are familiar with your target employer. You can always call the organization and inquire as to whom you should direct your letter. Large law firms often identify recruiting contacts on their NALP Forms, which are

found at <https://www.nalpdirectory.com/>.

The common recruiting contact for many legal employers is a non-attorney serving a HR/administrative function (e.g., recruiting coordinator/office manager/personnel director). Since attorneys generally play a significantly greater role in the decision-making process with regards to hiring, depending on the circumstances, it may be more effective to direct a cover letter to an attorney *in addition to* the recruiting contact, *assuming you have some sort of connection with the attorney*. If you send a letter to multiple individuals with the same employer, professional courtesy requires that you indicate in the letter that you also have contacted a colleague of theirs (who you identify with a cc at the bottom of the letter). Small law firms often don't have a recruiting coordinator, office manager or HR administrator, so it is likely you will be addressing your letters to attorneys.

**First names
should
NOT
be included in
salutations.**

When sending a letter as part of a proactive job search where you have identified an employer that *does not have a known or advertised position*, you should select a lawyer who is a likely decision maker and/or who has experience practicing in the area of law you hope to pursue.

Salutations ALWAYS should include "Dear" and the recipient's title (e.g., Mr./Ms./Mx./Atty.) and last name, e.g., "Dear Ms. Jones:" **First names should NOT be included in salutations.**

B. Introduction/First Paragraph

The introduction should be brief and clearly accomplish two objectives: 1) grab the reader's attention; and 2) provide information including who you are, what you want, and why you are interested in the position and the employer.

1. Grab the Reader's Attention. Whenever possible, the opening line should identify a contact/mutual acquaintance and/or articulate a connection with the reader or a specific interest in the person or employer.

- a. **The name of a contact/mutual acquaintance.** A powerful and effective opening line comes in the form of making a specific connection to the employer. Assuming the reader knows and respects a mutual contact, you might mention a name, hoping to further draw attention to your qualifications. We respect that most first-year students do not have existing connections in the legal profession, and this should not be of concern. Building a network is a goal, and the CPC is excited to help students do this. Below are two examples of opening lines that mention mutual contacts.

- Suzanne Howe, General Counsel of XYZ Manufacturing, a client of the firm, suggested that I write to you. Ms. Howe identified you as a source of information for me as I research law firms in the area with outstanding labor and employment practices.
- Jack Taylor, your current law clerk and my law school mentor, recommended that I contact you regarding my interest in securing a summer position with Reynolds & Paulsen.

- b. *A connection with the reader or a specific interest in the person or employer.* Another terrific way to begin a letter is to identify a connection or a specific interest in the person or employer.

- I enjoyed reading your profile in the October issue of the *Chicago Lawyer* in which you described how the firm is actively involved in patent litigation in connection with technological advances in the automotive industry.
- I am interested in working for Havens, Richard & Wilkie in part because of the firm's strong international trade practice. It is my intent to practice in the international trade area, and I have carefully geared my course of study and job experiences toward this goal.



The better you can demonstrate that you researched the employer, the better you will be able to express enthusiasm and conviction in your letter about your interest in the job.

2. Define your candidacy. In the introductory paragraph, you need to tell the reader who you are, why you are writing him/her/them, and why you are interested in the employer and position. How you define yourself in this regard will vary according to your audience. Be *employer centered*. This means you should consider what the employer finds valuable and introduce yourself and your interests through that lens. The better you can demonstrate that you researched the employer, the better you will be able to express enthusiasm and conviction in your letter about your interest in the job. Mission driven employers often prefer cover letters that discuss the applicant's commitment to the constituencies and/or issues the organization represents. AI is particularly ineffective in drafting letters tethering your candidacy to specific employers.

The following are examples of opening paragraphs (the language that addresses who the writer is and what he/she/they is seeking from the reader is in bold).

I was excited to learn that ABC Insurance is again hiring summer law clerks. I understand from comments made by previous law clerks that the company provides diverse and interesting work opportunities. **In addition to being a first-year law student, I am a licensed insurance agent in the state of Wisconsin, and I am enthusiastic about the chance to work with ABC's legal team. I welcome an invitation to meet with you to discuss my qualifications for and interest in this position.**

Professor Jackson Woodley and Attorney Elizabeth Peters, who I understand are professional acquaintances of yours, recommended I contact you. Both are aware of my intent to practice elder law and on separate occasions identified Reed, Irving & Krueger as a firm with an outstanding elder law practice. **As a graduate of Marquette Law School, I am actively searching for an associate position that will give me the opportunity to practice in this field. I am aware that Reed Irving & Krueger has not advertised a need for a new associate; however, I appreciate your consideration of the enclosed résumé, and I value meeting with you at this time to make and introduction and to learn more about the firm's practice.**

I am enthusiastic about the prospect of joining Zimmerman & Dorney as a law clerk for several reasons, including the opportunity the firm offers I to attend court proceedings. I am motivated to see law in action and am interested in assisting the legal team on issues involving child custody disputes, personal injury claims, and trust and estates. **I am a second-year law student at Marquette University, and I would like to meet with you to discuss my interest in the position currently available.**

I am active in a Madison-area job search, so I am familiar with Stone, Alliotto & Graf and would welcome an invitation to meet. I find Stone, Alliotto & Graf's stated approach to practice refreshing. Specifically, I like Stone's focus on fundamental skills including writing, researching, negotiating, and creative problem solving. **My practical experiences and coursework denote my skills in these areas and position me to serve the firm's clients well.**

C. Body/Second Paragraph

1. Objective. The primary objective of the body of the second paragraph is to convince the reader he/she/they needs to meet you by stressing "fit" regarding your relevant qualifications. To accomplish this, the letter should reflect your knowledge of the employer and highlight why you are a good match for the job in terms of your *skills* and *experiences*. You should identify specific skills (or qualities) transferable to the work you will be expected to perform, and experience that is relevant and/or demonstrates that you possess the skills you identify. In addition, you should explain why/how your specific skills and experiences will directly benefit the employer.
2. Tell a Story About You and the Employer. Like the opening paragraph, the body paragraph of the cover letter should be tailored to the specific employer and position. Consider the story you can tell that highlights skills and experiences while making meaningful connections to what the employer is looking for in a candidate. If you are responding to a job posting, the themes for the stories you tell in the body of the letter may come from the posting. For example, if you are responding to a posted opportunity for which the employer is seeking someone to assist in general litigation and who has strong research and writing skills, share a story about the experience you had drafting an appellate brief in Appellate Writing and Advocacy. Include mention of the skills you honed, your enjoyment of the process, and how this translates to the employer's work.



Tell a story in your cover letter that is interesting to read and that establishes your qualifications.

The following are examples of employer-centered second paragraphs. The first two examples are developed from a job posting with clearly stated qualifications.

I appreciate that Waak Brown & Brixius values hiring a law student with exceptional research and writing skills and solid academic credentials. My academic performance and my research and writing skills position me well to meet and exceed the firm's expectations. The strength of my legal skills is demonstrated in part by the fact that I was hired as a research assistant for my real estate professor and that I earned honors grades in both of my legal writing courses. As a student intern at the Marquette Volunteer Legal Clinic, I have been able to further develop practical skills through researching and analyzing a wide variety of legal issues. Finally, my academic performance places me well within your expectations of the top half of my class as I am currently ranked in the top third. I truly look forward to the opportunity to use the skills and experiences I have acquired to the benefit of the firm's attorneys and clients.

I understand that Perez & Arnett values hiring a law clerk with strong writing skills and who is self-motivated. My prior experiences evidence my strengths in these areas. As a first-year law clerk with a local company, I researched and prepared legal memoranda on several issues, which developed my writing skills well beyond those acquired in legal research and writing courses. Moreover, having worked professionally for small companies before law school, I appreciate how each person plays a vital role in the organization and that self-motivation is particularly important. For example, as a quality auditor for Custom Millwork in Ohio, I worked away from the corporate office and was responsible for setting my own goals, planning my own schedules, and making independent decisions to benefit the company and its clients. I look forward to applying my motivation and writing skills to the work of Perez & Arnett.

I am currently serving as student practitioner in the Milwaukee Trial Division, so I am aware of the qualities necessary to be effective as an attorney with the State Public Defender's Office (SPD). Practicing under the Wisconsin Student Practice Rule, I manage misdemeanor and felony cases, and I regularly appear on behalf of clients in proceedings ranging from intake court to sentencings. Because of the work I am doing on behalf of the SPD, I am prepared to immediately assume responsibility for cases as an attorney. Moreover, my internships with Legal Aid Society and the Marquette Volunteer Legal Clinic further developed my practical lawyering skills, including my ability to work well with diverse clients. Finally, my course of study, which includes criminal law and procedure, criminal investigations, and trial advocacy, complements the work of the SPD. I am excited to bring my knowledge of and enthusiasm for criminal defense work to the position.

3. **Avoid Repeating Your Résumé.** Rather than rehashing your résumé, expand on it. Highlight your strengths and point out relevant experiences. Choose a few points about yourself that you know to be of most value to the employer based on your research and share stories of these successes and accomplishments. Try to communicate intangibles that your résumé only implies – such as leadership, organizational, or advocacy abilities – that would be specifically useful to the position.

4. Stick to the Facts. Cover letters should contain “hard” detailed data about you, not “soft” abstract information. Avoid boilerplate language or sweeping conclusions about your qualifications without specific examples to back up your statements.

Support your stories of qualifications using specific examples.

STRONG: My writing skills are one of my strengths. My impressive performance in my first-year writing class is why I was invited to serve as an academic support leader for a legal writing and research professor. I was also placed as an intern in chambers with Justice Rebecca Bradley of the Wisconsin Supreme Court. There, I wrote bench memoranda and assisted in editing opinions, including an opinion on the economic loss doctrine, which was argued successfully by a member of your firm’s appellate advocacy practice.

WEAK: The enclosed résumé reflects my commitment to numerous activities and organizations and demonstrates my strong work ethic and ability to organize and manage time efficiently and effectively.

D. Conclusion/Last Paragraph

The objectives of the last paragraph are to restate enthusiasm for the position with the receiving employer, identify documents included, and establish relevant next steps. For example, if you are applying to an employer outside Milwaukee and you plan to be in the employer’s community, indicate when you would be available for an interview. It is also smart to note your willingness to meet with the recipient, regardless of location, on a date and at a time convenient for the contact. For out-of-state employers, consider a statement of your willingness to travel for an interview at your own expense if the employer is located a significant distance from Milwaukee. In addition, indicate whether you plan to follow up. When sending cold (proactive) letters, you should state that you plan to follow the letter with a phone call, *e.g.*, “I will call within the next two weeks to set up a time to meet.”

Take time to draft a final paragraph that retains your letter’s tone and denotes enthusiasm for the specific employer.

Despite being short and having straight-forward objectives, take time to draft a final paragraph that retains your letter’s tone and denotes your enthusiasm for the receiving employer. After carefully crafting a letter that distinguishes your candidacy through demonstrated knowledge of the employer and a discussion of relevant skills, avoid defaulting to standard end-of-letter language, meaning don’t use boilerplate language like, “Thank you for your consideration. Do not hesitate to contact me.” Below are examples of effective closing paragraphs.

Because its practice focus is a perfect fit with my interests, I am excited to explore a future with Chen Law Firm. If I have not already heard from you, I will call the week of September 9th to confirm that you received this letter and to determine whether you would like to schedule an appointment for us to meet. Thank you for considering the included résumé.

I welcome the opportunity to talk with you about my interest in working as a law clerk at Patel & Patel. I appreciate the firm did not have a job posted, and I know that you are busy, so if I do not hear from you within the next two weeks, I will contact you to determine your interest in meeting with me.

I want to reiterate my excitement for the summer position with the Madison City Attorney's Office. The range of work offered to the City's law clerk is exactly the experience I am looking to have. I attached the requested documents as PDF files.

E. Closing and Signature

Your signature block should be aligned with the date, *e.g.*, if your date is flush with the left margin, so should your signature block. Be consistent in tone with a formal business letter. See pages 2-3 of this Guide for information about how to format a signature block on letters being emailed or uploaded to online application systems.

F. Naming the Employer

Throughout your letter it is important that you reference or name the employer correctly. There are two aspects to this. First, when using the employer's name as a proper noun, make certain to use it as the employer does. For example, the word "the" is part of the name of *The Marcus Corporation*. If employers abbreviate their names, you can use the abbreviation in the letter, but only as the employer uses it. For example, Quarles & Brady uses "Quarles" and "Q&B" as nicknames. Foley & Lardner uses "Foley," but never uses "F&L." If you are uncertain about abbreviating an employer's name, stick to the full name. Second, you need to use the correct common noun when referring to an employer. For example, law firms are always "firms" and never "companies." Government agencies are "agencies" and "organizations" but never "firms" or "companies." A district attorney's office is an "office" or "organization" but never a "firm" or "company." Referring to the employer inaccurately calls into question your attentiveness to details.

VI. ADDITIONAL KEY POINTS

A. Irrelevant or Unnecessary Information and Documents Not Requested

The information shared in a cover letter should be limited to information that promotes your candidacy and that is consistent with your intended, professional brand. Do not include personal information that is not relevant to the employer's hiring decision. Also, avoid discussing work experiences that are not professional or otherwise do not connect relevant skills.

Follow directions with respect to the documents you include with your letter. Share only the documents that the employer specifically requests.

B. Organize Printed Applications

When submitting hard copy applications, you increase the chances of your cover letter remaining with your enclosures by paper-clipping the documents together. Do **not** staple your cover letter to your résumé or any other documents.

C. Creating vs. Recycling Letters

There are opportunities to recycle language from one letter to another. For example, if you are a first-year student applying to five different companies for in-house, summer legal positions, your discussions about your qualifications may be similar or the same in each letter. Be careful, though, when trying to recycle language in letters where the audience is a different type of employer, or the employers are in different industries. And be sure to confirm that the employer's name matches all

references made in the document, as this type of recycling can lead to sending the wrong cover letter to an employer.

As you gain more experiences and continue in your professional and career development, the stories that are relevant for your cover letters also change. Trying to add new experiences to a previously written letter is not the recommended approach. Assess how your most recent learning and activities can form a new and more impressive story of development and vocational discernment that will capture an employer's attention.

VII. POINTS FOR GRADUATES

A. Shift in Career Focus

If you are changing the focus of your career, it may be to your advantage to explain this change in direction in your cover letter. Be sure to highlight those skills which are transferable to the new position.

B. Gap in Work History

If you have been out of the work force for some time, *i.e.*, a year or more, and you have not been in school during that time, you may want to mitigate this fact in your cover letter. Be certain to mention whatever skills or education you may have acquired during this period (*e.g.*, as a consultant, through volunteer work, etc.) that could be transferred to the position to which you are applying.

C. Confidentiality

If you are seeking a new position while currently employed, and your employer is unaware of your job search, state in your cover letter that your application is being submitted *in confidence*. A future employer will respect the confidentiality of your communication.

Appendix

SAMPLE LETTERS

The following pages contain ten cover letter samples. When written well (*e.g.*, according to the information in this Guide), every cover letter is unique. This is because every letter must articulate a candidate's specific interest in the receiving employer and frame a candidate's relevant qualifications in relation to the hiring employer's industry, work, culture, and preferences.

You should NOT copy or otherwise draft letters that closely mirror any of the sample letters in whole or in part. As noted in the guide, it is important that your letters emulate your personality through your writing style and vocabulary choices and highlight your knowledge of the employer and your relevant skills. No one can tell your story better than you!

The purpose of these examples, then, is for you to see how previous Marquette law students implemented the recommendations and best practices articulated in this guide.

JENNIFER J. JENKINS

200 W. Michigan Ave., Apt. 400, Milwaukee, WI 53203
(608) 456-7891 • jennifer.jenkins@marquette.edu

February 20, 2025

Atty. Taylor Roberts
Children's Hospital of Wisconsin
999 N. 92nd St.
PO Box 1997
Milwaukee, WI 53201-1997

Dear Mx. Roberts:

In my personal statements to law schools, I shared that I want to use my law degree in the field of healthcare and that a long-range goal would be to serve as counsel for a hospital. Upon arriving at Marquette Law School, I began working to build connections in Milwaukee's health law community, which included previously emailing you to make an introduction. As such, I was genuinely excited to learn that Children's Wisconsin is adding a law student to its legal team for summer 2025. I recognize this as a unique opportunity to work with and learn from attorneys whose careers reflect what I am working towards. A summer spent immersed in laws, policies, and compliance matters that impact a pediatric hospital and clinics is my version of ideal.

My readiness to achieve as a legal intern with Children's Wisconsin is evidenced in part by my complementary background in healthcare and my commitment to developing legal skills. My interest in healthcare began during my undergraduate studies where I earned a degree in Interdisciplinary Health Services, with minors in Health Care Ethics and Justice & Ethics in the Law. This focus equips me with knowledge of some of the issues that impact healthcare organizations, which I anticipate will allow me to complete projects with a deeper understanding of the hospital's values, mission, and vision. I also bring to Children's Hospital relevant skills that I have sharpened through *pro bono* work. Immediately in my first semester of law school, I began volunteering at the Domestic Violence Injunction Clinic and the Family Law Forms Clinic. Through these opportunities, I learned to effectively communicate with clients and attorneys. Additionally, I advanced my skills in spotting and framing legal issues, which I know will benefit my work as a legal intern.

If given a chance, I will embrace the opportunity offered by Children's Wisconsin. I hope to be able to meet with you on-campus at Marquette Law School during Spring OCI to discuss the position.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jennifer Jenkins

Jennifer J. Jenkins

Attachment (1)

Sample 2

Raed Soudah
Milwaukee, WI
414-888-9999 | raed.soudah@marquette.edu

February 26, 2025

Luciana Morales
Morales Law
12345 Bylaw Drive
Milwaukee, WI 53051-5660

Dear Attorney Morales:

I recently met with two Morales attorneys, Ryan O'Dell and Maria Lopez, and had terrific conversations with each. (How could talking with these attorneys be anything but fantastic?) They both spoke of their journeys from summer associates to partnership. Despite working in different practice groups, their experiences echoed important similarities in that they had meaningful opportunities to develop as young lawyers and they clearly enjoy their work and colleagues, which I really appreciate. Moreover, Atty. Lopez's comments piqued my interest in products liability, a practice I had not previously considered. Also, as a current law clerk with Tabor Corporation, I learned that Morales is respected in the business community as well as in the legal community. I am excited to learn more about the firm, and I hope to do so this interview season.

My summer experience with Tabor Corporation has been fast-paced and loaded with learning. I now know about 1031 exchanges, allergy policies for restaurants, and corporate risk assessments and allocations. In sum, I now have a much better understanding of the range of legal and business issues impacting companies. I also appreciate the expectations that in-house lawyers have for outside counsel. In my first week of work, I realized I needed to adjust my approach to research and writing. The attorneys for whom I was working needed me to answer questions in the context of business solutions. My work had to be accurate, useful, and timely. I succeeded in meeting expectations, and, as a result, have been invited to continue as a law clerk into the fall. I am grateful for the lawyers at Tabor Corp. as they committed to mentoring me and have prepared me well to succeed as a summer associate in a law firm in 2025.

Additionally, my résumé and transcript establish that I have many of the qualities valued by Morales, including academic achievements, leadership, and service. For example, I earned the highest grade in my Civil Procedure class and accepted an invitation to join the MARQUETTE LAW REVIEW staff. I also was elected to leadership positions in three student organizations, and I volunteer at area legal clinics.

Thank you for your review of my application.

Sincerely,

/s/ Raed Soudah

Raed Soudah

Attachment (1)

ASHLEY M. WELSH

5558 N. 42nd St. • Phoenix, Arizona 85028 • (562)252-2322 • ashley.welsh@marquette.edu

February 3, 2025

Nimit Patel, Deputy Public Defender
Maricopa County Public Defender's Office
620 W. Jackson Street
Suite 4015
Phoenix, AZ 85003

Dear Attorney Patel:

I had the opportunity to intern with the Maricopa County Juvenile Defender's Office the summer after my second year of law school. The experience impacted my career focus as it cemented my desire to use my law degree to advocate for children and those less fortunate. I will graduate from law school in May, and I am contacting you to express my interest in working for your office in your 3L internship program during the summer of 2025 while I prepare to sit for the Arizona bar examination.

My legal experiences and coursework reflect my commitment to government work. In addition to the previously mentioned experience with your office, I also participated in a judicial internship and am currently interning with the Waukesha County District Attorney's Office. All three of these experiences enhanced my understanding of the legal process. Particularly noteworthy is my internship with the Waukesha County DA where I am permitted to practice law under the Wisconsin Supreme Court student practice rule. As a result, I have had extensive experience representing the State's interests in preliminary hearings and motion hearings. The courses I have taken prepare me to work in your office as well. I completed every criminal law class offered in the curriculum of my law school, which includes substantive and procedural coursework.

While I am interested in joining the Public Defender's Office in any capacity, I welcome the opportunity to work in the juvenile offender division. I have a long-time interest in advocating for children, which is supported by the initiative I displayed in co-founding the Children and Family Law Society at Marquette Law School and several other entries on the enclosed résumé.

I am pleased to provide additional information if any is required. Furthermore, I am willing to travel to Arizona at my own expense to meet with you to discuss my qualifications and interest in joining the 3L internship program.

Sincerely,



Ashley M. Welsh

Enclosures (1)

CHARLES R. BARRY
Milwaukee, WI | Washington, D.C.
414-555-5720 | charles.barry@marquette.edu

February 14, 2025

John R. Hoffheimer, Esq.
Attorney Honors Program
U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
Office of Federal Operations
1801 L Street, N.W., Room 407
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Mx. Hoffheimer:

I have a sincere interest in working for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission because of its dedication to ensuring equal employment opportunity through education, technical assistance, and administrative and judicial enforcement of the federal civil rights laws. I witnessed this commitment firsthand while interning as a law clerk for the EEOC this past summer, and I would like to be considered for an attorney position with the EEOC following my graduation from Marquette University Law School in May. With my spirited interest in promoting equal employment opportunity and extensive educational background and experience in Labor and Employment Law, I am ready to contribute to the Commission.

My background and experience are an excellent match with the needs of the EEOC. In addition to being successful academically, currently ranking in the top 20 percent of my class, I gained a broad range of knowledge regarding the theoretical and practical aspects of labor and employment law. Part of that knowledge stems from the completion of an article that will be published in the upcoming issue of the *Marquette Law Review* regarding a clarification of employer liability for supervisor sexual harassment claims brought under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Moreover, Mr. Hoffheimer, I conducted significant research during my current internship with the National Labor Relations Board in Milwaukee regarding the need to modify Section 8(a)(2) of the National Labor Relations Act. My experiences with the NLRB and the EEOC provide an excellent foundation in my understanding of government agencies and labor and employment matters. As such, I am well prepared to join your organization as an attorney and make immediate and meaningful contributions.

The EEOC position represents everything I worked toward during my legal studies, so I hope to be able to meet with you and other members of the interview team. I shared the documents you requested as PDFs.

Sincerely,



Charles R. Barry

Enclosures (2)

Sample 5

Maria R. Marino
63 W. Franklin Dr., Wauwatosa, WI 53219
(706) 618-2123 • maria.marino@marquette.edu

April 11, 2025

Atty. Jill Stein, Partner
Stein, Franken & Van Erdt
505 Columbus Street
Suite 101
Sparta, WI 54601

Dear Atty. Stein:

I would like to meet with you to discuss the possibility of serving as a law clerk with Stein, Franken & Van Erdt during summer 2025. I appreciate that the firm does not have an advertised need for a law student; however, I am excited to learn more about its litigation and business practices and to talk with you about how I might be able to support you and your colleagues. I am committed to being in Sparta, and I know that Stein Franken & Van Erdt's practice is diverse in representing businesses and individuals. As a first-year student this appeals to me, because I am excited to explore different areas of law. Even if you do not anticipate hiring a law clerk, I would like to meet with you to discuss how your career unfolded in Sparta as a Marquette alum. I will be in the area during the week of May 1, and I would be grateful if we could meet.

My motivation to learn, prior achievements, and work ethic will contribute to my success with the firm. Notable is my commitment to developing practical legal skills beyond the classroom, which I am achieving as a volunteer at a Milwaukee area legal clinic. As a volunteer, I work with clients to identify and frame diverse civil issues and collaborate with attorneys to educate and guide clients towards the best course of action. Additionally, prior to law school, I interned with Havisham & Associates. I excelled in this position and received an offer of permanent employment based on me being thorough and professional in all that I did. I know these same traits will allow me to produce top-quality research and writing on behalf of Stein, Franken & Van Erdt's clients. Finally, I bring to the firm a work ethic that I appreciate is necessary to achieve. In addition to my studies first semester, I assumed a leadership role in the Sports Law Society, participated in a negotiation competition, and as mentioned, volunteered at a legal clinic.

I appreciate you were not expecting my request to meet in early May, so I plan to contact you by phone call next week if we have not already connected. Also, I included my résumé for your consideration.

Sincerely,

/s/ Maria Marino

Maria R. Marino

Enclosure

Sample 6

Benjamin S. Fitzgerald
1000 Blue Water Drive, Rochester, WI 53002
(262) 777-8888 | benjamin.fitzgerald@marquette.edu

November 15, 2024

Mr. Andre Smith
Director of Attorney Recruiting and Retention
Yu & Bates, S.C.
888 North Canal Street
Milwaukee, WI 51118

Dear Mr. Smith:

I recently met with your colleague, Charles McConnell, for an informational meeting and his comments about the firm's work and culture sold me on the idea that Yu & Bates is a terrific fit for me professionally. My interests are directed towards representing businesses and corporations, and I know Y&B is considered a leading corporate law firm in Wisconsin. Beyond the challenging work offered, it is also important to me that I join a firm where the culture promotes collaboration and creativity. Y&B's recent honor of being named a top firm for women suggests to me that the firm is intentional in fostering a work environment that promotes creative lawyering and professional satisfaction. I welcome the opportunity to talk with members of the firm's recruitment team about how I can contribute as an associate attorney.

Academic achievement, practical experience, time management skills, and a passion for law are what I offer Yu & Bates. As is reflected in my attached résumé, I am ranked in the top 33 percent of my class. This accomplishment is a result of my work ethic, motivation, and enthusiasm for the study of law. I enjoy studying the law and confirmed while working for a civil litigation firm similarly sized to yours that I have a penchant for practice as well. I thoroughly enjoyed tackling and researching the issues related to discovery and pre-trial activities and welcomed responsibilities to draft briefs and identify experts. I appreciate that thorough research and precise writing are important to my success with your firm. In addition to the positive feedback I received as a law clerk, the quality of my writing and research skills is evidenced by the fact I received the highest grade in my second semester legal writing course. I also bring to Y&B time management skills, which I know are important in order to balance multiple projects with demanding deadlines. Throughout my academic career, I successfully managed full-time studies, leadership roles, part-time employment, and volunteer activities. As such, I am prepared to assume the responsibilities of a new associate with Y&B.

In addition to my résumé, accompanying this letter is a list of references. If you need any further information, I am pleased to provide it.

Sincerely,



Benjamin S. Fitzgerald

Enclosures (2)

Phillip M. Greene

100 W. Wisconsin Ave., Apt. 2, Milwaukee, WI 53233
414-757-2262 | phillip.greene@marquette.edu

August 20, 2025

Ms. Michael Farley
NCAA Leadership Development
700 W. Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46206

Dear Ms. Farley:

I am excited to be in a position professionally to apply for the NCAA Postgraduate Internship Program for the 2025-2026 cohort. I enrolled in law school at Marquette University with a goal of parlaying my legal studies into a future in collegiate athletics. Working towards this goal, I spent a semester with the NCAA as an extern with the Office of the Committees on Infractions. The experience affirmed for me that a career focused on collegiate athletics is a perfect fit for my skills and interests. I know that the opportunities the NCAA offers are incomparable in terms of exposure and learning, and I will embrace the chance to return to the organization through the Postgraduate Internship Program.

My sports-specific experience and studies will serve as strong foundations for my work. With respect to collegiate athletics, I am working with a Division I member this fall and have already experienced working with a Division III member. As a result, I will return to the NCAA having been exposed to the many intricacies of collegiate athletics from the perspectives of member schools. Without question, my summer spent with the NCAA OCOI is invaluable in terms of preparing me to be an effective post-graduate intern. I enjoyed being immersed in the daily operations of COI, including being exposed to the thought processes and strategies that are behind decisions. Also, I successfully interacted with representatives from the membership, which I enjoyed.

My sports-specific experience further includes contributing to the operations and logistics of a Division I intercollegiate tennis tournament and of the Iowa State Men's Basketball Team, for which I served in a manager role for four years. Because of these opportunities, I am adept at handling competing deadlines, responding to matters with solutions, and communicating effectively with individuals, including coaches, who may have competing interests and ideas. In my role with the Milwaukee Tennis Classic, I prepared media guides and plans and communicated with coaches and sports information directors. I also assisted in maintaining three sites and contributed to logistics ranging from media plans to sponsorships. My direct training is complemented by coursework at Marquette Law School, including Amateur Sports, Pro Sports, Contracts, and Sports Advanced Legal Research and Sports Sponsorships.

Additionally, I bring to the NCAA traditional legal skills, including writing, research, and analytical reasoning. My legal skills have been honed while completing nearly 100 hours of *pro bono* work and through completing an internship with Catholic Charities where I focused on immigration issues.

My résumé is included. I would love to return to the NCAA as a post-graduate intern.

Sincerely,

/s/ Phillip M. Greene

Phillip M. Greene

JAMES E. JEFFERIES
Milwaukee, WI
920.912.7378 | james.e.jefferies@gmail.com

October 30, 2025

Atty. Miki Chen
Goldman, McDermid & Wright, S.C.
650 South Broadway, Suite 200
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Ms. Chen:

Employment law has been a focus of my practical experiences and legal studies, so I am excited to submit my application for the position of part-time law clerk with Goldman, McDermid & Wright. Having witnessed the struggles of employees last summer as an intern with the EEOC Enforcement Division, I appreciate how important it is for employees to have zealous advocacy, which is why your firm's job posting captured my attention. I know your representation of clients is focused on employees who have been mistreated or otherwise injured in the course of work and includes civil rights claims. I welcome the chance to meet with you to discuss my qualifications and to learn more about the law clerk position with your firm.

My on-point experiences in employment law and my study of civil rights matters will be foundational to my contributions as a law clerk. With respect to my employment law experience, my internship with the EEOC equipped me with firsthand knowledge of many of the legal issues and struggles employees face. While with the agency, I analyzed hundreds of claims and drafted opinion statements that were relied upon by staff attorneys. My work on behalf of the Department of Veterans Affairs is also complementary in that I drafted a brief on the issue of a Title VII motion for summary judgment from the employer perspective. This experience gave me a more complete understanding of the strategies of both parties in labor and employment disputes. Moreover, I completed two upper-level courses that are relevant to your practice - First Amendment Rights, and Labor and Employment. Finally, as evidenced on my résumé, I have pursued diverse opportunities throughout law school to research, write, and work directly with clients. The totality of these experiences has ready me to provide top-quality analysis and writing on behalf of Goldman McDermid & Wright clients.

Advocating for employees is what I want to do with my law degree, so I am excited to talk with you about your practice and how I might help you and your partners as a law clerk.

Sincerely,



James E. Jefferies

Enclosures: 2

MICHAEL L. KING

414.913.2251 | michael.king@marquette.edu

Via Electronic Mail

November 15, 2024

Attorney Scott Spears
The Law Office of Scott Spears, LLC
890 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 2E
Racine, WI 53403

Dear Attorney Spears:

I was highly motivated to contact you after learning you are hiring a law clerk. My legal experience and coursework are focused on criminal law, so I am well prepared to support you and your associate attorney at The Law Office of Scott Spears. Presently, I am representing clients under a provisional student practitioner license while interning with the criminal misdemeanor division at Centro Legal. As such, I know firsthand the importance for defendants to have strategic and zealous advocacy. The position with your firm is appealing to me because of the opportunity you offer your law clerk to really participate in and contribute to your criminal practice. I look forward to drafting briefs and documents, communicating with clients, courts, and attorneys and otherwise supporting your legal team in advocating for clients.

My on-point experience in criminal work and courses will permit me to achieve as your law clerk. With respect to my criminal law experience, I have worked on several OWI cases and written memoranda regarding a Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity Plea and a warrantless search challenge. Moreover, I have appeared on record before judges and court commissioners representing the interests of clients of Centro Legal. This has given me a solid foundation for understanding criminal process and procedure. I have complemented my practical experience with relevant coursework, including Evidence, Criminal Process, Criminal Law, and Appellate Writing and Advocacy. I am excited to rely upon my understanding of the criminal law system and my direct participation in the system while taking on projects at your firm.

I also have persuasive communication skills, which I know you value. With respect to my writing and research skills, I have had significant opportunities to write on behalf of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and a civil litigation firm. While working with these organizations, I drafted a wide range of documents, including motions, briefs, and client correspondence. Also, my ability to establish rapport with others and to communicate well has been a hallmark of my successes in every work setting from a small law firm to the U.S. Department of Justice.

Criminal defense work is my calling, and I know your firm has a terrific reputation, which is why I am motivated to join the firm as an associate. I provided my résumé and writing sample as PDF attachments.

Sincerely,

/s/ Michael L. King

Michael L. King

Attachments (2)

1800 W. Wells St., Apt. 12G • Milwaukee, WI 53233 • 414-767-1234 • lillian.weiss@marquette.edu

March 2, 2025

Atty. Maria Martinez
Martinez & Ingram, S.C.
902 South Water Street
Milwaukee, WI 53204

Dear Attorney Martinez:

Why Martinez & Ingram? That question is easy for me to answer. As a law student at Marquette, I quickly came to know that Martinez' Milwaukee office is reputed for its great client service and its kind, intelligent lawyers. My impression is confirmed by the firm's stated commitment to being "People First." I have had several conversations with a lawyer who is starting at Martinez in September 2025, and they praised the firm for its focus on training its summer associates and also making everyone feel included. Also, I appreciate Martinez's commitment to "Career Longevity." I am looking for a summer opportunity during which I can take advantage of learning and mentoring to launch into a full-time associate position with the firm, and I like that Martinez values the same long-term relationship.

In reflecting on what I have to offer to Martinez, I settled on two traits that define all of my experiences and accomplishments: I inquire, and I contribute. I have an insatiable appetite for learning, which is why I enrolled in law school, graduated with a double-major from my undergraduate studies, and interned with several different organizations. I attribute my love of learning to the fact that I rank in the top of my law school class. My goal is always to acquire a broad base of understanding. I know from my first year of legal studies how important this is as clients do not present issues that "fit" a single area of law. This perspective was elevated by my experience interning at the Minnesota Supreme Court during summer 2024. In reviewing lower court records and analyzing questions of law, I learned that breadth and depth of knowledge are important. I also have a history of getting stuff done; I contribute. In every internship and position I have held, particularly as a manager at Target, I contributed work that was useful and that informed business processes and/or decisions. I value active participation, which is why I took a leadership role in the Business Law Society and accepted membership on a law journal. Looking to summer 2024, I will take advantage of every learning opportunity offered by Martinez.

I included the requested documents, and I hope to be able to meet you in person through the interview process.

Sincerely,

/s/ Lillian Weiss

Lillian Weiss

Enclosure (3)