



CAREER SERVICES CENTER

COVER LETTER GUIDE FOR PRE-LAW/LAW PATHWAY PROGRAM

(Information is to be used as a guidance and not repeated verbatim)

WHAT IS A COVER LETTER AND WHY IS ONE NEEDED?

A cover letter is your personal introduction to a prospective employer. It is a way to market yourself. Although some employers may not specifically ask for one, it is better to provide one, as it is an example of your organization and communication skills, specifically your writing skills. Is your cover letter well-written, nicely formatted, grammar and spell checked, etc. If a job position is not posted, a cover letter is a great way to network yourself into an interview or job.

A concise and well-written resume can lead an employer to consider your candidacy and go on to view your resume and job application in detail. Therefore, make sure to avoid repeating your resume verbatim and using flowery language. Your cover letter should enhance your resume. Again, it should outline your interest in a specific position within an organization and why you are qualified.

There is no argument that the cover letter may take you more time to compose for each position that you are interested in than just using a canned cover letter with the employer information changed. But if you truly care about having the opportunity to interview and later get that position, tailoring your cover letter to each job position, is the way to go. Again, your cover letter and resume together, can help land you an interview. This is your initial opportunity to put your best foot forward.

HOW TO CREATE A COVER LETTER?

Research: Do your homework. Take the time to learn about the organization, business, company, etc. and what was posted on the job description. Read the job description clearly. Pay attention to the preferred and required qualifications and be sure to emphasize how you meet the required qualifications in your cover letter. Note that in some job descriptions, employers may request prospective candidates to address a certain question or questions in their cover letter. This question may be simple, or it might be an important part of the application process. So, as you conducting your research, here are some questions to think about.

- What is the employer looking for in a candidate? Review what the employer listed as the important qualifications.
- What skills, abilities, training, education, background, experience, etc. do you have that match the skills that the employer wants? Don't forget that skills are also transferable. If you don't have the exact skill or experience, try to use the closest example you have.
- Why that position? What interested you in the position? Were you referred or recommended to that position?
- Why do you want to work for this employer? Research the company. What does the organization do? What are their goals? What characterizes the organization's culture?

Content: Every cover letter that you create should be tailored to the specific job description and employer. It shows that you have carefully read the job description and understand what the job entails. Never send a generic, one size fits all type of cover letter. In your cover letter, you need to demonstrate what you know about the organization/industry, specifically your understanding of the job, and why you are a good fit. One way to show this is to use the job description in your cover letter. Match your language to the language of the employer. Use plenty of action verbs. Directly demonstrate how you meet the required qualifications for that particular job, by emphasizing between 2 or 3 most relevant skills, abilities, education, training, background, experience, etc. you possess that match the most important or required skills an employer is looking for as listed in their posted job description.

Finally, take the time and care to construct your cover letter. Although your cover letter should reflect your individuality, your personal vision and uniqueness, remember your cover letter is way to "introduce yourself," so it is best to err on the side of professionalism. It is also important to proofread your cover



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letter as well as have other individuals, including the SMC Career Services Center team, proofread it before submitting it to an employer.

Format: The font of your cover letter should be the same as the font you used for your resume. Keep the font size to within 1 point, larger or smaller, than the general font size used for your resume. For the same reasons as your resume, you should keep your cover letter to one page in length. If you will be attaching your cover letter, make sure to send it in Adobe PDF file form and not a Microsoft Word or Google Doc file form. When you send it in Adobe PDF file form, make sure your formatting translated correctly before submitting it to an employer.

Framework: Your cover letter needs to include the following areas:

Heading: For consistency purposes, it is recommended that you use the same heading as your resume. As such, your heading should include items like your name and contact information. If you have a current job letterhead or business card, don't use it. When posting your information in a public forum, consider what information you want accessible to a stranger. This may determine what information you list.

- **Name:** It should be a larger font type size that makes your name stand out, easy to read, but not look out of place. The font type size can range from 16 to 22 point and bolding is optional. Make sure your name matches your resume, cover letter, online application materials, calls to references and background checks. If you are referred to by a nickname, for example, some international students go by an alternative name and not their given name, one of the ways to list your name is
 - First or Given Name "Preferred Name" Last Name, Surname or Family Name
- **Address:** Typically, listing your address is standard on cover letters and resumes. However, as the landscape of communication changes, your address is sensitive information that you should list on your cover letter if and when you feel comfortable. Check to see if the job application requires a physical address on the cover letter or resume. Some alternatives to listing a physical address include:
 - City, State
 - City, State, Zip Code
- **Email Address:** List a professional email that you check regularly. If an employer needs to contact you, this is one of the methods they may choose to use. A combination of your first and last name is common.
- **Phone Number:** List a phone number with a voicemail set up to receive messages. If you use your cell phone as your contact phone number, be prepared to handle a professional conversation whenever you answer your phone. When listing your number, do not use a hyphen directly after the area code. Make sure to use a professional outgoing message on your phone. For example, *"You have reached the voicemail of Julie Connors. I am sorry I missed your call. Please leave your name, number and a brief message and I will return your call as soon as possible. Thank you."*
- **Personal website/LinkedIn public profiles:** Only include personal websites/LinkedIn accounts if they are current and up-to-date, relevant and will enhance your chance of obtaining an interview.



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Once you have listed your contact information, the next lines should include the full date (month/day/year), the name of the person you are sending your cover letter to and that person's current title, company name and company address. See example below:

Date (i.e. April 28, 2020)

Contact Person's Name

Contact Person's Current Title

Company Name

Company Address

Exceptions: If you are short on space, only list the date. If you are typing your cover letter into the body of an email and not attaching the cover letter to your email, you can start with the salutation.

Salutation: Always try to address your cover letter to a specific person rather than "To Whom It May Concern," "Sir," or "Madam." Take the time to find out this information. If you do not have a name, contact the organization and politically try to obtain a name. Be sure you have the person's full name, correct spelling and current title. Unless you are aware of the gender pronoun a person identifies with, simply list the individual's full name. Do not assume using Mr., Mrs., Miss, etc., based on a given name. The greeting should be formal and include a colon (:) and not a comma (,) or semicolon (;), at the end. If you are not able to obtain a contact person, you can use the phrase to "Dear Name of Job Title Hiring Manager."

Opening Paragraph: The first paragraph is an introduction. You want to attract the reader's interest. Always begin by introducing yourself. Let the employer know who you are, what job position you are applying to (use the exact job title listed in the job description), how you heard about the position and why you are interested in working for that employer. If you were referred or recommended to the position, mention the person's name in this paragraph. In the opening paragraph, briefly introduce your background, education, skills and experience. This paragraph serves as an outline for the body of your letter, again by mentioning what you will highlight later in your cover letter.

The Body: The body of your cover letter should be 1 to 2 paragraphs long. This part of your cover letter highlights the most important qualities you can offer to the employer, as it relates to the job description. You want to get the employer's attention and interest in your candidacy. Therefore, you should expand on the specific skills you have that match what the employer is looking for in the person to be hired, what is stated in the job description and what you briefly introduced in your opening paragraph. Do not just list jobs you have held that they can find on your resume or skills that you don't have. You need to provide specific examples of how you have demonstrated a skill set that is required for the job position. Remember, the cover letter can make or your job application.

You want to directly connect your experience and background to the skill set the employer is seeking. In a direct, confident, and professional manner, sell your skills, education, training, experiences and abilities, etc. as it relates to the needs of the organization. Include what you can do for the company and not what the company can do for you. For example, if an employer is looking for someone with research skills, this is an opportunity for you to expand on your experience working on a research project for one of your classes or a job you held.



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Finally, although the cover letter is an opportunity for you to show your personality, unless the job descriptions specifically asks for comedian-like skills, maintain professionalism. This also means excluding any personal material unless it relates to the job.

Closing Paragraphs: The closing paragraph should summarize your qualifications and reiterate your interest in the position. Be sure to outline what action you will take to follow up with an employer as well as a thank you to the employer for their time and consideration. It is also recommended that you include your contact information (i.e. phone number and email address), in case your resume and letter become separated. Again, make sure your voicemail is set up, you have a professional outgoing message and that you regularly check your voicemail messages. The email you list should also be professional and one you regularly check. You can end the paragraph by stating that you look forward to the opportunity to further discuss the position.

Closing Signature: With any employment related correspondence, it is best to use a more formal language and tone. Examples of words or phrases you can use to close your cover letter include:

- Sincerely,
- Regards,
- Best,
- Best Regards,
- Respectfully,

ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE

The following are the services offered by the SMC Career Services Center to SMC students who are currently enrolled in 3 units or more or are currently enrollment in Counseling 12 or Counseling 16 at SMC. To receive assistance in these areas, please contact the SMC Career Services Center at (310) 434-4337 to schedule an appointment. The Career Services Center is located on main campus (1900 Pico Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90405).

• Assistance with Major/Career Selection	• Mock Interviews
• Career Exploration and Planning	• Recruitment and Networking Events
• Class/Group Presentations (Request from the instructor)	• Resume and Cover Letter Development, Writing and Critiquing
• Part-Time and Full-Time Employment Resources/Listings	• Applied and Service-Learning Opportunities
• Internship Program and Resources	• Volunteer Opportunities
• LinkedIn Profile Development	• Workshop on Career Relevant Topics
• On-campus Employment Student Help and/or Federal Work Study (FWS) Listings	



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[Heading Used for Resume]

January 20, 2020

Jane Hahm
Director
Legal Aid Law Society
1234 Pico Boulevard
Santa Monica, CA 98765

Dear Jane Hahm:

I am seeking an opportunity to fill the student intern/volunteer placement at the Legal Aid Law Society for the fall semester. I learned about this opportunity through the Law Pathway Program at Santa Monica College, where I am finishing my second year of academic classes. I believe strongly in the Legal Aid Law Society's mission and am especially interested in learning more about the role legal counsel has at your organization, specifically in the areas related to public interest law, where I have a shared interest in empowering communities through direct representation, education and advocacy.

My strong commitment to your organization's mission as well as my interest in community advocacy and education rights stems from my personal experience attending an inner-city high school in Los Angeles. I have seen and experienced the inequalities in educational opportunities and this has instilled in me a passion to assist others in gaining access to a quality education, regardless of their status.

I have demonstrated this commitment through my volunteer experience at the Los Angeles Community Center. For the past two years, I have volunteered weekly with the after-school program, where I tutor underperforming elementary and middle school students in science and math. The community center also hosts several workshops related to social and educational services and I use my bilingual Spanish language skills to help those needing assistance. Beyond immeasurable rewards, these experiences have taught me how to tailor my approach to students' needs and effectively communicate information to various groups, skills I know would serve as an asset at the Legal Aid Law Society.

This position is an amazing opportunity and I am ready to expand my experience in public interest as well as utilize my organizational and leadership skills to assist the team at the Legal Aid Law Society. Additionally, I am eager to employ my Spanish language and communication skills to contribute to any of the services offered by your organization. I am confident that if accepted I will thrive and provide a positive contribution to the team at the Legal Aid Law Society. Thank you for taking the time to consider my application and my attached resume. Please feel free to contact me at (310) 987-6543 or by email at Corsair_Joe@student.smc.edu. I will follow up with you next week to see if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Joe Corsair



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[Heading Used for Resume]

January 20, 2020

Jane Hahm
Director
LA Monitor Firm
1234 Pico Boulevard
Santa Monica, CA 98765

Dear Jane Hahm:

I am seeking an opportunity to fill the undergraduate student intern/volunteer client intake placement at the LA Monitor Firm for the fall semester. I learned about this opportunity through the Law Pathway Program at Santa Monica College, where I am finishing my second year of academic classes. Being enrolled in the Law Pathway Program has given me a solid foundation in the understanding of law and business. I can bring to the LA Monitor Firm a record of teamwork, leadership and experience working in a fast-paced environment, which will enable me to respond to client intake efficiently and strategically.

At Santa Monica College, I completed courses ranging from Business Law, Introduction to Law, and Statistics and have achieved a 3.7 grade point average. Through these courses required by the Law Pathway Program, I developed my writing, research and analytical skills. In my statistics class, I calculated and analyzed data to see if the results of the federal elections had any effect on stock prices. In my Introduction to Law course, I identified and explained the significance of current conflicts and cases under consideration by the Supreme Court as well as prepared and wrote case briefs. In my Business Law course, I analyzed elements of a contract, contract performance and the remedies available in the event of a contract breach.

While being a full-time student, I also manage my time effectively, so I can work a part-time job as a server and hostess. In my experience in the restaurant industry, in order to be successful, you have to work well with others and be flexible and cooperative, while being able to multitask. Good communication is also key as you need to give clear directions and listen carefully to avoid misunderstanding and needless work and expense. Lastly, you have to learn about customer awareness and understand what the customer wants and whether or not it can be delivered in a way they want and can be provided by the business. These are just a handful of skills I have developed over the last two years and will be beneficial when I will be expected to deal with a variety of people ranging from colleagues, clients and other agencies as the student assigned to client intake at the Law Monitor Firm.

In closing, I would be delighted to be a part of your team this fall and I am confident that if accepted I will be able to employ my research and communication skills effectively; therefore, providing a positive contribution to the LA Monitor Firm. Thank you for taking the time to consider my application and my attached resume. Please feel free to contact me at (310) 987-6543 or by email at Corsair_Joe@student.smc.edu. I will follow up with you next week to see if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Joe Corsair