A Cover Letter in a Nutshell

Dear Mr./Ms. [Last Name]:

Begin your cover letter with a short introduction expressing the purpose of your letter – try not to start with “I.” Include a statement in which you align yourself with the values of the company – be sure to research their mission first so that you may incorporate themes in their strategy or values. Finish this paragraph with a thesis-type statement, in which you state particular competencies or values that make you an ideal candidate: “I am confident that my [passion for human rights law] and my [communication skills] make me an ideal candidate for [the legal assistant position] with [organization name] as advertised [on/by database through which you found position].”

Use your thesis above to scaffold the rest of your letter, with one paragraph speaking to one-two (no more than two!) of the noted competencies. Be concise and clear in your writing. The purpose of your body paragraphs is to connect your experiences and qualifications with the job position, as well as advocate for why you would be a good fit for the employer. This means explaining both why you want this position in particular, as well as what you would add to the organization. You should go into more detail than your résumé when discussing your duties and responsibilities, and connect your experience with the position explicitly. Use this opportunity to directly reference qualities mentioned in the qualifications or description section of the internship or job application. If they say “interpersonal skills,” use similar phrasing in your cover letter and give context as to your interpersonal skills and ability to apply them. At the end of your body paragraph(s), summarize the qualifications you previously outlined, and relate them to how that would be useful and helpful to the employer.

Your first sentence of your final paragraph should be the “final pitch” in which you reiterate your pseudo-thesis statement from your first paragraph. You should then mention that you would welcome the opportunity to discuss this position with the employer further, and are reachable at (xxx) sss-ssss or netid@cornell.edu. Finally, sign off with, “I look forward to hearing from you soon,” or “Thank you for your time and consideration.”

Sincerely, [should be followed with two empty lines]

Name
Your cover letter should be similar to:

- A movie trailer: It should highlight the best aspects about you without giving too much away.
- A sales pitch: You are essentially trying to sell your skill set.

Other things to keep in mind:

- Cover letters **must** be completely free of grammatical and spelling errors.
- If you cannot find a recruiter or HR representative to address the letter, just list the company name and then begin the letter with “Dear Sir/Madam:” or “Dear Recruiting Committee:”
- **Never go over a page on a cover letter!**
- Where ever you align your information on the business letterhead (your address & the date), you must have the same alignment on the page for your complimentary close (i.e. Sincerely, ...), signature and typed name.
- Instead of the business letterhead, you can also use your letterhead from your résumé.
- Cover letters should be very strategic; your word choice and phrasing can make or break it.
- Be confident in your cover letter and never sell yourself short or mention any qualities you DON’T have.