



# Effective Cover Letters and Resumes

**Kelly Beattie, Fillmore Riley LLP**

**Dinh Bo-Maguire, Department of Justice**

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## Overview

- Tips on writing Resumes
- Tips on writing an effective cover letter
- Tips at interviews
- Tips on finding an articling job

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## Resume

- Usually the first contact a potential employer will have with you (first impression)
- Draft the Resume so it motivates the employer to call you for an interview
  - ensure that it is clear (define certifications, etc.);
  - easy to read;
  - is an appropriate length;
  - is accurate; and
  - contains unique information about you.

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## Resume – Basic Content

- Name & Contact Information
- Education
- Academic Awards
- Work Experience  
(may include volunteer experience)
- Skills
- Extracurricular Activities / Interests

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## Examples of Other Content to Consider Including in your Resume

- Honours / Other Awards
- Research Experience
- Specialized Training
- Certificates
- Language Skills
- Committee Work
- Conferences Attended

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## Personal Contact Information

- Should be at the top of page one
- **BOLD** your name (and/or place it in CAPS)
- Include your complete address
- Include your telephone number with area code
- Include your email address
- Ensure that at least your name, telephone number and email address appear on subsequent pages as well

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## Education

- List most recent educational experience first
- Include:
  - name & location of school
  - type of program
  - major and / or minor concentrations
  - degrees / diplomas obtained
  - years over which studies were completed
- For current education include anticipated grad date
- Include certifications, special training, etc. here as well

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## Academic Awards

### INCLUDE:

- distinctions
  - scholarships
  - university awards
  - date award received
- 
- Provide a brief description of the award  
(e.g. recognizing excellence in \_\_\_\_)  
(e.g. awarded to students that demonstrate\_\_\_\_)

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## Work Experience

### INCLUDE:

- Name of the organization / company
- Place of Employment
- Dates of Employment
- Job Title
- Very brief description of job duties that focus on skills obtained that are related to the practice of law if possible
- Include volunteer and internship experience

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## Work Experience

- Use active words to describe your job duties (e.g. supervised, analyzed, managed, facilitated, executed)
- If there are gaps in your employment history that have reasonable explanations (e.g. education, maternity leave, traveled Europe) then feel free to explain this
- If no reasonable explanations then note year of employment instead of month and year
- If gaps are minimal, don't bother explaining



## Special Skills & Abilities

Include if relevant to a legal setting:

- language skills
- unique computer related skills
- research skills

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## Interests / Extracurricular Activities

### INCLUDE:

- professional activities  
(memberships on boards, etc.)
  - community activities  
(volunteer coaching, fundraising, etc.)
  - sports activities
- Major source of interview questions
  - Note interests / activities that you like to talk about
  - Attests to your interpersonal skills, leadership abilities, etc.

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## References

If you include them:

- Note name, title, and telephone number
- Employment references are better than personal ones
- Obtain consent from references before noting names

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## Other General Tips for Resume Writing

- Keep Resume within 2 to 3 pages
- Use 8.5 X 11” white paper
- Use only one side of page
- Use 11 or 12 font (10 is too small)
- Use short bullet writing not longer paragraphs
- Maintain consistent verb tense

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## General Tips Continued

- Make Resume look aesthetically pleasing (bold, underline, wide margins, avoid graphics and leave lots of unused space on each page)
- Do not exaggerate your accomplishments
- Omit personal statements such as “Career Objective”
- Do not use technical jargon / abbreviations
- Do not include age or marital status
- Proofread (ensure no typos or grammatical errors and have another person look it over as well)
- Do not list your law school courses

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## The Cover Letter

- Always include one with your Resume
- Chance to show off your writing skills so take advantage
- Customize the letter to specific firms
- Research the employer and tailor your cover letter accordingly (e.g. some firms indicate what they are looking for in an articling student)
- Show that you have knowledge of the employer in the letter
- Articulate what contributions you can make to the employer
- Draft in a conversational manner

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## Cover Letter Content

- Heading
- Introductory paragraph
- Body
- Conclusion
- Enclosure Information

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## Heading

- Use the same heading, font and paper as your Resume

### INCLUDE:

- your address
  - the firm's address & contact person
  - the date
  - salutation
- Call the firm and obtain the name and job title of the person responsible for the articling program
  - Include a re: such as “2016-2017 Articling Position”

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## Introductory Paragraph

- Identify your interest in the position at the law firm
- Identify that you are a 2<sup>nd</sup> year law student at U of M
- Consider identifying why you are applying at the specific firm (e.g. interest in their civil litigation program)
- If applying for positions at firms outside MB, explain why you want to article in that jurisdiction

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## Body of Cover Letter

- Identify your knowledge of the firm following your research
- Tell the reader why you are seeking the particular position
- Show how and why working with the firm fits in your overall career plan
- Identify which areas of law you have interest in
- Next, summarize your work experiences
- Pick 2 or 3 of your skills and demonstrate them with an example
- Highlight what makes you unique and interesting

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## Conclusion

- Thank the reader for their consideration
- Stress your interest in speaking with the law firm about of the articling position
- Maintain professional tone and sign the cover letter above your typed name
- Type “Encl.” under your typed name and state what they are (e.g. transcripts, Resumes)

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## Tips for Writing Cover Letters

- One page maximum
- Avoid use of the word “I” as much as possible
- Keep sentences short and to the point
- Proof read
- Do not rely on spell check
- Have someone proof read the cover letter as well

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## Supporting Documents & Follow Up

- Some firms accept photocopies of transcripts (others do not) so be sure to find out the precise requirements
- Assess costs and time frames for obtaining transcripts well in advance of due dates
- Make note of due dates and account for delivery time
- Date of receipt is often noted right on the cover letter so don't submit it last minute

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## Interviews (The Preparatory Step)

- Your chance to assess the employer as well
- Before the interview consider:
  - what you can offer the employer
  - what skills do you have that are a benefit to you in the practice of law
  - know your strengths and weaknesses and especially your greatest strength and greatest weakness
  - what are your short and long term goals
  - firms are impressed by volunteer and work experience (show you are capable of work/ life balance)





## Tips re: Obtaining an Articling Job

- Law firms are looking for well rounded individuals
- They are looking for someone that will fit into the culture of the firm and have benefited from their life experiences
- Researching the law firm is key
- Attend events arranged by the law school
- Check the Career Desk in the library
- Talk to students who have interviewed at the firm or associates and students who are now working in the firm
- Be motivated and energetic in the interview
- Ask questions

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## Questions

### **Kelly Beattie**

Fillmore Riley LLP

Phone: (204) 957-8342

kbeattie@fillmoreriley.com

### **Dinh Bo-Maguire**

Department of Justice Canada

Phone: (204)984-7652

dinh.bomaguire@justice.gc.ca

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