

Be sure to include your name and address in the top right corner, with the date, employer name and address on the left.

Ideally, you should find out how to address the cover letter to – usually a graduate recruitment manager. If this isn't possible, 'Dear Sir/Madam' is most recruiters' preferred choice of address.

Joanna White
20 Wellington Heights
Norfolk NF9 3ZZ

3 January 2013

John Smith
City law firm
4 Fleet Street
London EC4A 9ZZ

In the first paragraph, explain exactly what you are applying for and state where you found the job advertised. Also provide information about what stage of university you are at, what degree you are studying for, and what university you go to. State that your CV is attached (if a CV is required).

Dear Mr. Smith,

Next, explain your interest in becoming a solicitor. Provide evidence of your interest by talking about your relevant experience.

I am writing to apply for a summer vacation scheme at *name of law firm* as advertised on your graduate recruitment website. I am currently in the second year of my law degree at Birmingham University. Please find my CV attached.

Don't just repeat the experience listed in your CV. Focus on your specific achievements. For example, in this cover letter the applicant has provided extra information about a presentation she delivered as part of her work experience. She's provided evidence that she did well with this task by giving specific details of the feedback she received.

While at university I have sought out experience relevant to a career as a solicitor. I recently undertook a two-day insight placement at City law firm Tower & May. I shadowed a trainee in a property law seat and spoke with partners from other practice areas in order to broaden my knowledge of working as a solicitor. I was able to contrast this experience with my two-week placement at the high street firm Porters, in which I observed solicitors as they acted for local businesses who wanted to expand. My supervisor requested that I draw up a list of the relevant issues affecting a chain of vet surgeries purchasing another practice; I presented my findings to an associate and was commended for the commercial awareness I displayed in highlighting the potential disadvantages of the acquisition. After comparing these experiences with my time spent in open court sessions at Norfolk County Court, I have determined that I would be most suited to a career at a City law firm and am now seeking experience in this environment.

Link your experience to the role and firm you're applying to. For example, this candidate has made it clear that she has experience of high street law firms, county courts and a City law firm, so it comes across as though she's making an informed decision about applying to a City commercial firm.

I am particularly interested in multi-jurisdictional mergers and acquisitions and have been following the expansion of UK law firms into new territories, such as Australia and Morocco, in recent months. I have spoken to solicitors from your firm in this field at graduate recruitment events and, for this reason, I am very interested to find out more about your firm's M&A seat and would like to speak with your current trainees about their experience of working with overseas offices. I believe that my language skills in French and Spanish will benefit me when dealing with colleagues in your French and Spanish offices.

Explain your specific interest in the firm you're applying to – you need to come across as well-researched. You may want to outline your interest in one of the firm's key practice areas. This candidate has spoken about mergers and acquisitions and has referenced a recent development in that field (something that might well come up at interview).

My ability to work well with clients has been enhanced by my time working as a customer services assistant at Sainsbury's – my ability to build a rapport with customers earned me a quick promotion. I have put this skill to good use in my role as student manager of the university legal advice clinic, in which I persuade local law firms to supply solicitors. In my role as president of the university law society, I have arranged guest speakers including Peter Lodder QC. By collaborating with other members of the Law Society committee, my colleagues and I increased the society's membership by 30 per cent within six months.

Link your experience and skills to the qualities required of a solicitor. Don't just say 'I worked with customers in my bar job' to suggest that you're client-friendly. Instead, give clear evidence that you are good at working with customers eg. a promotion, good feedback from a customer, returning customers.

I am available for interview at any time and look forward very much to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Joanna White

In the final paragraph, state your availability for interview and reiterate your interest in the position. Be enthusiastic.

Sign off 'Yours sincerely' if you have addressed the letter to a named person, or 'Yours faithfully' if you've addressed it to Sir/Madam.