

Cover Letters and Resumes

Adapted from Jeff Minzel's unpublished book on finding a legal job.

Step One-Research

- Read job descriptions very carefully and address every point you can through examples in your previous experience demonstrating you're a good fit. You are re-packaging yourself as a lawyer for every different job lead.
- If it's not a posted position but one you've learned about through networking, learn as much about the job as possible. Meet people who work there that can describe the job. The various responsibilities, the work environment, etc.
- Learn about the firm on the internet and other resources, trying to find facets of that company in which you match, or have interest. Showing that you have done your research sets you apart.

Step Two-Tailor Your Resume and Cover Letter to the Job Description.

- Use objective as opposed to subjective criteria in explaining your value to a firm. You don't need to explain that you are hard working, diligent, a leader, thoughtful, team player, a good communicator, etc.
- Rather, let your resume demonstrate that:

Managed a team addressing x,y,z. (proves that you are a good communicator, leader).

Brought in \$x on accounts related to x,y,z (proves that you are hard working).

- Have a *Super Resume* of several pages of *every* job you've worked, organization or group you've served with, skills you've achieved, etc. This is a self-esteem buoy as you remember everything you *have* done. It's also the resource from which you will tailor your *one-page* resume.

Step Three-Writing the Cover Letter

Paragraph One-2-3 sentences.

- Explains *why* you're writing them. Be direct. *John Doe, a partner at XYZ recommended that I contact you.* Put the connection right up front. You have to assume they're skimming, so be direct.

- Explain your experience in one or two relevant areas and believe you would be a good *fit* for their needs. This word “fit” is not demanding. Rather it’s respecting the interplay between your skills and their needs.
- Also, you can show some enthusiasm by demonstrating that you’ve researched their office and hold it in high esteem.

Paragraph Two-Why the Employer Should Interview You

- This paragraph should spotlight *experiences* that should set you apart from other applicants. Some of this may come down to phrasing. Address the job’s description and explain why you have experience that fills that need. Cover Letters are not for talking about yourself. This is inappropriate—you want to always be making the connection between yourself *and the job*. And only share things about yourself *relevant* to the job. Your personality will come through in time.
- Simply state their need and how you fill it. You can tweak without lying (**Don’t Lie!**). Just look at where you match, and omit the areas in which you don’t match. This is not lying. No need to bring up negatives, or justify differences (if the differences between you and the job description are major, this job might not be a good match)

Paragraph Three- Now What?

Politely state your availability to meet or discuss further. Indicate that you’re easily reached at the number listed. Thank them for their time. Signing “Respectfully Yours,” “In Consideration”, or “With Appreciation” can set you apart from “Sincerely.”

Step Four-Following Up.

- Give them about days. Keep in touch cautiously (no more than every ten days), but don’t give up. Being respectful may foster a connection with human resources so that they can hopefully mention *other jobs* that may be coming up.
- When sending emails, be professional. Include the date, perhaps your address, as in a letter. Format your paragraphs. Email is sometimes a convenience for the recipient, but your approach should set you apart. No jargon, typos, etc. If you receive a reply with interest, be responsive! This will also set you apart. They want someone who is *available*.
- As with networking, you’re trying to make several “touches” with that connection. With networking you are training others to look for jobs for you. The same holds true with job applications. You want to remind them you’re out there. That’s why you send Thank You notes. That’s why if you don’t get the job, you still keep in touch.

Other Resume Tips

- These should be short, concise, and bullet pointed for skimming (assume 100 people are applying for this job), but detailed and precise enough for if they do choose to interview you.
- Always include: education, previous experience, non-legal experience, previous honors, & organizations in which you are a member.
- Explaining why you left a job is not often done, but a good idea since this is the question on every HR person's mind. Ex: *sought to transition into real estate law with my next firm, or pursued a higher paying position at....*
- If you have gaps in your resume this is problematic. Better to explain the gap as an experience than just pretending to drop off the map for a while. For instance: took two years off from law for maternity leave, pursued writing a book for 1 year, etc.
- Interests/Hobbies *are* appropriate. They set you apart and give you things to talk about during the interview. It should be a brief last line. Don't be over the top. Just show that you are interesting.
- Try to write in full sentences as it sounds more professional. Use an active tense. Be grammatically consistent. Especially in terms of where you put dates or format paragraphs or use periods.

Some of this handout was taken from an unpublished book on Job Seeking by Jeff Minzel.