

The Art of the FRP Cover Letter



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Goal of FRP Cover Letters

- ***Demonstrate*** interest in employer
 - Very important in a challenging market: employers have a ton of candidates to pick from and will likely choose students who seem ***genuinely interested!***
- ***Explain*** why you would be a good fit
 - Do not make the employer “do the work” – i.e., you need to explain why your experience is relevant and ***why you will be an asset to the firm***
- ***Show off*** your excellent writing ability
 - It is your first ***writing sample!***

Employer Cover Letter Pet Peeves

- Typos!
 - Spelling
 - Grammar: passive tense, split infinitives, etc.
 - Use of contractions, symbols (&, %, \$, etc.), other abbreviations
 - Wrong words (e.g., "memorandums" instead of "memoranda," "i.e." instead of "e.g." etc.)
- Generic cover letters that sound like they were sent to hundreds of firms
- Identifying practice areas or office locations the firm doesn't have!
- Including the wrong contact information

Anatomy of a Cover Letter – Part I

[HEADER – SAME AS RESUME]

Susan Jones

123 Center Street, NW • Washington, DC 12345 • (202) 123-4567 • sjones@law.gwu.edu
Permanent Address: *[include ONLY if you have an address near the city you are applying to]*

[DATE – USE UPLOAD OR MAILING DATE]

July 23, 2009

[ADDRESSEE INFORMATION]

Name *[Always use a name!]*

Organization *[Use full version: include “LLP,” “LLC,” etc.; use “U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission” – not “SEC” or Securities and Exchange Commission]*

Title

Address Line 1

Address Line 2

Address Line 3

[SALUTATION]

Dear Ms. Spears: *[Always use a name!]*

Humble Beginnings

- Header –
 - Use same as resume (3 lines max!)
 - Include “permanent” address if applying outside of DC
- Date –
 - Use upload/application date
- Addressee info –
 - ***Always*** include a contact name + title
 - Find in NALP Directory, Symplicity or web
- Salutation –
 - ***NEVER*** “To Whom It May Concern”
 - If you don’t know gender, call employer or CDO and ask (anonymously!)

Anatomy of a Cover Letter – Part II

[BODY OF THE LETTER]

¶1. *Tell them who you are and why you are interested in working for them. If you are applying to a city other than D.C., indicate your ties/reason for interest in that city.*

I am a rising second year student at The George Washington University Law School and I am extremely interested in working for [*Use full version of employer name here; it is okay to use an abbreviated form in the rest of the letter*] because _____. I am most interested in working in the _____ office because _____, but I am also interested in _____ offices because _____.

¶2. *THE THESIS! Tell them why you would be an asset to the employer. The thesis should be at least two parts, up to three is okay. Discuss each part in turn, and give specific examples to convey why each is relevant/useful to the employer.*

¶3. *Discuss the rest of your thesis.*

¶4. *The concluding paragraph. Thank them for their consideration; indicate when you will follow up.*

[SIGN OFF]

Sincerely,

First Name [*typed first name is fine; electronic signatures sometimes make the files too large*]

Full Name

[ENCLOSURE LINE]

Enclosure [*make plural if uploading more than one document*]

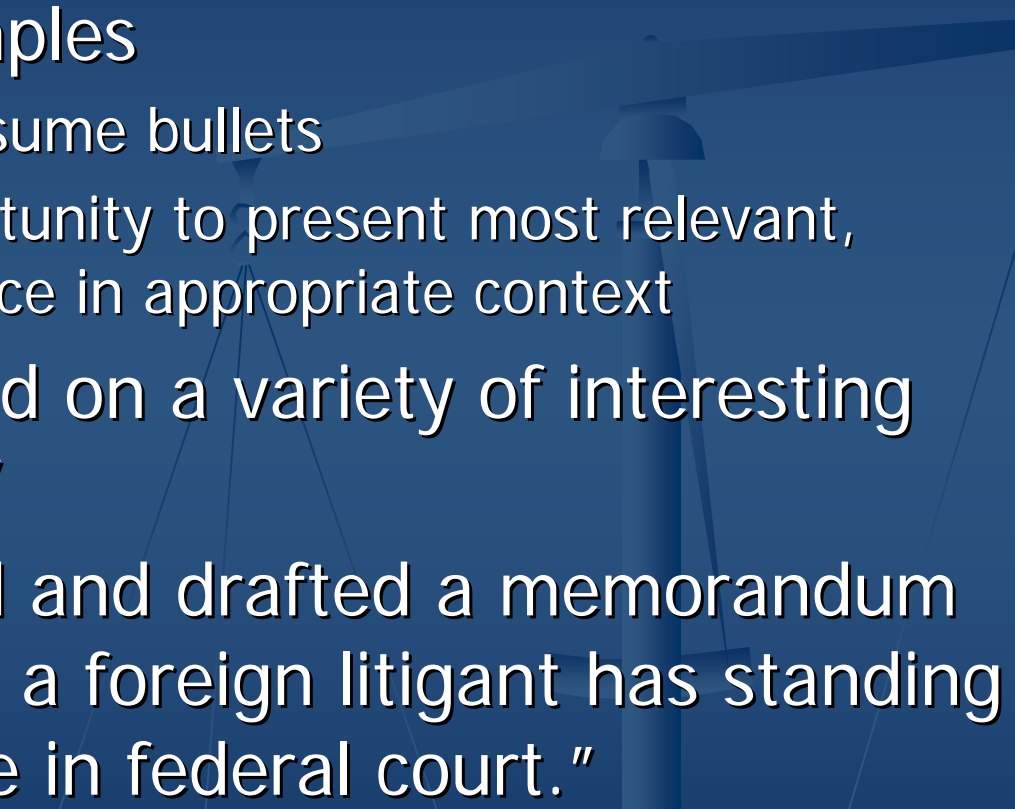
The Body of the Letter

- Who you are: second year, third year, etc.
- When: summer/ after graduation
- Which office(s) you are interested in
 - If you have no apparent ties to desired office, explain WHY – i.e., interested in working with clients in X industry, which is based there, have family/friends there
 - Need to convince them you are committed to that area
- Why you are interested in employer – focus on:
 - For firms: someone you know that works there, leading practice areas, recent cases/matters in the news
 - For government/public interest employers: because you believe in/want to further their mission!

The Whole Point of the Letter *The Thesis!*

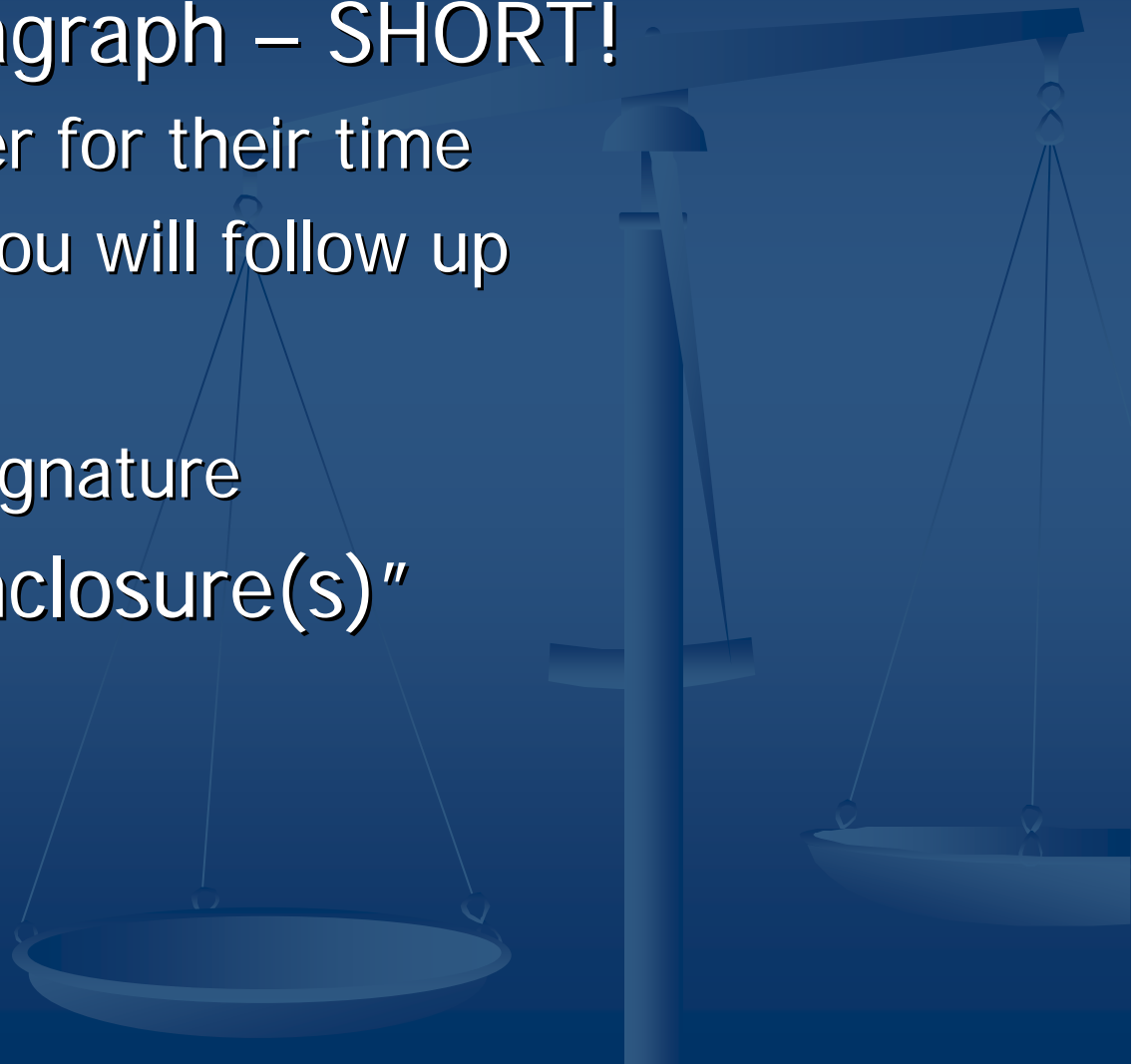
- Goal: tell them why you would be an asset...your *PITCH!*
- Ideal:
 - 1) practical, relevant legal experience and
 - 2) legal research + writing skills
- Other options:
 - Relevant non-legal experience
 - *Demonstrated* interest in relevant practice area
 - Career counselor can help you with ideal “pitch”

The Golden Rule of Cover Letters: Be Specific!

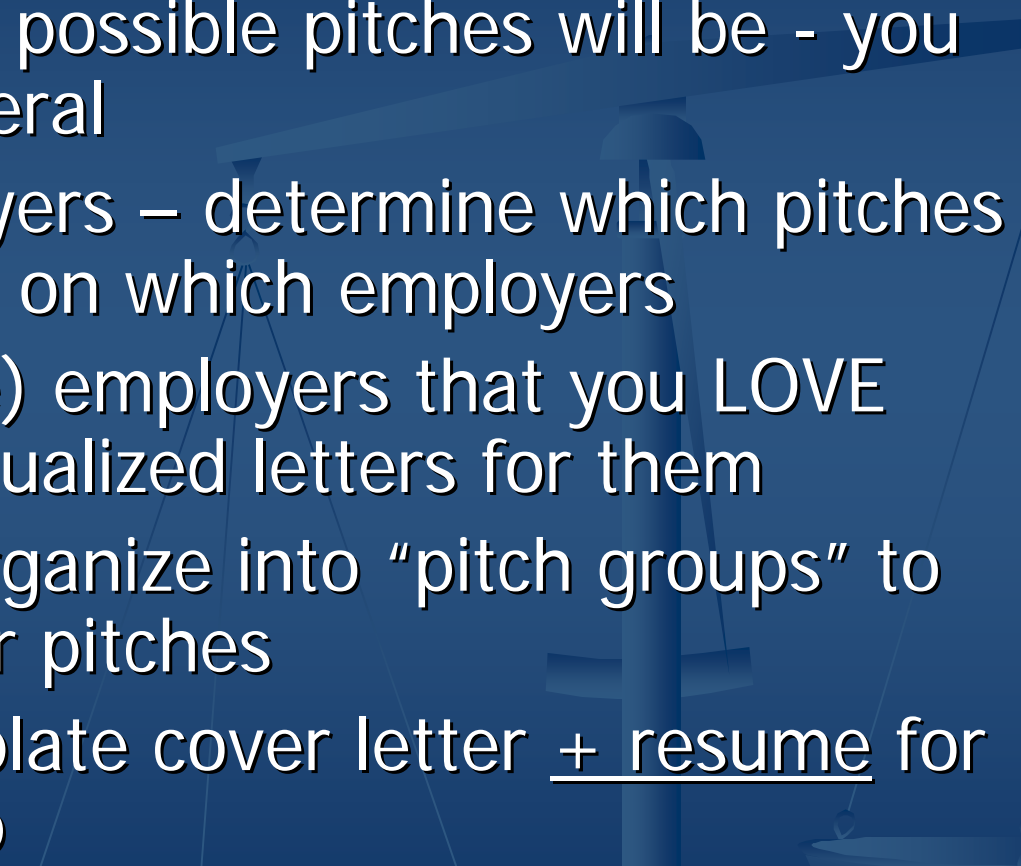
- Give specific examples
 - DO NOT rehash resume bullets
 - Use letter as opportunity to present most relevant, important experience in appropriate context
 - No: "I have worked on a variety of interesting litigation matters."
 - Yes: "I researched and drafted a memorandum analyzing whether a foreign litigant has standing to challenge venue in federal court."
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The Wrap Up

- Concluding paragraph – SHORT!
 - Thank the reader for their time
 - Indicate when you will follow up
- Sign off
 - No need for e-signature
- Don't forget "Enclosure(s)"



Strategy – How to Write 35+ Great Cover Letters!

1. Assess what your possible pitches will be - you should have several
 2. Research employers – determine which pitches would work best on which employers
 3. Pick 20 (or more) employers that you LOVE and write individualized letters for them
 4. For all others, organize into “pitch groups” to pair up with your pitches
 5. Generate a template cover letter + resume for each pitch group
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Tricks of the Trade

- Use NALPDirectory.com *via the Portal* for mail merge
- Start researching employers now!
- Start talking to other practitioners, contacts, etc. about FRP now!
- Go over drafts with your career counselor ***BY JULY 9*** (earlier if doing the Regional Programs)