
**Best Practices for Crafting Strong Cover Letters to Plaintiff-Side Firms
Tips Provided by Berkeley Law Alumni (July 2022)**

Your cover letter is often the first chance you get to make a good impression on a potential employer. In fact, some of our alumni working at Plaintiff-side firms have said that **the cover letter can be *the most important part of any hiring packet they receive***. We asked Berkeley Law alumni working at Plaintiff-side firms for their suggestions on how to write a successful cover letter and they shared the following tips and practices.

BEST PRACTICES:

1. **Set aside ample time to write, edit, and proofread your cover letter.** Plaintiffs' lawyers have to create compelling narratives in their legal work. Treat your cover letter like a writing sample, and tell the firm a story about why the firm is a good fit for you and why you're a good fit for the firm. A strong cover letter and application can significantly improve your chance of getting an interview.
2. **Individually tailor your cover letter for the job and the employer to which you are applying.** Explain why you are interested in the work the firm does. Indicate in the letter that you understand what they do (are they employment lawyers? consumer lawyers?). The best cover letters explain a substantive interest in an area of law (e.g. employment, consumer, etc.) and do more than indicate a general interest in public interest law. If you are interested in a specific aspect of the firm's work (e.g. its class action practice, torts litigation) say so in your letter.
3. **Highlight specific skills and experiences that show you will be able to hit the ground running** because the firm may need you to contribute more right away. This is your opportunity to add color to the bullet points on your resume (e.g. if you did a clinic whose work overlaps with the firm's) or tell them something about you or an experience you had that does not already show up on your resume. Please note: any significant experiences that you plan on discussing in depth or expect to be of interest to the employer should already be included in your resume! (See "Practices to Avoid" below.) However, you can and should elaborate in the cover letter as needed.
4. **Show the employer you've done your research.** Have you spoken with current associates and learned something about the firm? Is there a class you are taking that dovetails with a case they are litigating in an interesting way? Talk about it in your letter!

5. **Highlight how you would contribute to the firm's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work.** If you are white, straight, cis-gender, able-bodied, etc., highlight work you have undertaken to help advance DEI efforts.
6. If there are **gaps in your resume, explain them.** Note that there can be sensitive exceptions to this rule that you may wish to discuss with your CDO counselors first, but in general a cover letter can be useful for providing the context and narrative behind your resume.
7. Work with the CDO to **get feedback and edits** on your cover letter. Triple check your cover letter for any spelling or formatting issues.

PRACTICES TO AVOID:

- × **Don't recycle the same cover letter for each job you apply for.** Take the time to tailor your cover letter to the job you are applying for.
- × **Don't get too fancy.** Your cover letter is for conveying information to employers, not demonstrating your prose skills or turning it into an academic writing sample.
- × **Don't simply restate your resume in chronological order.** Firms already have your actual resume for that. Instead, make the theme of your cover letter why this position is a natural fit for someone with your skills, experiences, interests, passions, etc. Use your experiences to narrate your theme and show how you have the skills to do the work.
- × **Don't list general statements about your skill level without providing support,** ex. stating "I'm a strong researcher and litigator" without sharing examples or experiences that prove it.
- × **Don't discuss past jobs in your cover letter unless they also show up in some way on your resume.** For example, don't talk about your past work as a paralegal if it doesn't show up somewhere on your resume. You want to make sure your cover letter is consistent with your resume, or else your reader will be left wondering why you didn't include the experience in your resume.