

The Cover Letter

A cover letter usually accompanies your résumé in applying for a position electronically or by mail, but check posted application directions first; sometimes a cover letter is not requested or is discouraged. A cover letter should be no more than one page in length and is always written in regular business letter format. It must be addressed to an individual at the firm or organization, such as the person named in the printed position description, recruiting coordinator for the firm, or the hiring partner. Phone calls to the firm or organization, internet research, or using printed directories will help you determine to whom the cover letter should be addressed.

Purpose Of The Cover Letter

- Articulate reasons for contacting the employer.
- Highlight your résumé.
- Convey your personality/individuality and how that relates to the employer.
- Demonstrate interest in the employer.
- Suggest opportunities for an interview.
- Show initial example of writing abilities.

Content Of The Cover Letter

- Identify position sought with employer.
- Show knowledge of employer.
- Highlight skills, strengths and experience from résumé.
- Articulate interests, goals and objectives as they relate to the position.
- Give your contact information and date you will follow-up and contact them.

First Paragraph. The first paragraph is the introduction paragraph. It should include basic information such as year in school, school attending and position for which you are applying. In other words, the first paragraph should state why you are writing the letter. If a position exists, state how you learned of the position.

“As a student at Southern Illinois University School of Law, I am interested in applying for...”

“_____ has recommended I contact you with respect to...”

“I am seeking summer (part-time, permanent) employment with...”

Second Paragraph. The second paragraph can provide information about why you are interested in this particular firm or the geographic area, how your legal interests seem to match those of the firm’s, and how your work experience would be beneficial to the employer.

“I have family and friends who live in ...”

“I grew up in the _____ area and hope to return there upon graduation.”

“With a background in _____, I am seeking opportunities in...”

“My prior experience as a _____ would qualify me for a position with...”

In the second paragraph, you can also refer to your enclosed résumé, pointing out some of the classes or activities you have been involved with at the School of Law which further illustrate your interest in this kind of employment.

“As the enclosed résumé indicates...”

“I am currently involved in...”

“My elective course work has been in the area of...”

Third Paragraph. Your final paragraph should be a simple closing in which you offer to provide additional information (writing sample, references or transcript) if requested and advise that you will be available for an interview at their convenience. Your phone number and e-mail address should always be included in this paragraph. You may also indicate a date that you will contact them.(Please allow enough time for the cover letter and résumé to reach them in the mail before contacting them by phone or e-mail.)

“I would be pleased to discuss further my qualifications in an interview...”

“I will contact your office on (DATE) to discuss potential interview dates...”

“I can be contacted at...”

“Thank you for your time and consideration...”

See the following pages for examples of various styles of cover letters.

3890 Old U.S. Highway 51
Amanda, Illinois 62958
October 26, 20XX

Ms. Becky Taylor
Chicago Lawyers, Committee for Civil Rights
100 Michigan Avenue, Suite 100
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Ms. Taylor:

As a third-year law student at Southern Illinois University, I am interested in a permanent position upon graduation in May, 20XX, with a public interest law agency. My professional experience and community involvement have convinced me that I want to work in an area of law which is dedicated to representing people whose liberties have been violated.

I am currently working in the Southern Illinois University's Legal Clinic. The Clinic provides legal assistance to senior citizens and prisoners in the thirteen southernmost counties. Last summer, I was a clerk for the Federal Defender Program. This experience provided me with invaluable experience in legal research and writing, litigation procedures at the federal level, and in the problems facing criminal defendants unable to afford legal representation. As my enclosed résumé reflects, I also have seven years experience as a social worker and am a counselor for Network, a crisis counseling center. I am a member of my school's Law Journal and Peer Support Group. With these experiences and activities, I have developed competent interviewing, counseling, research, writing and advocacy skills.

I believe my professional experience, community involvement and academic ability represent the type of attorney who could provide assistance to your clientele. I will contact your office during the week of November 1 to discuss potential interview dates. If, before that time, you should need additional information, please feel free to contact me at (618)555-1212 or janedoe@siu.edu. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe

Enclosure

John Doe
3890 Old U.S. Highway 51
Amanda, Illinois 62958

October 19, 20XX

Mr. Jeff Rhine
Fowler, Rhine, Cawley & Ernest
616 Market Street
Mt. Carmel, Illinois 62863

Dear Mr. Rhine:

I am writing in regard to the possibility of employment with Fowler, Rhine, Cawley & Ernest. I am a third-year law student at Southern Illinois University. I will graduate this December and take the bar exam in February. As a former resident of Mt. Carmel, I would like to relocate in the area and work for a reputable law firm such as yours.

I have a strong background in the coal industry. My undergraduate training was in mining engineering. While in law school, I have taken such courses as mining law, real estate finance, and trusts and estates. I also plan to do an independent study in oil and gas law after graduation. While a second-year student at SIU School of Law, I had the good fortune to work for Professor Beck as a graduate assistant. In this position I assisted Professor Beck to research and compile information for his chapter in Surface Coal Mining Effects on the Ground Water Recharge, titled "Legal and Regulatory Framework." In addition to this graduate assistantship, I served as President of the Environmental Law Society.

I feel that my legal education and work background would be well suited for the type of work in which Fowler, Rhine, Cawley & Ernest is engaged. I would welcome the chance to discuss employment opportunities with you at your convenience. Please feel free to contact me at (618)555-1212 or johndoe@siu.edu. Thank you for your consideration of my application.

Sincerely,

John Doe
Enclosure

3890 Old U.S. Highway 51
Makanda, Illinois 62958
October 9, 20XX

The Honorable John P. Smith
United States District Court
123 Justice Building
Downsouth, IL 69999

Dear Judge Smith:

I am a third-year law student at Southern Illinois University School of Law and am seeking a position as a judicial clerk in southern Illinois after graduation in May. Professor John Jones suggested I contact you concerning such an opportunity.

During my first and second years of law school, I maintained a 3.5 grade point average and was on the Dean's List three semesters. In addition, I was selected for the Law Journal and worked as a research assistant during the summer, which helped me develop my legal research and writing skills. I find as I near the end of my studies that it is the process of research, analysis and writing that greatly intrigues me, hence the interest in a clerkship as the foundation to my legal career. Prior to law school, I attended Eastern Illinois University with a major in Political Science. I helped finance my education by working on campus all four years. I was also a member of the Student Council and Pre-Law Student Group, and maintained a 3.8 grade point average. Being able to balance academic studies with work and organization participation has been very important to me as both an undergraduate and law student.

I would appreciate an interview at your convenience to discuss opportunities within your chambers and my possible qualifications. Should additional information be needed, please advise and it will be forwarded immediately. You may reach me at (618)555-1212 or jilldoe@siu.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jill Doe

Enclosures

100 Anywhere Street
Southernmost, IL 69999
February 28, 20XX

Mr. Jones
Law Firm Name
Street Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr. Jones:

I am writing in regard to the possibility of part-time employment with Law Firm Name. I am in the process of finishing my first year of law school at Southern Illinois University and now seek practical legal experience as I continue my education.

Prior to entering law school, I worked in the loan operations division at ABC Bank in Anywhere, USA. During my time at this position, I was exposed to the intricacies of maintaining escrow accounts for mortgage loans. In the process, I further developed the skills of document research, working with outside agencies, implementing computer programs for document efficiency, and customer service. As an escrow teller, I was faced daily with masses of information that had to be filtered and recorded correctly to meet payment deadlines. This scenario led to several opportunities to work independently and within small groups in achieving an efficient organization in which to operate. Oral and written communication skills, the ability to work under pressure and excellent listening skills were not simply valuable to have but were necessities.

I will be moving to your city in May and hope to secure employment in the area. Your firm has an excellent reputation and I would consider it a privilege to work for Law Firm Name this coming summer. I have enclosed a résumé and a list of references for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me at (618)555-1212 or wandajob@siu.edu if you need additional information or materials. I hope to hear from you soon concerning an interview date. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Wanda Job

Enclosures

3890 Old U.S. Highway
Makanda, IL 62958
December 3, 20XX

Mr. John Shepherd
Sandberg Phoenix & vonGontard
1500 One City Centre
St. Louis, MO 63101

Dear Mr. Shepherd:

Please accept this letter as application for the position of Summer Associate which was posted in the Southern Illinois University School of Law Career Services Office. I am currently a first-year student at the School of Law and feel my background may be of interest to your firm.

Prior to entering law school, I held the position of Assistant Dean of Recruiting for Olin Corporation in Alton, Illinois. During the ten years I held this position, I developed oral and written communication skills, the ability to work well under pressure and excellent listening and counseling skills. My undergraduate and graduate degrees were obtained through St. Louis University in Personnel Management. As Assistant Dean of Recruiting, I was faced quite often with employment disputes, which led me to develop an interest in law. While in this position, I attended several workshops and seminars focused on legal issues in employment practices and also took a not-for-credit class at St. Louis University on drafting legal documents. After taking this class, I realized the great interest I had for law.

I will return to the St. Louis area upon graduation and hope to secure employment there each summer until that time. Your firm has an excellent reputation and I would consider it a privilege to work for Sandberg Phoenix and von Gontard this coming summer. I have enclosed a résumé and list of references for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me at (618)555-1212 or jackdoe@siu.edu if you need additional information or materials. I hope to hear from you soon concerning an interview date. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jack Doe

Enclosures

6666 N. Pecan
Carbondale, IL 62901
October 31, 20XX

Ms. JoAnn Knight
Assistant Federal Public Defender
Southern District of Illinois
112 N. Merry Street
P.O. Box 676
Marion, IL 62959

Dear Ms. Knight:

As a second year law student at Southern Illinois University, I am interested in employment opportunities with the Federal Public Defender's office. Geri Wilson suggested I contact you concerning such a position. I believe my work experience, legal education and personality would allow me to be an asset to your office.

During my senior year at Quincy University, I gained experience in criminal law as a result of my externship with the law office of Pollock, Ennis & Heck, where I observed and participated in the preparations for a wide range of litigation, criminal, and civil cases. I also obtained valuable exposure to and experience with actual daily court proceedings. In addition, I am currently working in the Southern Illinois University Legal Clinic where I have also gained invaluable practical skills through trial preparation, client interviewing, document drafting and research. As my résumé indicates, I have been selected for the Southern Illinois Law Journal and the Products Liability National Moot Court Team. I have also been actively involved with many activities such as the Illinois State Bar Association and the American Bar Association, which have enhanced my ability to interact and work well with others.

The knowledge which I have gained through my legal education and professional experience will allow me to work efficiently and knowledgeably in your office. I would welcome the chance to further discuss my qualifications with you. Please feel free to contact me at (618)555-1212 or jstudent@siu.edu, if you have any questions or would like to set up an interview. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

John Student

Enclosures

123 Job Boulevard
Murphysboro, IL 62966
February 16, 20XX

Mr. John Rahoy
Brown and James
705 Olive Street, Ste. 1100
St. Louis, MO 63101

Dear Mr. Rahoy:

Please accept this as an application for your interview that was posted in the Office of Career Services at Southern Illinois University's School of Law. I have long desired to work with Brown and James as defense litigation is my most keen interest. Recently, John Cunningham advised me that the firm has raised its requirements in relation to law school class rank. I want to express my continued interest in a position with Brown and James as I believe I bring experience and qualities that strengthen my academic record.

I recognize that many prestigious firms utilize class ranking as a primary indicator of a prospective associate's future value to the firm. However, I believe in my situation at least, that class ranking may not be the best indicator and ask that you consider several factors that have affected my law school performance. First, I am a candidate for two degrees, the Juris Doctor and the Masters in Accounting. I have a GPA of 3.5 on a 4.0 scale in my accounting program. Completing two degrees simultaneously certainly involved rigorous work, over and above what the normal law student faces. Secondly, unlike the vast majority of my law school classmates, I returned to graduate school some twenty years after completing the requirements for my undergraduate degree. I know that this time delay intensified the challenge of law school for me. Finally, the illness and passing of my mother has affected my performance also. During a very troubled period of my life, some twenty years out of undergraduate school, I have virtually completed my accounting and legal studies. All the while I have maintained a position in the top half of my law school class.

I also believe my prior work experience would be an asset for Brown and James. I have over fifteen years experience as an insurance agent which gives me a perspective of that industry that few, if any, other prospective associates might bring. I performed particularly well in insurance law against top tier students, many of whom are currently working for other St. Louis firms. That a major part of your business is insurance defense makes Brown and James particularly appealing to me. Because I have such a grasp of both how the insurance business works and how the law operates, I know that I will be an exceptional advocate in that area. My strengths are not limited to the insurance arena, though. I entered law school with the intention of specializing in taxation and trusts and estates. While those areas remain very viable for me, I have also performed well in legal areas not normally associated with tax and wealth transfer matters. For example, some of my best law school grades were earned in classes concerned with

Mr. John Rahoy February 16, 20XX
Brown and James Page 2

legal writing. In addition to a brief writing sample, I am submitting a copy of my senior writing seminar article for your review. This article is being published in the Winter 20XX edition of *The John Marshall Journal of Computer and Information Law*, set for release later this month. Beyond my writing skills, I have also performed very well in oral advocacy throughout my legal education. I was chosen for Honors Round Finalist in both Lawyering Skills Advocacy and Advanced Appellate Advocacy. I am a member of the Moot Court Board and will represent SIU at the ABA National Appellate Advocacy Competition. Currently, I am taking Trial Advocacy and find it to be one of my all-time favorite law school classes.

I believe my work ethic, my work and life experience and my legal strong suits would make a good fit for Brown and James. I hope that you will review my credentials and consider me for an associate position. I would be happy to schedule an interview in St. Louis at your convenience. Please feel free to contact me at (618)555-1212 or jwilling@siu.edu if you need additional information or materials. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jason Willing

Enclosures

211 Wakeland Hall, SIU-C
Carbondale, IL 62901-6814
August 29, 20XX

Lilly Beltran
Schiff, Hardin & Waite
660 Sears Tower
Chicago, Illinois 60606

Dear Ms. Beltran:

Please accept this letter as an application for the position of summer associate with Schiff, Hardin & Waite. I am currently a second-year law student at Southern Illinois University, and am extremely interested in corporate law.

My previous legal experience provided me with the skills, enthusiasm, responsibility, and dependability that are necessary for working in such a professional capacity. In the summer of 20XX, I clerked for Gray, Ritter & Graham, a plaintiff's attorneys firm specializing in medical malpractice and products liability in St. Louis, Missouri. There, I drafted memorandum, petitions, and gained practical legal research and writing skills to supplement the first year of my legal education. Additionally, prior to entering law school, I received internships in the legal department at Hamilton Sundstrand and at the Winnebago County State's Attorney's Office in Rockford, Illinois. The internship with Hamilton Sundstrand was particularly rewarding because it solidified my interest in corporate law. I drafted a Test Stand Agreement from the ground up, registered two subsidiaries with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, attended depositions, as well as numerous other due diligence projects common in the corporate sector. At the Winnebago County State's Attorney's Office, I interviewed police and witnesses, aided the attorneys in trial preparation, and observed numerous criminal trials.

I believe my work ethic, writing ability, and verbal skills make me a perfect fit with Schiff, Hardin & Waite. I have been fortunate to receive the grades that exemplified the hard work and energy I put into my studies. I made Dean's List both semesters of my first year and I am officially ranked 5 out of 126 competent students (top 4%). Furthermore, my writing skills earned me an invitation to the Southern Illinois University Law Journal, and my verbal skills provided me with the opportunity to argue in front of a district court judge in the Appellate Advocacy Honors Rounds. I am confident those characteristics of mine, along with my previous work experience, will allow me to be a beneficial addition to the legal staff and attorneys at Schiff, Hardin & Waite this summer.

I have enclosed my résumé for your consideration. I hope to hear from you soon to further discuss an opportunity with Schiff, Hardin & Waite and a possible interview. Should you need additional information, please feel free to contact me at 618/536-9999 or bright@siu.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Jan Bright

Enclosures

6687 Old Hwy 13, Apt. C-1
Carbondale, IL 62901
January 10, 20XX

Mr. Albert Strong
The Strong Law Firm, LLC.
163 Battlefield Road
Springfield, MO 65805

Dear Mr. Strong:

As a third-year law student at Southern Illinois University, I am interested in a permanent position with your firm as an associate. I will be graduating this May and will sit for the Missouri bar exam in July of this year. As a part-time resident of the Springfield area I would like to relocate there permanently.

Despite being a third-year law student, I have considerable experience in the legal profession. I have spent time as a paralegal and legal assistant for both general practice firms and most importantly a plaintiff's personal injury firm. That experience lit the fire for my wanting to be a trial lawyer and made me realize that my bent is toward plaintiff's litigation. It also taught me that the legal profession while being first and foremost a profession, is also a business. I have also been fortunate in being able to participate in the law school's elder law civil practice clinic under Illinois Supreme Court Rule 711. I also gained valuable courtroom experience with the Missouri Public Defender's Office in Cape Girardeau as an extern under Missouri Supreme Court Rule 13. While at SIU I attempted to concentrate in areas usually associated with a personal injury practice such as Products Liability, Medical Malpractice and Issues in Managed Care. I also took several skills courses such as ADR, Negotiation and Trial Advocacy. Prior to my mid-life career change to the legal profession, I spent several years working in the manufacturing sector as an industrial engineer and later in various management positions. My experience as an engineer taught me to think analytically and how to problem solve. My experience as a manager taught me to work with all types of people and handle the myriad of disputes that continually arose. It taught me how to be a leader.

I am confident that the combination of my legal education and experience, my people skills, my strong work ethic and my considerable life experiences will allow me to make a significant contribution to The Strong Law Firm in a shorter time than any other new law graduate. I would welcome the opportunity to further discuss how I may be an asset to your firm. I will take the liberty of contacting your office the week of February 7th to discuss potential interview dates. If prior to that time, you should need additional information or would like to set up an interview, please feel free to contact me at (618)555-1212 or jlegal@siu.edu. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

John Legal

Enclosures