

COVER LETTER GUIDANCE

Remember, your cover letter is to introduce you to an employer. It gives you the opportunity to make a connection to that employer before the employer reads your resume and learns about your skills and accomplishments. It's also the first writing sample an employer will read, even before your resume, and needs to reflect your excellent writing skills. It should be concise, clear, and convincing, and it should complement, not repeat your resume. Below are a few tips that you should find helpful:

PARAGRAPH #1: THE INTRODUCTION

The first paragraph of your cover letter is your opportunity to establish a relationship with an employer; in it, you tell the addressee who you are and why you are writing the letter. The introduction is only about two or three sentences long, but it can encourage or discourage an employer from reading the rest of your letter and your resume. Do not start with the standard sentence used in too many cover letters: "I am a first-year student at XYZ law school, and I am interested in applying for a summer internship with your organization." You can do better.

For example, before writing the introduction, determine the nature of your connection to an employer. In general, there are three potential types of connection: (1) *school related (e.g., from an on-campus or off-campus interview program, networking event, or informational)*; (2) *non-school related*; or (3) *weak or none*. The last scenario is the least fruitful for students, so I encourage you to look very hard to find a connection. This may mean that you need to find out if anyone at your law school knows someone at a particular potential employer. Once that connection is determined, put it in your first sentence. A name or event will grab their attention and encourage them to keep reading.

The second piece of information that you should include is the reason you sent the cover letter. Perhaps it's required as part of an application; maybe you sent it as a follow-up to an employer's networking event, or in anticipation of a program in which an employer is a participant. Whatever the reason, say that in your first or second sentence. Don't leave the employer trying to figure it out. Finally, encourage the potential employer to interview you by saying that you would appreciate the opportunity to meet that employer in person.

PARAGRAPH #2: THE FACTS

This section gives you the opportunity to highlight your individuality in a personal and professional way. In it, convey one or two things about yourself that might not be evident from your resume and that will be of interest to an employer. Do not simply repeat your resume.

The goal of this section is to provide specific facts that show your strengths and uniqueness, and to lead into a discussion of why you would be a good fit for an employer's practice. State the facts in a conversational and professional manner. Include your goals and tie those goals into the reason you would like to work with that particular employer. Use the facts to lead into the next section of your letter, the Discussion/Argument of why you are a good fit for the employer.

PARAGRAPH #3: THE DISCUSSION/ARGUMENT

In this section, you make a case for why an employer should interview and ultimately hire you. Think of a theme as to why you are a good fit for the employer's organization and make your argument using facts to "prove" your theme. Themes that resonate with employers focus on proving that you: (1) have the intellectual capacity to do the work; (2) have done related or similar work; and (3) possess the professional skills necessary to be both successful in the employer's legal practice and part of the next generation. These are the same themes conveyed in your resume.

PARAGRAPH #4: THE CLOSING

The closing is your opportunity to re-establish the relationship you established in the Introduction and to convey your next step. It lets you "keep the ball in your court" for a little while longer.

First, thank the employer for considering your application. Second, reiterate your enthusiasm for that employer's practice. Third, identify the next step you will take in pursuit of an opportunity to work with that employer.

*Sample Cover Letter
(School Connection)*

Stacy A. Stevens
stacyastevens@wustl.edu
(504) 123-4567

January 25, 20XX

Rochelle Miller, Esquire
Carter Golden Legal Aid
123 N. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60642

Dear Ms. Miller:

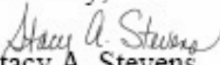
I became interested in Carter Golden Legal Aid after Executive Director Mathew Bruner's presentation in St. Louis this fall. As a first-year law student at Washington University School of Law, I am excited to learn of an opportunity to engage in public service in Chicago. I am pursuing law school because I have a desire to provide justice for those who lack access to it and I believe that individuals can affect change one life at a time. I am drawn to Carter Golden because of its vision to empower people and their communities. Your CLAIM program and Criminal Records division are excellent examples of the multifaceted impact attorneys can have on men, women, children, and society as a whole. Please consider this letter and my enclosed resume as my application for an internship position this summer.

My passion for social justice, and my work experience and academic achievements in law school, will allow me to be a valuable and immediate contributor to your office as a legal advocate. My desire for social change and public service was first fueled by research and discourse for a class called Poverty, Justice & Capabilities. That course inspired my commitment to finding a way to engage hands-on with issues of the education gap, housing discrimination, miscarriages of justice, and wealth disparity. I was fortunate to work with Chicago's homeless population at Inspiration Café and youth at the Boys and Girls Club. As part of my work, I generated solutions for stretching non-profit resources to address multiple levels of clients' wellbeing. Throughout my time with Teach for America, I battled the interplay between education, class, family structure, and race as I implemented individualized plans for students and engaged their families in fighting for students' futures. As the Logistics Coordinator for a yearlong mission trip, I strengthened my leadership, communication, and time management skills. I coordinated with multiple parties, led large groups of diverse personalities, drove teams to complete time-sensitive projects, and balanced varied roles and responsibilities.

In addition to my passion for social justice, I understand the need for working with the system to effect change. In law school, I am integrating my real world experiences with legal concepts, analytical skills, and legal training. I was proud to score in the top fifteen percent in Legal Practice (legal writing) last semester. This past semester, I was also honored to be a Finalist in the Client Counseling Competition for 1Ls.

I welcome the opportunity to use my skills and growing legal knowledge to advance your mission of bringing justice and mercy to those with the greatest need. It would be my pleasure to interview for an internship with you and I would be happy to provide any further information you may require. I will contact you in a few weeks to confirm that you received this letter and my enclosed resume and to see if there is any other information you need from me to consider my application for an internship with Carter Golden.

Sincerely,


Stacy A. Stevens

Encl.: resume

*Sample Cover Letter
(School Connection)*

Matthew T. Novack
(845) 123-4567
mtnovack@wustl.edu

School Address
7025 Forsyth Dr.
St. Louis, MO 63105

Permanent Address
16 Adams Court
Nanuet, NY 10954

January 24, 20XX

Benjamin Cruse, Esquire
Commodity Futures Trading
Commission 140 Broadway
New York, NY 10005

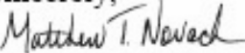
RE: 20XX Summer Internship Program

Dear Mr. Cruse,

Please accept the enclosed resume and personal statement as my application for the Commodity Futures Trading Commission's ("CFTC's") 20XX Summer Internship Program ("Internship"). I learned about the CFTC Internship at the Federal Government Career Fair held at my law school, Washington University in St. Louis—School of Law. I was intrigued by the opportunities that participants in the CFTC Internship have to participate in all phases of the CFTC's work. After law school, I plan to use my background in corporate work and psychology to pursue a career in securities litigation and white-collar criminal prosecution. If selected for the CFTC Internship, I welcome the opportunity to pursue my interests and to apply my corporate experience and expertise in securities research to contribute substantively to the CFTC's efforts.

Prior to law school, I worked as a market research analyst for a business information firm, where I researched corporate information technology trends and immersed myself in financial statements and SEC filings using the SEC's EDGAR database. I drafted reports on information technology and corporate expenditures in a variety of industries, using U.S. Census Bureau economic data and American FactFinder to extrapolate trends and identify growth areas. I believe that my technical understanding of corporate underpinnings and securities research experience will allow me to assist you and your colleagues at the CFTC this summer.

I welcome the opportunity to speak with you or one of your colleagues about my interest in, and qualifications for, the CFTC Internship program. I will contact you in a couple of weeks to confirm receipt of my application materials. In the meantime, please contact me at (845) 123-4567 or mtnovack@wustl.edu if you have any questions. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Matthew T. Novack

Encls.: Resume
Statement of Interest

*Sample Cover Letter
(School Connection)*

Laura M. Mackey
123 Westgate Ave #6
St. Louis, Missouri 63130 lmm@wustl.edu

January 10, 20XX

Missouri State Public Defender System
Attn: Gina Hall, Human Resources
Woodrail Centre
1000 West Nifong, Building 7, Suite 100
Columbia, Missouri 65203

Dear Ms. Hall,

A representative from the Missouri State Public Defender's Office (the "PD Office") spoke at Washington University School of Law's Public Service Career Fair this week. At that event, I talked to Mr. David Sanger, a public defender with your office. Mr. Sanger's enthusiasm for his work inspired me to seek an internship with the PD Office. As a first year law student I am hoping to combine my new legal skills with my experience working in the criminal justice system by working for your office this coming summer. I plan to live in the St. Louis area, but am willing to commute to another city if there is a greater need for an intern in a different location.

I am confident that my academic achievements, experience, and enthusiasm will contribute to the PD Office. This first year of law school, I am proud to have earned high grades in Criminal Law and Legal Practice, our legal analysis and writing course. In Legal Practice, I received praise for my research-based writing assignments and my oral presentation skills. Prior to law school, I worked for the Santa Barbara Superior Court Recognizance Unit. I interviewed individuals immediately after arrest with the goal of releasing them from custody without bail. While our primary task was to reduce jail population, my office was often able to help individuals who would not otherwise be able to post bail. During my time in this position, I gained an understanding of the criminal legal process. I also witnessed the impact this process can have on low-income individuals and their families. It was this experience that inspired the passion I will bring to the PD Office if given the opportunity to intern there this summer.

I will contact you in a couple of weeks to confirm that you received this letter and my enclosed resume. Before then, if you have questions regarding my qualifications, please contact me at (805) 123-4567 or at lmm@wustl.edu. Thank you in advance for your consideration. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Laura M. Mackey
Laura M. Mackey

Encl.: resume

*Sample Cover Letter
(School Connection)*

DENISE ALYSSA HOLLANDER
1234 West Pine Blvd #10L • St. Louis, MO 63108
dahollander@wustl.edu
(941) 123-4567

January 14, 20XX

Ms. Marsha Dennis
Tucker Smith LLP
7000 Forsyth Blvd
Suite 1000
St. Louis, MO 63105

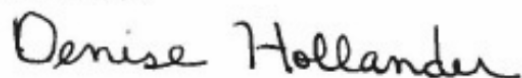
Dear Ms. Dennis:

I recently spoke with John Holmes, one of your intellectual property attorneys, at the Employer Showcase hosted by Washington University School of Law ("Wash U Law"). I also had the opportunity to attend the 1L reception hosted by Tucker Smith in December. The collaborative and welcoming atmosphere of your firm was evident to me from both of those experiences. As a recent transplant to St. Louis, I am eager to make a connection in the St. Louis legal community with a firm like yours that has a varied, sophisticated practice as well as a reputation for community engagement. Please accept this letter and my attached resume as my application for a summer internship with Tucker Smith.

I am interested in exploring your firm's wide variety of practice areas, especially intellectual property, and am excited by the opportunity to seek responsibility early on as an associate. I am confident that I have the research and writing skills, leadership skills, and enthusiasm to be an asset to Tucker Smith this summer and beyond. In addition to maintaining a strong overall academic record, ranking in the top XX% of my class, I have demonstrated my writing ability in law school by earning the highest grade in my Legal Practice course, X.X. This builds on my prior research and writing experience obtained through journalistic training at the University of South Florida and as a media fellow for multiple organizations. Moreover, I developed leadership skills while serving in a variety of capacities at my undergraduate university and in the South Florida community. In addition to building a successful legal practice, it is important to me to be involved in my community. Tucker Smith's demonstrated commitment to the St. Louis community appeals to me.

I understand that Tucker Smith is participating in the on-campus interview program at Wash U Law and I welcome the opportunity to meet with you or one of your colleagues. In the meantime, please contact me if there is any other information you need from me at this time.

Sincerely,



Denise Hollander

Encl.: resume

*Sample Cover Letter
(Non-School Connection)*

Carrie S. Yu

12 South Kingshighway Blvd., Apt. 12S
St. Louis, MO 63108
(703) 123-4567
carriesyu@wustl.edu

December 18, 20XX

Ms. Valerie Rogers
Senior Manager, Recruiting & Retention
Davis Smith P.C.
1234 Main Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

RE: Davis Smith New York Internship

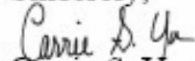
Dear Ms. Rogers,

I met Sarah Jones from your firm's New York office at the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association Conference in New Orleans this November, and she encouraged me to apply for a 1L summer associate position in the firm's New York office. Ms. Jones's enthusiasm for her labor and employment practice at Davis Smith, as well as the firm's demonstrated dedication to diversity, is very appealing to me. I worked in New York for two years before attending law school and plan to return to the area after graduation. I believe I am a very strong candidate for a summer associate position with your firm for a number of reasons.

My research and writing skills, prior work experience, and ability to work in a fast-paced environment will be assets in this position. This fall, at the end of my first semester in law school, I received the highest grade in my Legal Practice (research and writing) section. This grade was based on multiple research and writing assignments. For the two years prior to law school, I worked as a Litigation Paralegal at a large, sophisticated New York City law firm. In that position, I supervised a team of paralegals in connection with a nationwide class-action lawsuit involving thousands of documents. I know that my attention to detail, perfectionist personality, and strong work ethic are characteristics that will allow me to succeed in the fast-paced environment of Davis Smith.

I will be in New York during the first week of January and welcome the opportunity to meet with you or your colleagues to discuss my qualifications for a summer associate position with Davis Smith. I will contact you in a couple of weeks to confirm that you received this letter and my enclosed resume. In the meantime, please let me know if you need additional information from me. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Carrie S. Yu

Encl.: resume

*Sample Cover Letter
(Non-School Connection)*

Timothy J. Newstead
7424 Buckingham Dr., Apt. 2D
St. Louis, MO 63105

January 12, 20XX

Jane Allen, Esquire
California Appellate Project
101 Second Street, Suite 600
San Francisco, CA 94105

Dear Ms. Allen:

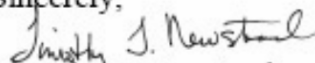
Sarah Volk, my friend and a former intern with the California Appellate Project (the "Appellate Project"), recommended that I apply for the 20XX summer internship. Sarah's enthusiasm for the work she did at the Appellate Project as an intern last summer inspired me to apply for an internship this summer. I am a first-year law student at Washington University in St. Louis School of Law. Like Sarah, I am committed to a career in public interest law, with an emphasis on criminal law. Please accept this letter and my enclosed resume as my application for a summer internship with the Appellate Project.

My primary goal in attending law school is to work in criminal defense, perhaps as a public defender. I am currently a member of the Public Service Advisory Board at Washington University. PSAB is a student-led organization that allocates public service funds among student groups, facilitates educational events about public service careers, creates opportunities for public service within the law school and in the larger St. Louis community, and administers the Pro Bono Pledge. I am an active member of the Public Service Committee and have had the opportunity to organize service projects to foster student involvement with the St. Louis community. My involvement with this organization has strengthened my determination to pursue a career in public service.

My commitment to public service predates law school. I spent my last two years at Notre Dame volunteering as an after-school tutor for local youth and weekly at a local hospital. I also spent a year after college living and working in Jamaica with the Passionist Volunteers International. My interest in criminal law stems from the challenges I observed many of my students enduring as their family members navigated the criminal justice system, often without consistent legal representation. I believe that spending this summer as an intern for the Appellate Project would be an incredible opportunity and the first step in realizing my goal of becoming a public defender.

I will be in Chicago during the weekend of February 6th for the Midwest Public Interest Law Career Conference, and welcome the opportunity to meet with you or one of your colleagues to discuss the Appellate Project and my qualifications for an internship with it. In the meantime, please feel free to contact me at (314) 123-4567 or newsteadt@wustl.edu. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Timothy J. Newstead

Encl.: Resume

*Sample Cover Letter
(Weak or No Connection)*

Stacy A. Stevens
stacyastevens@wustl.edu
(504) 123-4567

January 25, 20XX

Rochelle Miller, Esquire
Carter Golden Legal Aid
123 N. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60642

Dear Ms. Miller:

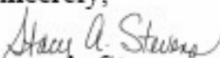
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Sincerely,


Stacy A. Stevens

Encl.: resume

*Sample Cover Letter
(Weak or No Connection)*

Sally Nathan
123 Lake Drive
Kirkwood, MO 63122
(314) 123-4567
snathan@wustl.edu

January 5, 20XX

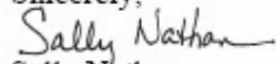
Sara Cook, Esquire
Recruiting Chair
Smith Jones, LLP
800 Washington Avenue, Suite 2000
St. Louis, MO 63101

Dear Ms. Cook,

As a 1L student at Washington University Law School, I am reaching out to you as one of our alumni to get more information about your practice. Like you, I am from St. Louis and plan to practice law here. After working in Chicago and Dallas, it is nice to be back in St. Louis. In reviewing your firm's website, I noticed that Smith Jones has a large energy practice group. Given my experience in the oil and gas industry, I am interested in exploring energy law, and welcome the opportunity to speak with you or your colleagues about my background and the possibility of an internship for this coming summer.

I am confident that my work experience combined with my professional qualities would make me an asset to your firm this coming summer. During my legal internship at an entrepreneurial and patent law firm in Chicago, I worked closely with senior attorneys and their clients on a variety of litigation related matters, and was responsible for reviewing filings and assisting in litigation proceedings. As the account manager for a Dallas-based global contractor, I worked with multiple Fortune 500 energy companies. In that role, I gained extensive exposure to the oil and gas industry working face-to-face with clients regarding their insurance, quality, and regulatory information. I was also active in business development by organizing and leading prospect meetings while providing exceptional customer service to strengthen current client relationships. I continue to bolster my professional leadership and business development skills in law school as an elected representative of the Student Bar Association ("SBA"). My participation in the SBA has allowed me to work with my fellow students as well as law school administrators to insure that 1Ls' interests are recognized and addressed. An internship with Smith Jones would allow me to use my work experience, provide me the opportunity to learn from skilled attorneys, and hone my research, writing, and advocacy skills.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you or one of your colleagues to discuss my qualifications for a summer internship. I will follow up with a phone call within the next couple of weeks to confirm that you received this letter and my enclosed resume. Before then, please let me know if you need additional information from me. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sally Nathan

Encl.: resume

*Sample Cover Letter
(Weak or No Connection)*

Frank D. Douglas

1234 Lindell Blvd., Apt. W-504
St. Louis, MO 63108

(609) 123-4567
fddouglas@wustl.edu

January 25, 20XX

Mr. Thomas Winston
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Region III (3RC00)
1650 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103-2029

Dear Mr. Winston,

As a first-year student at Washington University School of Law ("Law School"), I am writing to express my interest in the Legal Internship ("Internship") at the Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") office in Philadelphia. Past participants and fellow law students, Roseanne Brown and John Caruthers, recommended that I apply.

My lifelong interest in environmental issues, research skills, and ability to communicate would make me an effective EPA intern. My interest in the environment, particularly climate change, is one of the reasons I decided to attend law school. As an attorney, I want to use my passion and legal knowledge to impact policies that will benefit future generations. As an undergraduate, I studied the environmental consequences of globalization, philosophical problems of climate change, and rational choice theory behind international environmental agreements. While I have not had the opportunity as a first-year law student to take environmental law classes, I have dedicated my personal time to working with the Law School's Energy and Environmental Law Society as an elected board member. In that capacity, I have learned more about climate change and broadened the scope of my interest in environmental issues. I earned one of my highest grades this past semester in legal research, and am anxious to put that skill into practice in the environmental area. Prior to law school I taught English as a Second Language as part of a ministry program. As a teacher, I learned to communicate effectively with supervisors and students. My passion for the environment, research ability and communication skills would be an asset to the EPA.

I will be in the Philadelphia area in March and welcome the opportunity to meet with you or one of your colleagues then to learn more about the Internship and share my thoughts on why I would be an asset to the program. I will contact you in a few weeks to confirm that you received this letter and my enclosed resume and to see if there is a convenient time for us to meet in March. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please contact me. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Frank D. Douglas
Frank D. Douglas

Encl.: Resume