

Cover Letters That Do The Job

Career Development Office
Fall 2022

Lucy Benz-Rogers
Associate Director for Public Interest & Public Sector Programs
Lucybr@berkeley.edu



Workshop Objectives

Understand
Cover Letters in
Legal Profession
Context

Create a Cover
Letter Template
Document

Work Through
Your Cover
Letter Content

Get a Start on
Drafting
Substantive
Language

Understand
Next Steps



Cover Letters: Why?

- Introduce Yourself
- Writing Sample
- Make the Case: They Should Want to Work With You



What Goes In?

- Name, Year, School, Position Applying For
- Why They Should Hire You
 - Relevant experiences/skills
 - Fit between their work and your interests
- What You Are Asking For
 - Usually an interview, in this context
- Confident, Clear Summary
 - Wrap up with a restatement of why you would be an asset, and...
- Gratitude For Being Considered

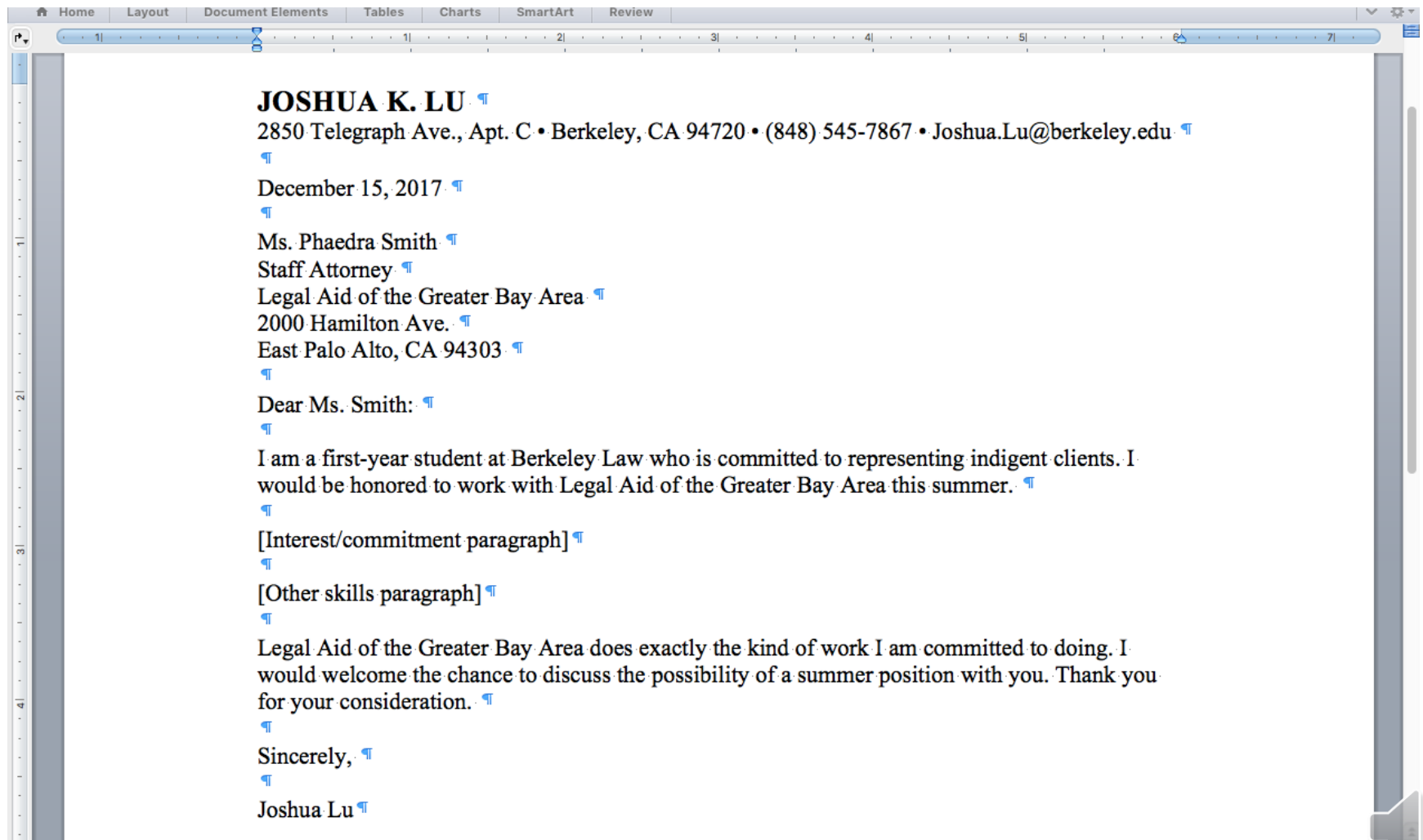


Some Unwritten Rules of Law School Cover Letters

- Customized for each employer!
- One page only
- Goes on same “letterhead” as resume, uses same font
- No errors of any kind
- Paragraphs, not bullets
- “Show, Don’t Tell”
- Focus on what you can offer the employer, not vice versa
- Addressed to a human
 - Choose your salutation- the standard Mr./Ms. or a more inclusive full name?



Set Up Your Letter



The image shows a screenshot of a Microsoft Word document with a letter template. The ribbon at the top includes Home, Layout, Document Elements, Tables, Charts, SmartArt, and Review. The document content is as follows:

JOSHUA K. LU
2850 Telegraph Ave., Apt. C • Berkeley, CA 94720 • (848) 545-7867 • Joshua.Lu@berkeley.edu

December 15, 2017

Ms. Phaedra Smith
Staff Attorney
Legal Aid of the Greater Bay Area
2000 Hamilton Ave.
East Palo Alto, CA 94303

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am a first-year student at Berkeley Law who is committed to representing indigent clients. I would be honored to work with Legal Aid of the Greater Bay Area this summer.

[Interest/commitment paragraph]

[Other skills paragraph]

Legal Aid of the Greater Bay Area does exactly the kind of work I am committed to doing. I would welcome the chance to discuss the possibility of a summer position with you. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Joshua Lu



Writing Your Substantive Content

Figure Out What The Employer Needs

- Job Description
- Website
- Talk to CDO, others

Identify Your Relevant Skills and Interests

- Take it back to grade school essay writing- think strong topic sentences based around your **SKILLS** and **ASSETS**
- Then list your experiences as support – be expansive
- Translate them to skills – be expansive and creative

Draft

- Choose the most relevant skills to highlight
- Avoid repeating resume language



What Do They Want?

Research

Writing

Analysis

Interest, Commitment, Shared Values

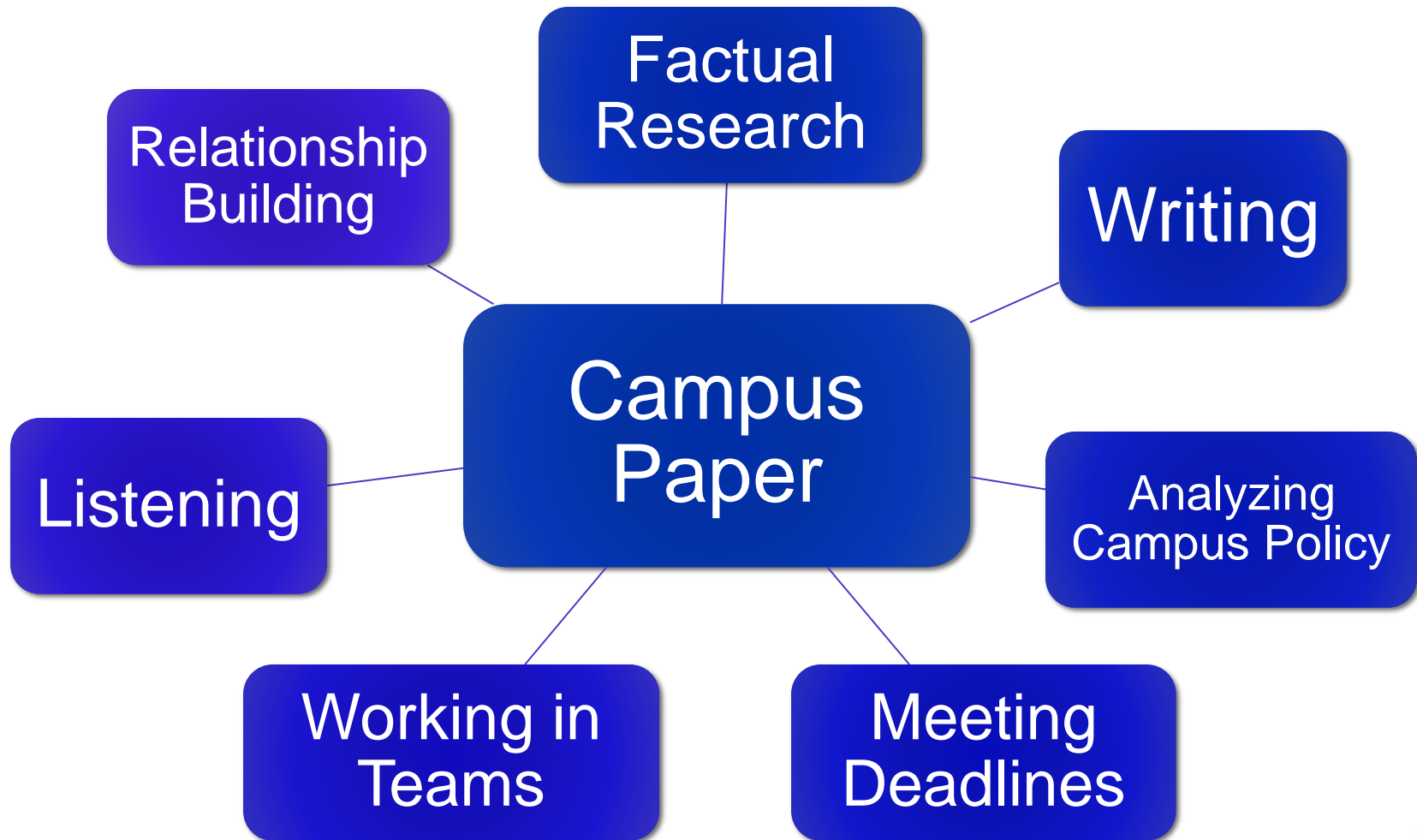
People Skills

Professional Skills

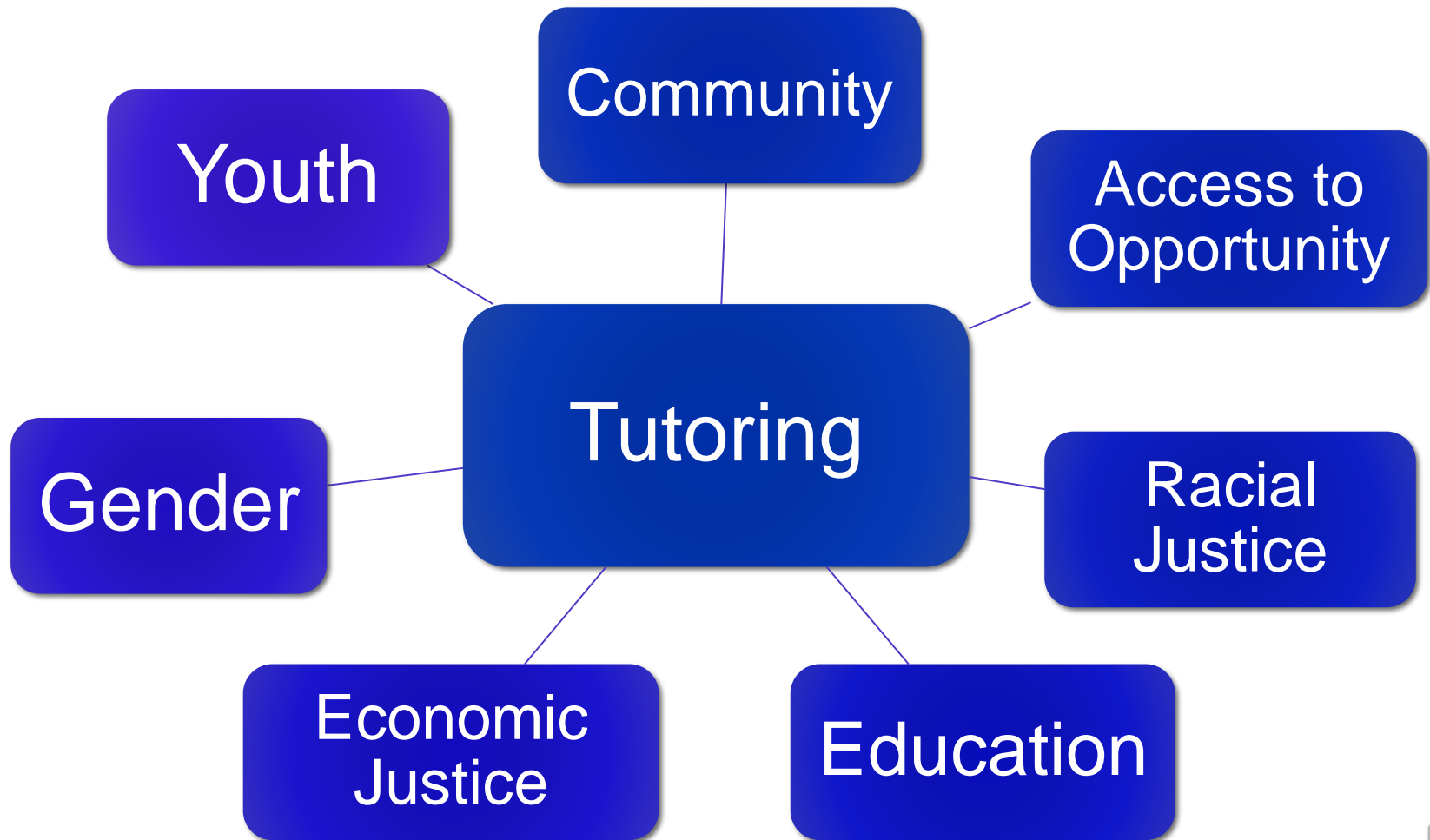
Whatever They Say They Want



Translating Experience to Skills: Campus Paper Example



Translating Experience to Interests/Values: Tutoring Example



Powerful Paragraphs in Action

Compare these examples:

“Last summer I worked on employment cases at Altshuler Berzon. I drafted briefs on employment rights and honed my legal writing and research skills. Before that I was an opinion-editorial writer for my campus newspaper. I published over 50 pieces from 2016-2018.”

VS.

“I have strong legal research and writing skills that would make me an effective advocate for workers through impact litigation. During my summer clerkship at Altshuler Berzon, I was responsible for drafting declarations and legal briefs in support of a class-action wage theft case. I had to synthesize legal reasoning with our clients’ compelling stories. Bringing well-reasoned arguments to life with research and quality writing was also a key part of my role as an Opinion-Editorial writer for my campus newspaper.”



Exercise

1. Figure Out What the Employer Needs

Using your target job description or another opportunity you're interested in, identify 3 skills or interests the employer is looking for.

What looks most important to them?

Choose a mix of skills and interests if possible.



Exercise

2. Identify Your Relevant Skills and Interests

Choose one of your past experiences, and list the tasks you did, e.g.:

- “Responded to questions from constituents”
- “Identified and invited experts on mass incarceration to speak on campus”
- “Maintained files”
- “Designed and implemented curriculum”
- “Trained new servers”

Now, make another list:

- What skills did those tasks require or help you develop?
- What interests drove you to pursue the experience?
- What interests did the experience spark? List them.



Exercise

3. Connect Your Skills and Interests With the Employer's Needs

Draft a point showing the connection between one or more of the employer's needs and one or more of your skills, as evidenced by your experiences.

Example Employer Need: Legal Aid Helpline Skills

“As a store manager, I responded to concerns from customers about a wide range of issues. This required me to listen carefully, come up with creative solutions, and maintain a supportive and professional demeanor while talking with individuals who were often upset. These skills would be useful to me in assisting with Legal Aid's helpline requests.”



How personal? Depends on the job.

Judicial Extern

- “I decided to attend law school after studying political science in college because I understand how important the legal system is in the lives of ordinary people. I hope to work as a judicial intern this summer in order to develop a more concrete understanding of how our process ensures fairness, and to contribute to it.”

Attorney General’s Office

- “The work of the Attorney General’s Office appeals to me because the office represents the interests of the public. Having grown up in a low-income community where people did not always know if our interests were being considered, I have always hoped to be part of that representation.”

Public Defender

- “In high school, my brother was charged with a serious crime. Our family attended his trial, and I was inspired to attend law school someday by watching his attorney, a public defender. Despite the many flaws and injustices in the system, she advocated powerfully for him. This made a difference to all of us, even though he was ultimately incarcerated. This summer, I want to take my next steps toward becoming this kind of advocate.”



Next Steps

- Evaluate your other experiences and draft more points
- Choose what you really need to include
- Put it all together in an order that makes sense
- Tie it together with topic sentences and transitions
- Draft or revisit your summaries: the last sentence of the first paragraph, and the first sentence of your last paragraph



Then...

- Paste in a signature
- Proof it
- Have someone else proof it
- Probably proof it again
- Maybe just have another person proof it
- Couple more proofs
- PDF it!*

And repeat.



Want your cover letter reviewed?

Send to CDO: career@law.berkeley.edu

Or, go over it in an appointment with a CDO counselor! We hope to see you soon!

