

WRITING A PUBLIC SECTOR COVER LETTER

In your cover letter to a public sector employer, you want to explain your experience and background in the employer's issue/practice area and/or a demonstrated commitment to public interest ideals through your undergraduate major, internships, prior and current work experience, coursework, community service, campus activities, etc. Prior to drafting your cover letter, review the following suggestions and see the sample cover letters beginning on page 3 below.

Your Address
City, State Zip Code

Today's Date

Contact Name
Employer's Name
Employer's Street Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr., Ms., etc.:

First Paragraph: Introduce yourself as a (first year, second year, etc.) law student at Georgetown and state your interest: in an internship for summer of 2011; in the opening for an entry-level attorney posted on the PSLawNet.org; in the part-time position described on the organization's website; etc. If you have a personal contact, mention it here. The first paragraph should mention the organization and something about the work they do and your desire to work on behalf of their focus issue(s), with their target community, etc.

Second or Middle Paragraphs: Now that you have introduced yourself and stated the reason for your letter, the middle of the letter is the appropriate place to go into some detail about how your past experiences relate to the work of the organization (skills, background knowledge, etc.) and how your experiences have shaped your public interest beliefs, aspirations, and values. You should stress your most relevant jobs, internships, community service, and leadership activities. First year students, note that highlighting particular skills is not always as important in a 1L cover letter as describing where your passion comes from, because employers recognize that your legal (and other employment) experience may be limited.

Concluding Paragraph: Conclude with a short, direct statement requesting an interview to discuss your background and experience. Mention any geographic availability, such as: I will be in New York City from January 2nd through the 5th and can meet with you at your convenience. Include your name and email address, such as: I may be reached at 202.662.9655 or at sallysmith@law.georgetown.edu.

Sincerely,

Your typed name

Comment [o1]: Address your letter to a specific person if possible. If you are not provided with a specific contact person, address your letter to the head of the department, or use "Dear Sir or Madam" or "Dear Intern Coordinator." Try not to use "To Whom It May Concern."

Comment [o2]: *Examples:*

I am a first year law student at Georgetown University Law Center and a 2006 graduate of Brown University. I am writing to apply for a Summer 2011 internship with _____. I came to law school to acquire the tools to become a more effective advocate for _____, and this summer, I hope to work with an organization that _____.

Ms. Eleanor Jackson, a staff attorney in your office, encouraged me to send my resume to you regarding a post-graduate opportunity with [name of organization]. I am a third year student at Georgetown University Law Center, and a position with your organization is of particular interest to me, as I am dedicated to a career in _____.

Comment [o3]: *Example:*

Representing clients in the Criminal Justice Clinic has solidified my desire to become a public defender. I am currently representing indigent clients in misdemeanor cases in the D.C. Superior Court and residents of Lorton prison in post-conviction matters. Through my clinical experience, I am developing strong client representation, legal research and writing, and trial skills, while also mastering the laws of evidence and criminal procedure. Additionally, I am gaining a strong background in criminal defense advocacy in my Criminal Defense: Theory and Practice Seminar.

Comment [o4]: *Examples:*

I have enclosed my resume for your review. I appreciate your time and hope that we can arrange an opportunity for me to speak with you when I am home over winter break, from December 22nd through January 11th.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my background and qualifications in greater detail. I may be reached at 202.495.6948 or at johndoe@law.georgetown.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

GENERAL TIPS:

- Avoid using corporate or private firm language in reference to the positions you're seeking (i.e., summer associate, first year associate, law clerk, etc.), because most government offices and non-profits do not use such terms. When seeking a summer or academic year opportunity with a public sector employer, use the term *internship* or *intern* unless an internship announcement provides a different position title. When applying for a post-graduate opportunity in the public sector, the term *staff attorney* or phrases such as *entry-level attorney position* or *position in your Honors Program* may be appropriate.
- DO NOT write, "I am interested in working for your firm this summer." Although "firm" is considered a synonym for "company" in the corporate world, it is absolutely taboo to use the term when applying to a nonprofit or government agency.
- Vary the structure of your sentences to avoid repeated rhythm and do not start every sentence with "I."
- Make sure that the cover letter flows smoothly and that your transitions make sense.
- Proofread every document carefully – do not rely solely on spell check, as it does not catch every mistake. When possible, have someone else proofread your work as well. The counselors at OPICS are happy to review your application materials.

** Remember, passion and commitment are as critical as skills and credentials. However, do not be intimidated if you lack experience in an employer's practice area. Focus your cover letter on transferable skills and enthusiastically explain why you are interested in the employer's work.

NOTE: The following cover letters were chosen to provide guidance as you consider how to think about and structure public sector cover letters. None of the letters are perfect. In the first three sample cover letters, we highlight certain aspects of each that are particularly strong and those that could be revised; the remaining samples are examples of particularly strong cover letters. These cover letters are to be used as examples only and should not be copied. It is important to individually tailor your cover letter based on your personal experience, the employer to which you are applying, and the reasons why you want to work for that particular employer.

ANNOTATED SAMPLE COVER LETTERS

1234 14th Street NW
Washington, DC 20010

DATE

Mr. Thomas Smith
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
624 9th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20425

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am a first year student at Georgetown University Law Center, and I am interested in a summer internship with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. I am eager to contribute to the Commission's work ensuring equal protection and combating discrimination.

Before law school, I had the privilege of working as a Legal Administrator at the American Civil Liberties Union in Baltimore. In that position, I was responsible for case intake and I responded to Freedom of Information Act requests. My experience at the ACLU was a motivating factor in my decision to attend law school and pursue a career in civil rights law. I am currently studying issues related to civil rights in my Constitutional Law I and Criminal Justice classes.

I developed strong research and writing skills as a history major at the University of Pennsylvania, and I am learning these skills from a legal perspective in Georgetown's rigorous Legal Research and Writing course.

I believe my skills and passion for civil rights work will enable me to make a strong contribution as a legal intern at the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Attached please find my résumé. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or require additional materials. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

NAME

Comment [o5]: This doesn't tell the reader much, as they know you are interested (you're applying!) and they know what they do. Instead, you should be specific about what you like about the work, the agency, or an aspect of the summer program. You might also address how a summer there will further your career goals.

Comment [o6]: This is a good example of showing how the candidate's experiences shaped his passion for civil rights law.

Comment [o7]: This doesn't tell the reader much, as almost all first year law students take similar classes.

Comment [o8]: If you make a statement regarding your strengths, you must back it up with facts. For example, did you write a thesis in college? Were you recognized for your strong writing skills?

Comment [o9]: Almost all law students take a legal research and writing course, so this would be better in a paragraph that includes other examples of your research and writing skills.

456 4th Street Northwest
Washington, DC 20010

DATE

Ms. Angela Jones
Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles
1550 W. 8th St.
Los Angeles, CA 90017

Dear Ms. Jones:

I am a first year law student at Georgetown University Law Center and plan to pursue a career in civil legal services. I grew up in Los Angeles and intend to return upon graduation. I am writing to inquire about summer opportunities with the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (LAFLA). A copy of my resume is enclosed for your review.

I am impressed by LAFLA's diverse project areas, and I am particularly interested in the Community Economic Development project and its focus on housing issues, education, employment, and government benefits. Prior to starting law school, I spent two years working in Washington, DC, with various public interest groups, including the D.C. Neighborhood Coalition and the Community Education Project. Through my work with both groups, I had the opportunity to organize various educational programs that encouraged youth to pursue careers in public life. Because of my background and experience, I understand the magnitude and importance of LAFLA's community involvement and I am excited about the prospect of taking part in LAFLA's valuable work. I am fluent in Spanish, which I believe would enhance my ability to contribute to your organization.

Please let me know if you would be available to meet with me to discuss my background and skills in further detail. I will be in Los Angeles from December 19 through January 8 and can meet with you at your convenience. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Respectfully,

NAME

Comment [o10]: Explain WHY. Including a statement about your passion/interest in the first paragraph can be a good teaser for a subsequent paragraph that fleshes it out.

Comment [o11]: Make sure to use an acronym ONLY if you know the organization uses that acronym.

Comment [o12]: This sentence is better placed in the last paragraph of a cover letter; it's wasting valuable space in the first paragraph since it's obvious you will also be submitting a resume.

Comment [o13]: This is the crux of a public sector cover letter - using prior experiences or activities to demonstrate why you are interested in this organization.

Comment [o14]: This is a great example of emphasizing skills you possess that would benefit the employer.

Comment [o15]: If you are applying for a position outside of the DC area, you should mention any dates when you will be in the geographic area.

5832 H Street NE
Washington, DC 20030

DATE

Mr. Larry Silverstein
Office of the Attorney General
Bureau of Consumer Frauds and Protection
The Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Mr. Silverstein:

I will be graduating with a Juris Doctor from Georgetown University Law Center this spring and I am interested in joining the Office of the Attorney General in the Bureau of Consumer Frauds and Protection. I am eager to contribute to the safety and well-being of the People of the State of Washington, and I believe that my skills and experience make me a strong candidate for a position with your office.

I developed a particular interest in consumer protection law as a summer associate with Gonzales, Rubin & Smith. During my time there, I drafted a memorandum concerning the rights of consumers to cancel health club contracts due to physical injuries contested under workmen's compensation. The memorandum was used as the basis for a brief submitted to the New York State Supreme Court. This semester I am interning with the Federal Trade Commission, where I am focusing on individual company and industry-wide investigations.

I am passionate about upholding consumers' rights and am excited about the prospect of working on consumer protection issues as a member of the Office of the Attorney General. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any additional materials. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my qualifications in greater detail. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

NAME

Comment [o16]: Although cover letters are typically left-justified, you may also choose to set your return address on the right side of the page. In that case, each paragraph in the body of your cover letter should be indented, and your signature line should be similarly aligned on the right side of the page.

Comment [o17]: If possible, address your letter to a specific person. Unless instructed not to, call the employer first and ask to whom materials should be addressed. If you cannot obtain the name of a specific person, address the letter to "Internship Coordinator" or "Sir or Madam".

Comment [o18]: If you are applying for a position outside of the DC area, you should mention any connection you have to that geographical area. Why the interest in contributing to the well-being of people in Washington State?

Comment [o19]: This is a good example of explaining how your experiences, even within the private sector, shaped your public interest aspirations.

Comment [o20]: 'There' is a bit colloquial. "During my time at the firm" might be better.

UNANNOTATED SAMPLE COVER LETTERS

635 F Street Southwest
Washington, DC 20007

DATE

Mr. Anthony Matthews
Kings County District Attorney's Office
350 Jay Street
New York, NY 11201

Dear Mr. Matthews:

I am a second year student at Georgetown University Law Center, and I am writing to express my interest in a summer position with the Office of the District Attorney in Kings County. I am committed to pursuing a career in criminal prosecution and I attended college in New York City, so I am particularly excited about the possibility of a position with your office.

This past summer, I served as a judicial intern in the Chambers of Judge NAME. During my internship, I experienced legal procedure from the judicial perspective and enhanced my knowledge of litigation practice. I observed a felony assault trial and drafted a memorandum concerning hearsay evidence, which solidified my interest in criminal law.

I developed strong oral communication skills during college through my participation in a variety of debate activities, including two Model United Nations competitions. I continue to hone these abilities at Georgetown Law in my Trial Practice course. My legal research and writing skills have been greatly strengthened by my work on the *Georgetown Immigration Law Journal*, as well as during my summer internship with Judge NAME.

I have enclosed a copy of my resume for your review and am available at your convenience for an interview. Please feel free to contact me if you require any additional materials. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

NAME

9183 Massachusetts Ave.
Washington, DC 20003

DATE

Ms. Rebecca Brown
Department of Justice, Criminal Division
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Ms. Brown:

I am a second year student at Georgetown University Law Center and am interested in a summer internship with the Criminal Division. My intent is to pursue a career in criminal prosecution upon graduation, and an internship with the Department of Justice would greatly further my career goals. I am particularly interested in the Criminal Division Gang Unit or the Narcotics and Dangerous Drug Section, although I would be honored to join the Division in whichever section suits your needs.

My passion for criminal justice developed during my undergraduate studies at Tufts University, where I majored in Sociology and minored in Urban Studies. Specifically, my course in criminal justice demonstrated how important a well-functioning criminal justice system is to the quality of life for residents of our cities and sparked a desire to pursue a career in that field.

I developed a practical understanding of criminal law as an intern with the Kings County District Attorney's Office Appellate Division last summer. During my time there, I drafted numerous briefs, including a memorandum concerning a defendant's right to a speedy trial when the defendant is remanded for a psychiatric evaluation. The memorandum was used with only minor alterations for submission to the Second Department. I had the opportunity to observe trials and appellate arguments throughout the summer as well.

This semester I am taking Advanced Criminal Procedure, and I am honing my writing skills as a member of the *Georgetown Journal of Law and Public Policy*. I am excited about the prospect of contributing to our nationwide judicial system, and I believe that my background and skills will enable me to make a significant contribution to your office.

I have enclosed my resume, transcript and a writing sample. I welcome the opportunity to discuss my qualifications in greater detail. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

NAME

3985 Constitution Ave.
Washington, DC 20015

DATE

Ms. Theresa Marks
National Resource Defense Council
40 West 20th Street
New York, NY 10011

Dear Ms. Marks:

It is with great enthusiasm that I write to apply for a 2011 summer internship with NRDC. I am a second year law student at Georgetown Law with a passionate and longstanding commitment to environmental protection. I have long been devoted to the values pursued by NRDC and my legal education has served to further impress upon me how important your work has been in shaping environmental law in the United States.

My commitment to environmental values led me to pursue an undergraduate degree in Environmental Sciences and to work and volunteer in several environmental non-profit organizations. I came to law school with the belief that a legal education would equip me with skills needed to play a role in advancing environmental protections and promoting environmental justice. Early in my first year at Georgetown I began to do *pro bono* work for Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility. In the course of my research on an environmental whistleblower case, I discovered a new Virginia statute giving the whistleblower a strong likelihood of reinstatement. This was a truly enlightening moment and I was struck in a very real way as to how enabling a legal education could be.

I spent my first summer at the Environmental Law Institute which served to further open my eyes to the many ways that legal tools can be used to solve environmental problems. I was involved in the drafting of new laws, researching, the application of existing statutes to new environmental problems, and investigating the legal implications and possibilities of new forms of environmental management.

Since I spent last summer discovering different legal policy making tools, I am very interested in gaining exposure to litigation with NRDC next summer. I have attached my resume. If you need any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I may be reached by phone at xxx and by e-mail at xxx. Thank you for your time in reviewing my qualifications.

Sincerely,

Name

Click [here](#) to see *Sample Resumes*.

Click [here](#) to see a *Sample Writing Sample*.

Click [here](#) to see a *Sample List of References*.

Click [here](#) to see a *List of Common Interview Questions*.

Click [here](#) to see *Suggested Questions to Ask an Interviewer*.

Click [here](#) to see a *Sample Thank You Note*.

