



Information for Trainee Solicitors on Writing Speculative Letters



WRITING SPECULATIVE LETTERS

Writing speculative letters to employers targeting unadvertised vacancies as well as imminent and spontaneous ones is a very effective way of getting yourself considered for a position. However the following matters need to be noted carefully:

- Most people mistakenly use a shotgun approach to contacting employers directly, rather than targeting employers that are most promising.
- Sending an employer your CV accompanied with a standard covering letter is unlikely to get a positive response, especially in tough economic times.
- A proper proactive approach involves clever targeting and then sending a communication that highlights a few specific achievements and makes the reader want to find out more.
- You need to write to a named person and not a job title.
- You should write to line managers rather than to people in HR / Personnel.
- You need clarity about what you have to offer that should be of interest to them.

How to Write a Speculative Letter That Will Get Results

You should not send out a standard letter to lots of employers. If you do so, your rate of success is going to be very low. Think hard about the objective of your letter. It won't get you a job but must attract sufficient interest from the reader to make them be prepared to meet you.

Concentrate on the situation you believe the organisation is in. Think about the problems that must be faced by the Managing Partner, the Senior Legal Counsel or whoever you are planning to write to. How can your combination of experience, legal training and personal abilities help them? How can you make their life easier or their business more profitable?

This is a time consuming activity – that is initially difficult to progress. However you will achieve a much higher positive response rate by tailoring letters specifically to the needs and interests of the reader.

Always try to write a letter to the person this position will report to – or if that is unclear then to one level above. This may be the Managing Director, Senior Partner or the head of the section you would like to work in. In as far as possible, never write to someone in Human Resources (HR). Always address the person by their name and never start letters 'Dear Sir / Madam'.

When writing, try highlighting anything that directly relates to contributions you can make. Keep the letter brief and to the point. Your CV will provide a summary of your career and the letter should only seek to whet the reader's appetite.

As with job application letters, you should use good quality paper in a white or a neutral colour. We recommend the use of standard A4 stationery because it is business-like. Sign each letter yourself, with your name typed under your signature. Be sure to provide a telephone number, ideally your mobile telephone number, and ensure it features prominently.

How to Construct a Speculative Letter

The first important thing is to catch the reader's interest - to make them want to read the rest of your letter. For example, *"In my summer job last year I was involved in discovery work for a major legal case currently underway"*.

Then make a connection between their requirements and what you have offer. Do this by focusing on their needs, not yours. For example, *"Your firm can enjoy significant convenience by having a energetic trainee solicitor on your staff and the experience I have means I can contribute towards this from the outset"*.

The third matter to refer to is your qualifications and / or relevant training. Understand however that these matters are of limited importance in this context and should not be laboured. They reassure the reader but - on their own - won't get you hired.

The final thing is to propose some action / some way of progressing forward. Do not leave this matter open ended. Usually you should seek an arrangement to meet. *For example, "If you would like to discuss matters, I am available to meet and I will telephone you early next week to inquire if a meeting would suit you"*.

Sending Out Speculative Letters

- Use A4 size and good quality paper – but not an expensive type.
- The letter needs to be short and to the point.
- Lay the letter out neatly, with adequate margins.
- Identify the person you are writing to by name and, if possible, job title too.
- Sign the letter and provide your name typed below your signature.
- Check you have included your mobile telephone number and email address.
- Proofread to eliminate spelling and grammatical errors.
- Keep a copy of all letters.

Following Up On Speculative Letters

The best way to end a speculative letter is to promise that you will follow up with a telephone call to arrange a meeting. This way, having taken the initiative, you hold on to it and do not have to sit around wondering how your letter has been received.

You then need to make sure you contact the person as promised. If she/he is not available when you call, leave a message to say you telephoned. Then try and arrange a good time and day to ring again with the person who has taken your call.

SAMPLE SPECULATIVE LETTER FOR AN IN-HOUSE LAWYER JOB

*Brian Walsh
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Ms Joyce Cosgrave
Cosgrave Developments
East Wall Industrial Estate
Dublin 3
Co. Kildare

12 March 2009

Dear Ms. Cosgrave,

I read with interest about how your company has been successful in transferring out of residential and commercial development into road, bridge and other large scale utility projects. This business area is one in which I have extensive experience and I thought I should contact you about the important business of tendering.

As I understand it, you have been drawing up tenders and associated contracts without an in-house solicitor on your staff. I believe you could make big savings and would also be able to respond faster by having someone with experience, as outlined in my attached CV, in-house, full time in your company.

I have five years' post qualification experience and have worked with many of the major utility development players during my time with Haughey O'Brien.

I would very much welcome the opportunity of discussing this matter with you and exploring how much your company could save. I am available to meet at your convenience and I will telephone you early next week to inquire when would suit you best.

Yours sincerely

Brian Walsh

Enclosed: Summary CV