



# MSU Law Career Services Office

## Cover Letter Guide

### HEADING

- Personalized letterhead: format to match resume, especially same font style and size
- Date: The first thing under the letterhead should be the date of submission
- Address block
  - Address to a person (NOT to whom it may concern)
    - If unable to find a name of a person in the posting or online, call the Human Resources Department or Recruiter and request the name of the appropriate contact
    - If you still cannot identify a specific name, use a concrete title like Hiring Coordinator, Hiring Partner, Selection Committee
- Salutation line
  - Use a colon after the name in salutation, not a comma
  - Do not include the person's first name in the salutation line
    - Dear Mr./Ms./Dr./Judge/Justice Smith:

*NOTE: Everything under your personalized letterhead should be left aligned.*

### CONTENT

#### INTRODUCTION PARAGRAPH

- Who you are (but don't say "my name is")
  - First year/second year/third year/recent graduate
  - Michigan State University College of Law
- What you are applying for
  - Position, name of the employer, and academic term for student positions
  - Do not use generic cover letters - make it specific to the employer and the position
  - Do not indicate where you saw the posting (especially do not mention CASE, that is just our internal database) unless requested
  - Mention if someone referred you for the position or if you have a direct contact
- Why you want the position
  - Brief interest statement
  - If you are applying for a position that you have no geographic connection to, briefly explain your interest in that location

#### BODY PARAGRAPH(S)

- Do NOT tell the employer what they can do for you (such as giving you legal experience), instead demonstrate how you will be an asset to the employer
- Highlight relevant experience (employment, law school, volunteer)
  - Do not recite what is on your resume, but expand upon it
    - Use examples of career successes (e.g. if your research was cited by a judge in his or her opinion that was favorable for your client)

- Focus on skills, not job title
  - Even if you have no legal experiences yet, include transferable experiences (e.g. as a server you developed customer service skills, problem solving skills, and skills to deal with high stress/fast-paced situations)
- Match your experience with what the employer is looking for
  - Tailor to the posting as much as possible
  - Use buzzwords from the posting
  - Research the employer to address the employer's needs

### **CLOSING PARAGRAPH**

- Summarize why you are the right fit for the job
- State what you've enclosed/attached
- If you are applying out of state, let the employer know when you will be visiting the area or mention video conferencing for an interview
- Thank him or her for considering you for the position

### **CLOSING SIGNATURE**

- Use an appropriate closing word followed by a comma (e.g. Sincerely, Regards, Respectfully,)
- Sign the cover letter – even if sending electronically (sign and scan, use drawing tool, or create an electronic signature)
- Type your full name
- List the word Enclosures (don't need to list what you've enclosed since it should be in last paragraph)

### **FORMAT**

- 1 page only
- Right, left, and bottom margins not larger than 1 inch, but not smaller than .75 inches
- Top margin may be smaller to have the personalized letterhead closer to the edge of the page
- Left align the entire document (do NOT justify or center below the letterhead)
- Use the same easily readable font style and size from your resume
- Paragraphs
  - Do not indent paragraphs
  - Have one space between paragraphs
  - Avoid paragraphs that are too short (one or two lines) or too long (more than 10 or so lines)
  - Do not use acronyms until the title has been spelled out fully and once you've referenced the acronym, do not go back to spelling it out
    - First use: Michigan State University College of Law (MSU Law)
    - Subsequent uses: MSU Law
- Do NOT copy the cover letter into the body of the email; simply state that you have attached a cover letter, resume, and any other requested materials

*NOTE: Read the cover letter out loud to check for grammatical errors and typos. Never submit a cover letter without another set of eyes looking at it.*