Applying for an Academic Position:  
The Academic Cover Letter

It is essential to include a cover letter with your CV. Also called a "letter of application" or a "letter of transmittal," the cover letter allows you to introduce yourself and provide a context for your CV. It's a chance to emphasize certain elements of your CV, show connections between your abilities and the needs of the department, and present a professional yet personal face to your application materials.

There is no standard format for an academic cover letter. The guidelines that follow are only meant to suggest the basic elements of a good cover letter. Students are encouraged to check with other students, faculty, and colleagues in their department to discuss conventions. Also, content and length will vary depending on the position you are seeking.

A GOOD COVER LETTER SHOULD...

● Be tailored to each specific job.
● Include a brief description of why you are interested in this particular job and why you think the search committee should be interested in you for this specific job.
● Indicate that the applicant knows something about the institution and is writing to apply for their specific job, not for any and every job.
● When possible, address your cover letter to a particular person, usually the head of the search committee or the chair of the department to which you're applying. If no contact was listed in the job announcement, call the department and ask to whom you should address all correspondence.
● Explain why you are writing and where you learned of the position in the first paragraph
● Specify the position that you are interested in, as many institutions put out calls for multiple positions at the same time. State your interest in the position.
● Show the employer that you are a good match for the position. Research counts! Knowing how to "read" the job ad, and doing your research about the institution, will help you figure out what to emphasize in your cover letter.
● Contain a summary of your research experience, and your teaching experience, depending on the job description.
● Include a summary of your dissertation if you are applying to a research institution.
● Include information on your teaching experience, if teaching is key.
● Mention the faculty committee you served on, if the search committee is looking for colleagues who will contribute to their community as well as teach and research.
● End with information about how you can be contacted. Reiterate your phone and/or email address. State that you are available for an interview.

ONLINE RESOURCES

● In, “The Basics of Cover Letter Writing,” Richard Reis describes the characteristics of a good cover letter and illustrates with an example: http://chronicle.com/article/The-Basics-of-Cover-Letter/46259/
● In “How to Write an Appealing Cover Letter,” you will find detailed advice and answers to common questions: http://chronicle.com/article/How-to-Write-Appealing-Cover/46284/

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- In “The Importance of Cover Letters in a Community-College Job Search,” Dana M. Zimbleman highlights what recent PhDs should keep in mind when crafting a cover letter for a community college position: http://chronicle.com/article/The-Importance-of-Cover/46090/
- Berkeley provides detailed advice for recent graduates writing cover letters at: https://career.berkeley.edu/phds/PhDcover.stm