SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF LAW

Cover Letters & Application Materials

College of Law

Drafting and formatting guidance for the documents that carry your candidacy — from the Office of Career Services.

Dineen Hall, Suite 214 · 315.443.1941 · lawcareer@syr.edu

START HERE

This guide covers five documents: the **cover letter**, **reference list**, **writing sample**, **transcript**, and **statement of interest**.

The cover letter is often read as your **first writing sample**. It should be a concise business letter — usually three paragraphs — that introduces you, connects your record to this employer, and asks for an interview.

PART 01

Before you write

Research comes first — it's what makes a letter specific instead of generic. Confirm the recipient, then learn enough about the employer to explain why *them*.

- Confirm the spelling, title, address, and salutation for the recipient from the employer's website or a quick phone call.
- Talk a career coach, students, alumni, or attorneys who know the firm or organization's culture and values.
- Check the employer's NALP form if they're a member (nalpdirectory.com).
- List your skills and accomplishments that match the posting — pull them from your resume. If the role wants research and writing, line up specific memos or motions you can point to.

PART 02

The three paragraphs

Every cover letter has three moves: introduce yourself, prove you're a fit, and close with a clear ask.

1 Introduction

- Say you're a student or recent graduate of Syracuse University College of Law, and give your year (or graduation year and current bar status).
- Name the specific opening, or the kind of role you want if there's no posting.
- Note any geographic tie to the employer's location.
- End with one sentence on why you'd be an asset — then prove it in paragraph two.

2 The case: why them, why you

The hardest and most important paragraph. Answer two questions concretely:

- **Why them?** Name what draws you to *this* employer — culture, size, location, practice area, mission. This is why research and tailoring are non-negotiable.
- **Why you?** Match the skills in the posting and prove each with an example. No direct experience in the practice area? Lead with transferable skills — research, writing, analysis, attention to detail.
- Focus on what you offer the employer, not what the job does for you.

3 Conclusion

- Express genuine interest in discussing what you'd bring to the role.
- If they're out of town, offer to travel at their convenience and your expense.
- Give your cell number, say you look forward to hearing from them, and thank them.

The whole letter in one line: it's not about what the position does for you — it's about what you do for the employer. Then proofread. Twice. Then have someone you trust read it again.

PART 03

Format & salutations

Use standard business-letter format: date in the upper left, then the recipient's name, title, and address below. Match the masthead to your resume. Every letter ends with a colon after the salutation — a comma is for a note to a friend.

No name in the posting? Check the website for a recruiting coordinator or HR manager, or call and ask directly. If you still can't find one, use "Dear Hiring Manager:" or "Dear Committee Members:".

TITLES & SALUTATIONS

- Everyone gets a title. Use **Esq.** for attorneys or **Ms./Mr.** for non-attorneys — never both. "Ms./Mr. Full Name, Esq." is wrong.
- Address a judge as **Honorable Full Name**, with the court on the next line. Salutation: "Dear Judge [Last Name]:" — use "Justice" for a Supreme Court judge (e.g., NY State Supreme Court).
- When writing to a judge, close with **"Respectfully"** rather than "Sincerely."

PART 04

Common mistakes

- Skipping research on the employer.
- Conclusory claims with no support — "I'm motivated and hardworking" with no example.
- Overconfidence — "I'd be perfect for you."
- Focusing on what you'll get — "this would be great experience for me."
- Leading with negatives — "Even though I don't have a background in..." State it positively.
- Structuring chronologically — lead with your most relevant strengths.
- Opening with "My name is..." or starting every sentence with "I [verb]." Vary your structure.
- A comma after the salutation. It's "Dear Mr. Smith**:**"

PART 05

Cover letter checklist

FORMATTING

- ☐ Your name, address, phone, and email on top — matching your resume.
- ☐ Addressed to a specific, correctly spelled person with the right title.
- ☐ Employer name and address correct; colon after the salutation.
- ☐ One page — three paragraphs, four at most.
- ☐ Journal, book, and magazine names italicized.
- ☐ No language copied from sample letters; proofread and signed.

CONTENT, PARAGRAPH BY PARAGRAPH

- ☐ **P1:** class year, law school, target job; any referral; geographic ties.
- ☐ **P2:** strong topic sentence; why this employer; concrete examples that add depth beyond the resume.
- ☐ **P3:** ask to discuss further; thank the reader; offer to travel if out of town.

PART 06

Sending & following up

Emailing your materials

- Follow the employer's stated preference. If no format is specified, send **PDFs** to preserve formatting — including a signed cover letter.
- Name files with your first and last name plus the document type (e.g., *Candice Camron Resume.pdf*).
- Put a short version of your cover letter in the email body, with your school, year, and contact details in the signature.
- Bcc yourself so you have a record. Skip Friday afternoons and weekends. Don't use read/delivery receipts.

Following up

No response after two or three weeks? A brief call or email (unless the posting says "no phone inquiries") can confirm they received your materials, ask about timing, and check whether they need anything else. Done well, it signals sincere interest and assertiveness — just balance persistence with restraint. Track every employer, date, and response in a spreadsheet.

PART 07

References

Have names, mailing and email addresses, and phone numbers ready — but send them only when asked. Never put "references available upon request" on your resume.

- Ask permission first, and avoid anyone who'd give only faint praise.
- Use law professors and employers familiar with your work; an undergraduate professor can work in some cases. Relatives, doctors, and clergy you haven't worked for are not appropriate.
- Three references are usually enough, listed on a separate sheet using your resume's masthead.

PART 08

Writing sample

Bring a writing sample to every interview. It must be entirely your own work — not a group project and not heavily edited by someone else.

- Keep it to **five to seven pages** unless the employer specifies otherwise.
- Remove any instructor comments; for uploads to Orange CORE, use Times New Roman or Arial.

- For work-product samples, get your employer's permission and remove or change identifying names and information.
- If it's an excerpt, add a one-line introduction (matching your resume masthead) noting the context and any omitted sections.

SAMPLE INTRO LINES

"This is an excerpt from an appellate brief written for a legal communications course; several issues have been omitted in the interest of brevity."

"The following writing sample is used with permission of the supervising attorney. All identifying names and information have been changed."

PART 09

Transcript

Get transcripts from the Registrar (registrar.syr.edu). The **Advising Transcript cannot be used** — it's marked internal-only.

Orange CORE can't read the encrypted official version. Print it and scan to PDF, or use "Microsoft Print to PDF" to save a fresh file before uploading.

PART 10

Statement of interest

Think of it as a cover letter without the business-letter format — not a law-school personal statement. Center your name and contact details, add "Statement of Interest" and the employer, then make your case.

Be specific and concrete; use active voice and action verbs; stay concise. Avoid vague adjectives like *meaningful*, *invaluable*, or *rewarding*.

Samples

Annotated examples of each document. The orange notes point out choices worth copying. Dates are generic (“summer 20XX”) — never copy this language; write your own.

COVER LETTER · 1L · PUBLIC INTEREST

ANITA JOBB
Syracuse, NY 13202 · ajobb@syr.edu · (315) 555-1234

December 15, 20XX

Lillian Moy, Esq.
Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York, Inc.
55 Colvin Avenue
Albany, NY 12206

Dear Ms. Moy:

I am a first-year student at Syracuse University College of Law writing to apply for a summer 20XX legal internship with the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York. As a lifelong Albany resident, I am committed to serving the community I grew up in, and I would bring the Society strong research and writing skills and genuine dedication to its clients.

Your posting emphasizes client-centered advocacy and legal writing, both of which I have already begun to develop. In my Legal Communication and Research course, I researched and drafted a 12-page memorandum analyzing a landlord-tenant dispute under New York's warranty of habitability — work that taught me to translate a client's problem into a clear, well-supported analysis. That interest in service is not new: before law school I worked at an elder-care facility, where I helped residents navigate Medicaid paperwork and learned first-hand how confusing legal systems are for people without a lawyer. Through the Syracuse Public Interest Network (SPIN), I now volunteer with a local tenants' rights clinic. These experiences map directly onto the housing and benefits work your office handles.

I have enclosed my resume, a writing sample, and a reference list. I would welcome the chance to discuss how I can contribute to your work this summer, and can be reached at the phone number or email above. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Anita Jobb
Anita Jobb

MATCH THE MASTHEAD
Use the same header as your resume and reference list.

GEOGRAPHIC TIE
Naming her Albany roots answers “why here?” up front.

NAME THE WORK PRODUCT
A specific 1L memo on a real NY doctrine proves the writing skill better than any adjective.

1LS: USE WHAT YOU HAVE
No legal job yet? Lean on your legal writing course, clinics, and pre-law work.

COVER LETTER · 2L · GOVERNMENT

THOMAS L. JOHNSON
Syracuse, NY 13210 · tljohnson@syr.edu · (315) 222-4567

November 20, 20XX

Jeffrey Jones, Esq.
Regional Director
U.S. Department of Justice, Environment & Natural Resources Division
47 K Street, Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Jones:

I am a second-year student at Syracuse University College of Law writing to apply for a summer 20XX internship with the Environment and Natural Resources Division. My science background, environmental coursework, and legislative experience have prepared me to contribute to the Division's work on day one.

The Division's docket in water-quality and pollution enforcement is exactly where I want to build my career. My commitment is grounded in both study and practice: I hold an undergraduate degree from the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and at the College of Law I have completed Environmental Law and Administrative Law, where I briefed a Clean Water Act citizen-suit problem. This past summer, as a legislative intern in a New York State Assembly office, I researched proposed amendments to the state's brownfield cleanup program and drafted plain-language bill summaries for constituents — work that sharpened my ability to distill dense regulatory material quickly. I am conversant with many of the issues your office litigates, including NPDES permitting, wetlands protection, and pollution prevention.

I am confident that my technical background, research and writing skills, and firm commitment to environmental protection would make me a valuable contributor to your team. My resume is enclosed, and a writing sample is available on request. I look forward to discussing my interest and qualifications, and thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

Thomas L. Johnson
Thomas L. Johnson

GIVE A TITLE
"Esq." for an attorney — never combine it with Mr./Ms.

TWO HARD RETURNS
Leave space between your contact block and the date.

CITE COURSEWORK
Named courses and a specific brief show subject-matter depth a transcript alone can't.

USE THEIR VOCABULARY
Terms like NPDES and brownfield signal he actually knows the field.

COVER LETTER · RECENT GRADUATE

GREGORY T. GRADUATE

Syracuse, NY 13244 · ggraduate@email.com · (315) 123-4567

February 15, 20XX

Andrew Attorney, Esq.
Truth & Justice, LLP
555 Main St., Syracuse, NY 13202

Dear Mr. Attorney:

Please accept the enclosed resume as my application for the litigation associate position at Truth & Justice advertised on your website. I am a 20XX graduate of Syracuse University College of Law, admitted to the New York bar, and currently in my second year as a staff attorney for the New York State Supreme Court, Appellate Division, Fourth Department. I am seeking a small firm with an active litigation practice in complex civil and criminal matters — precisely the work your firm is known for.

Two years of appellate clerking have made me a faster, sharper writer than I was as a summer associate. I draft bench memoranda and proposed decisions across administrative, criminal, and civil appeals, distilling voluminous records into tight analyses under real deadlines — the same demands your associates face on brief-writing and motion practice. Earlier, through the College of Law's NYEx externship program, I externed at the U.S. Attorney's Office and interned for both the Federal District Court and a nonprofit general counsel, so I have seen litigation from the bench, the prosecution, and the client side.

I am also drawn to Truth & Justice's record of civic involvement; I serve on the Onondaga County Bar Association New Lawyers' Section and, before law school, spent five years as executive director of a social-service agency. I would bring your firm well-developed writing skills, courtroom exposure, and genuine enthusiasm. Thank you for your consideration — I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Gregory T. Graduate
Gregory T. Graduate

BAR STATUS
Graduates state their current role and admission status early.

ADAPTS FOR 3LS
Rework only the first paragraph to use this as a 3L.

FRAME THE EXPERIENCE
He ties clerkship work directly to the firm's brief- and motion-writing needs.

REFERENCE LIST & STATEMENT OF INTEREST

STEPHANIE D. JOHNSON

Syracuse, NY 13210 · sdjohn@syr.edu · (315) 443-1941

REFERENCES

Mary Cicci, Esq.
Cicci, Jefferson, Able & Moskow, LLP
500 South Salina Street, Syracuse, NY 13202
cicci@cjamlaw.com · (315) 451-1234
Supervisor, summer intern position

Professor Samuel Aba
University of Arizona, James E. Rogers College of Law
Tucson, AZ 85721
saba@law.arizona.edu · (520) 555-1000
Torts and Constitutional Law professor

Professor Maria Hunt
University of Maryland, Department of Philosophy
College Park, MD 20742
mhunt@umd.edu · (202) 382-1846
Professor, three courses incl. Philosophy of Law

Choose people who know **you and your work** — not the most senior name who's only heard of you. A former professor or supervisor is fine; use current contact info.

SARAH STUDENT

Syracuse, NY 13210 · sastudent@syr.edu · (315) 222-4567

March 19, 20XX

STATEMENT OF INTEREST

Office of the Nassau County District Attorney

I am drawn to criminal law, specifically as a prosecutor, because it is where people find justice for the harms they endure. A prosecutor has a special responsibility to advocate for victims and the community — in both oral and written form.

I have built my oral advocacy through the Advocacy Honor Society's Trial and Appellate Divisions, reaching the quarterfinals of the 1L Moot Court competition and the finals of the Mackenzie Hughes Appellate Advocacy Competition. My research skills support the written side: as a journal reporter and a research assistant at INSCT, I have researched wide-ranging legal and policy questions.

I have aimed my internships at the same goal — a family-justice center at the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, then a trial bureau at the Queens County District Attorney's Office, where I researched issues and drafted motions in felony and misdemeanor cases.

I want to work in Nassau County specifically: I have family and friends there, and having grown up in a Chicago suburb, I am at home in a community adjacent to a major city. For these reasons, I believe I am a strong fit for your office.