

JOB SEARCH CORRESPONDENCE

Letters are vital tools in the job search process. If a letter is properly written, it will create an image of a candidate as a professional, serious, and qualified individual. Letters also provide the potential employer with a writing sample, revealing whether the author can express him or herself in a focused and articulate manner. Throughout your job search, you will draft cover letters, informational interview letters, thank you letters, letters of acceptance and letters of refusal. This booklet offers effective guidelines and tips for crafting such letters.

This booklet also contains samples of correspondence. You are strongly advised not to copy the samples. Rather, use the various samples as guides to draft your own letters. If your letter sounds like a carbon copy of that of every other UM Law student, your correspondence will not stand out from the rest. Furthermore, the employer may assume you are not truly interested in the position because you did not take the time to write a targeted and personalized piece.

You are encouraged to bring drafts of any letters you write to the counselors at the Career Planning Center. The counselors will give you tips to improve each letter by highlighting your skills, background and experience.

COVER LETTERS

Why is a cover letter important?

A cover letter is usually your first opportunity to impress an employer. An effective cover letter can make you stand out from the hundreds of resumes on a recruiter or hiring attorney's desk. A letter is a vehicle for you to express real interest in the employer and to demonstrate that the credentials and experience you possess make you a good "fit." More importantly, a cover letter serves as your *first* writing sample. Grammatical and spelling errors will send a message that you lack attention to detail or are unable to deliver an excellent work product. Similarly, if your letter contains inaccurate information about the organization you wish to target, the employer will have reason to question your research skills, as well as your commitment to the organization.

When do I need to write a cover letter to an employer?

A cover letter should accompany your resume in any employment inquiry other than through the OCI process. Any candidate, no matter how strong his or her credentials, will benefit from the clear and convincing message a well-written cover letter conveys. Throughout your job search, you will probably craft several different versions.

COVER LETTER FORMAT

First Paragraph: Who are you and why are you writing?

The first sentence of this paragraph states why you are writing to this employer. For example, "I am writing in response to a job posting from the Career Planning Center at the University of Miami School of Law" or "I am a second year law student seeking summer employment at [name of employer]." If you have been referred by someone, an effective opening sentence would be: "My supervisor at the U.S. Attorney's Office last summer, Margaret O'Hara, recommended that I contact you regarding employment."

The second sentence should briefly highlight two or three features of your background *most relevant* to this prospective employer. You may consider touching upon oral advocacy or writing skills, or drawing the employer's attention to your *relevant* work experience. Example: "Given my background in accounting and my strong interest in taxation, I believe I can contribute to your firm's tax practice."

Second Paragraph: Why are *you* the right person for this job?

State why you are interested in the particular organization (one or two sentences) and give the employer numerous reasons to pick YOU (two or three sentences). In stating your interest in a particular employer, you may wish to refer to factors such as the employer's area of practice, the geographic location, the employer's reputation in the community, the employer's mission, and/or the type of position available.

Next, explain how your skills and background are ideally suited to the needs and the work of the targeted organization. Some research on your part will be necessary. Select the qualities you possess that are most likely to impress and interest this particular employer. Be specific with examples of skills and accomplishments you wish to emphasize. Stating that you “work well under pressure” or that you are “highly motivated” will not be as effective as providing actual examples of your personality traits and abilities. Retyping job descriptions from your resume will not be effective and will waste your reader’s time. A final wrap-up sentence in this paragraph may comment on how the particular job you are applying for utilizes all your skills and experience.

Third Paragraph: What are your next steps?

In this final paragraph, you will thank the employer for his or her time, refer to any enclosures, and give your next steps. Usually, your resume will be your only enclosure. If your letter responds to a job posting, make sure you include any other materials the employer has requested (such as a writing sample, transcript, etc.). As for your next step, if your targeted organization is located out of town and you are planning a trip to the area, tell the employer when you will be available. A final paragraph might read as follows:

I welcome the opportunity to discuss my qualifications and your hiring criteria in greater detail. I plan to visit the Chicago area from November 22 through December 1 and am available to visit your offices at your convenience during that period. I have enclosed my resume for your review. Should you wish to schedule an interview, please contact me at (305) 222-2222. Thank you for your time and consideration.

I. THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW LETTER

Informational interviews are valuable to learn about different practice areas and network. Informational interviews will help you make career choices and may possibly generate job leads.

In your letter, identify how you obtained the person’s name (referral, alumni directory, etc.) and the reason for the letter (information, advice, etc.). Next, explain why you value this person’s background and experience. Furnish details about your interests and career goals. Finally, restate the purpose of your letter and ask to meet. State when and how you will contact the person to schedule an appointment. Thank the person.

II. THANK YOU LETTERS

The purpose of a thank you letter is to thank the interviewer for his or her time, remind the interviewer of who you are, and express your continuing interest in the particular organization. A thank you letter should highlight an aspect of the interview that will help the interviewer recall the conversation you had. If you met with several people during an interview, send one letter to the most influential person or recruiting coordinator. You may wish to include the names of other interviewers within your letter and indicate that you enjoyed meeting with each of them.

Thank you letters should be brief and cordial. Mail them no later than 48 hours following an interview. Keep in mind that anything you write will go into your file. If you write to more than one person, make each letter slightly different.

III. LETTERS OF ACCEPTANCE OR REFUSAL

Once an offer is extended, you should respond in writing. If you accept, you may wish to confirm the terms of employment in your letter, such as a starting date, salary and responsibilities. Express enthusiasm and appreciation in joining the organization, and thank the employer for the opportunity you have been given. If you decline, indicate that you are pleased with the offer, but have decided not to accept the position for another reason (you have accepted another position, etc.). Thank the employer for the offer and for his or her time. Express your regret at not being able to accept.

V. GENERAL TIPS FOR ALL JOB SEARCH CORRESPONDENCE

1. A proper addressee. Do not misspell an organization's name. Also, be sure to address your cover letter to a specific individual. Make sure to use gender references correctly. If you are applying to law firms, you may direct your correspondence to the recruitment coordinator (an administrator in charge of personnel at the firm – usually not a lawyer) or a hiring partner (a senior attorney and member of the firm who makes the ultimate hiring decisions). This information is available in the National Association for Law Placement (NALP) Directory of Legal Employers. If you have a specific contact at a firm, you may wish to direct your correspondence to him or her. Finally, a quick search on Martindale-Hubbell (Martindale.com) will give you the names of UM alumni working in a particular city. These may be valuable contacts.
2. One page. Keep your cover letter to ONE PAGE. Three or four relatively short paragraphs will be sufficient.
3. Proofread. Proofread your letter carefully to ensure accurate grammar and spelling.
4. White or ivory paper. Use white or ivory paper, as creativity in this area will work against you. Preferably use paper that matches your resume.
5. Professional tone and format. Avoid informality in your correspondence. Your tone should be professional and your letter should subscribe to standard business letter format. You may wish to use business letter templates available in word processing applications such as Microsoft Word and WordPerfect.
6. Beware of computer glitches. For example, if you “mail merge” your correspondence, check each letter carefully to ensure that addresses, addressees, and greetings match.
7. Black or blue ink. Sign your name in black or blue ink.

Targeted Letter for Out-of-Town Job Search Mailing

12345 San Amaro
Coral Gables, FL 33124

September 1, 2000

Edith Bunker, Esq.
Smith, Garcia & Loc
1234 Dupont Lane
Washington, D.C. 20002

Dear Ms. Bunker:

I am a second-year student at the University of Miami School of Law seeking a position as a summer associate with Smith, Garcia & Loc. My academic background, professional experience, and strong interest in corporate transactional law would enable me to contribute to your firm's corporate practice. In addition, as a native of Washington, D.C., I maintain strong ties to the area and hope to settle there permanently.

As my resume reflects, my education and experience in corporate finance are geared toward a career in corporate transactional practice. Upon earning my undergraduate degree in Economics from the University of Florida, I became a research analyst for Dean Witter in San Francisco. I routinely worked sixty to seventy hours each week, conducting complex research on proposed investment opportunities. I received outstanding performance reviews from my supervisors during my three years with Dean Witter. More recently, as a second year law student, I have taken numerous courses in business-related areas, such as Business Planning, Business Associations, and Accounting for Lawyers.

I am aware that Smith, Garcia & Loc rotates summer associates through various practice groups during the summer. Although I have an interest in transactional practice, I desire a summer clerkship that offers exposure to many areas of the law.

I welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my qualifications and your hiring criteria. I plan to be in Washington from October 10 through October 14. Should you wish to schedule an interview, please contact me at (305) 222-2222. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ricky Ricardo

Enclosure

*Targeted Cover Letter for
Local Job Search Mailing*

23456 Memorial Boulevard
Hollywood, FL 33030

February 1, 2000

Alicia Smith, Esq.
Murray, Rodriguez & Louis, P.A.
123 South Flagler St.
Miami, FL 33131

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am a first-year law student at the University of Miami School of Law, and I am extremely interested in pursuing a position as a law clerk with Murray, Rodriguez & Louis for the upcoming summer. I believe that my strong research and writing skills, combined with my background in health care, make me an attractive candidate for your firm's health care practice.

My interest in health care issues is long standing. I hold an undergraduate degree from Barry University in Nursing and Biological Sciences where I graduated *cum laude*. During my three years as a nurse at Jackson Memorial Hospital, I not only worked with patients, but also assumed extensive managerial responsibilities. Over time, I became very familiar with many of the legal issues surrounding the medical profession and decided to pursue a career in law.

During my professional career as a nurse and now as a student, I have had various opportunities to develop my research and writing skills. Prior to law school, I published two articles in the American Journal of Nursing. During my first semester of law school, I excelled in my legal research and writing class, earning a B+.

My resume is enclosed for your review. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you personally. I will call you within two weeks to discuss the possibility of scheduling an interview or you may reach me at (305) 222-2222. Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

Jan Brady

Enclosures

**Cover Letter Seeking a
Corporate Internship**

Vary Teckie
666 San Amaro Lane
Little Gables, FL 33000

March 1, 2000

Lois Lane, Esq.
General Counsel
Gtech Computer Systems, Inc.
89 Oasis Lane
Austin, Texas 77334

Dear Ms. Lane:

I am a second-year student at the University of Miami School of Law seeking to integrate my background in computer sales and marketing with my legal career. I am interested in obtaining an internship in the legal department of GTech Computer Systems for the summer of 2001.

My experience in the computer industry would enable me to make a substantial contribution to GTech as an intern. After graduating from the University of Florida in Engineering and Computer Science, I worked as a computer engineer for MBI Corporation, while attending law school in the evenings. Last summer, I took a three-month leave of absence from MBI to clerk for Belden & Bantam, a small patent firm in Washington, D.C. At Belden & Bantam, I had the opportunity to draft a summary judgment motion in a complex intellectual property lawsuit filed against a software company.

I was born and raised in San Antonio, and I am eager to establish my legal career in Texas. I have enclosed my resume for your review. Should you wish to schedule an interview, please contact me at (305) 222-1111.

Very truly yours,

Vary Teckie

Enclosure

**Cover Letter in Response
to a Job Posting**

Milli Manelli
111 San Amaro Lane
Little Gables, FL 33000
(305) 222-1111

March 1, 2000

Liza Vanilli
Recruiting Coordinator
Leon, Thuc & Jones, L.L.P.
888 Alcatraz Lane
San Francisco, CA 94555

Dear Ms. Vanilli:

As a first-year student at the University of Miami School of Law, I am applying for a summer associate position with Leon, Thuc & Jones. I was pleased to note your posting in the Career Planning Center. My resume is attached for your review and consideration.

I am highly interested in working at Leon, Thuc & Jones, a small firm with a diverse practice in civil litigation, insurance defense, and personal injury, because it represents a challenging opportunity to gain experience in a variety of areas. As my resume highlights, my most recent position with Random Corporation required strong leadership and organizational skills, as well as the ability to analyze, research, and write. As a manager, I supervised two teams of senior analysts, yet was also entrusted to handle numerous time-sensitive projects on my own. In addition to my work experience, I have a strong undergraduate record, having earned a degree in Computer Sciences from Florida State University where I graduated *magna cum laude*.

I am confident that my diverse skills would be an asset to your firm. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,

Milli Manelli

Enclosure

**Cover Letter for a
Judicial Internship**

222 San Amaro Lane
Little Gables, FL 33000
(305) 222-1111

March 1, 2000

The Honorable Ashley Wilkes
United States District Court
301 N.W. 1st St.
Miami, FL 33131

Dear Judge Wilkes:

I am a second-year student at the University of Miami School of Law and I am seeking a judicial internship in your chambers for the summer of 2001. Given my solid academic record and strong research and writing skills, I believe I am well suited to meet the demands of your courtroom. As requested in your posting with the law school's Career Planning Center, I have enclosed a copy of my resume and a writing sample.

As noted in my resume, I graduated *magna cum laude* from the University of Notre Dame, where I completed a double major in English and International Relations. During my senior year, I enrolled in two graduate-level writing courses, wrote an honors thesis, and was a research assistant in the English Department. My enjoyment of research and writing has continued with my legal education at the University of Miami, where I am assisting Professor Doe with revisions of a law review article. I am also actively involved in the Children and Youth Legal Clinic where I have co-authored an appellate brief for a case now pending before the Third District Court of Appeal.

I hope to meet with you to further discuss my qualifications and your hiring criteria. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Jane Eyre

Enclosures

***Unsolicited Cover Letter to
a Networking Contact***

***Letter Requesting
Informational Interview***

Paula Corbin
9999 N.E. 156 St.
Miami, FL 33111

January 1, 2000

Jim N. Ecrickets, Esq.
Harrison & Ford
423 Harbor Lane
Boston, MA 43222

Dear Mr. Ecrickets:

Dana Larvey, a senior associate with Peters & Williams and your University of Miami School of Law classmate from the class of 1993, suggested that I contact you. I am a third-year student at the University of Miami School of Law and I am interested in learning about small firm practice in Boston, particularly in the field of labor law.

I am extremely interested in labor and employment law, having previously worked as director of human resources for the Miami branch office of Mell Computers. Presently, I am interning at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, where I review discrimination charges, investigate complaints, and observe settlement negotiations. My internship has only increased my high level of interest in this area of the law.

I would greatly appreciate your insights and advice as a practicing labor attorney. I can be reached by telephone at (305) 666-6666 or by e-mail at Pcorbin@loa.com. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Paula Corbin

Thank You Letter

1357 Happy Lane
Merriville, Florida 33444
(786) 666-6666

February 1, 2000

Jacqueline Santos, Esq.
Children's Legal Network
333 Montrose Ave.
Houston, Texas 77033

Dear Ms. Santos:

Thank you for speaking with me on Friday, January 28, about employment opportunities with Children's Legal Network. Our meeting served only to heighten my interest in working with your organization.

I am strongly committed to working within the legal system to meet the needs of at-risk children. As we discussed on Friday, I have volunteered with several youth organizations and am aware that children have a critical need for effective legal representation. I was especially pleased to learn on Friday that you are seeking a Spanish-speaking attorney to reach out to the high concentration of Hispanic children in the Houston area. As you know, I am not only fluent in Spanish, but also a native of Colombia. My cultural background would enable me to quickly establish a relationship of trust with CLN's clients to better serve them.

For your review and consideration, I have enclosed a copy of a paper I wrote for my Children's Rights class: *Breaking Down the Barriers to Legal Representation of Immigrant Children*. Please contact me should you need additional information. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,

Alejandro Banderas

Enclosure

Thank You Letter

1357 S.W. 87th St.
Miami, Florida 33444
(786) 333-3333

February 1, 2000

Carl A. Osmond, Esq.
Osmond & Osmond
123 Smiley Way
Salt Lake City, Utah 83444

Dear Mr. Osmond:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me yesterday afternoon. I remain highly interested in an associate position with Osmond & Osmond.

Your firm is attractive to me because of its diverse areas of practice and congenial atmosphere. After meeting with the head partners in the litigation, labor, and real estate sections, I am confident that my skills and personality provide a suitable match with Osmond & Osmond. I would feel privileged to join your firm.

I look forward to hearing from you. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require additional information. Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

Ben N. Jerry

Letter Rejecting Offer

1357 Happy Lane
Merriville, Florida 33444
(305) 111-1111

April 15, 2001

Jamie Sommers, Esq.
Walton & Griffith
444 Rejact Lane
Denver, Colorado 45678

Dear Ms. Sommers:

Thank you for your offer of employment with Walton & Griffith. Although I am very pleased that you found my qualifications commensurate with your hiring needs, I will be unable to accept your offer. I have been given an opportunity to practice in the Miami area and have decided not to relocate at this time.

I thoroughly enjoyed meeting you and Ken Walton. I truly appreciate the time you invested in considering me for employment.

Sincerely yours,

Gomer Pyle

Letter Accepting Offer

1357 Merry Lane
N. Miami Beach, Florida 33444
(305) 555-5555

April 15, 2000

Richard Cunningham, Esq.
United States Department of Justice
1111 Pennsylvania Lane
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Cunningham:

Thank you for your offer of summer employment with the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice. I am pleased to accept your offer at a salary of \$555 per week for twelve weeks.

As we discussed last week, I am available as of May 15th to begin work. I will contact you next week to set a definite starting date. I look forward to a challenging and busy summer at the DOJ.

Sincerely yours,

Beaver Cleaver