Writing a Cover Letter

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Wednesday, Oct. 22, 2008
Cover Letter (1-2 pages)

- **Introduce Yourself:**
  Name, position you’re applying for, how you learned of it, degree/field/current position

- **Your Research:**
  General area, methodologies, why interesting and important, (grants, awards, etc.)

- **Your Teaching:**
  Quick rundown of experience, ideas, methods, (awards, innovations, etc.)

- **Closing:**
  Mention what’s enclosed, express enthusiasm, give special contact info.
• Introduce yourself in the first paragraph:
  • Name the position you’re applying for
  • How you learned about it
  • What degree you hold
  • Which field you are in, or what is your current position; when you will finish your thesis

Sample:
“Dear Professor xxx,
I am writing to apply for the assistant professorship in xxx advertised in the MLA Job Information List. I am currently completing a Ph.D. at the University of xxx in the Department of xxx. I will defend my dissertation, “dissertation title” on (specific date) and will complete the Ph.D. in xxx (month).”
Second Paragraph

• Your Research:

General area, methodologies, why it is interesting and important

• “My dissertation maps a.... new vision...that takes into account the relationship between...I take as a case study for my inquiry the most important...Considering a wide variety of texts in both manuscript and print, I show how ....Ultimately, I claim, these texts are...”

• Use forceful, clear language
• State what makes your dissertation important and new
• Explain the methodologies you used
Choose one chapter to explain your research in more depth

- List any grants that facilitated the research in this part of the dissertation
- If you intend to publish any part of your thesis, say where and when and if it is a refereed journal
- State how or if your dissertation will lead to a first book and which chapters will be new and what they will be about

Cover letter continued
Review: On Research Statement

• **Contextualize your research:**
  What have you worked on, and what big questions does that work address?

• **Give select details of past and ongoing work:**
  What are your methods, your main conclusions, etc?

• **Outline the future of your program:**
  What are your research plans for the next few years? What new areas will you branch into?

Your tasks:
• Sell your project in the context of the field as a whole
• Show that you will continue to be productive.
Paragraph on Teaching in a Research Letter

Sample:

“I believe that teaching and scholarship are organically related, and hope to bring my research interests in the classroom...”

“In 2006, my essay xxx was published in xxx. This aspect of my research xxx might make an appealing seminar for undergraduates.”

“While I would especially enjoy the opportunity to contribute to xxx at xxx, the doctoral program at xxx has prepared me to teach a wide range of courses. I would be happy to teach general courses in... as well as xxx, and I am comfortable teaching xxx”

“At xxx I have taught xxx. I am an enthusiastic teacher of xxx and I am firmly committed to xxx...I believe that one of the most important things I can do as a teacher is to xxx. To encourage participation, I ask students to xxx”
“I have a strong record of academic service and involvement in departmental life and would be delighted to work at an institution that values the same.”

“During my graduate career at xxx, I have served as xxx, organized a graduate student conference on xxx and chaired the xxx”

“I currently serve as xxx...”

“I hope that my interdisciplinary approach to research, my teaching experience, and my commitment to academic service would make me a valuable member of the xxx community.”
“I have enclosed my c.v., transcript, and summaries of student evaluations; letters of recommendation from xxx will arrive under separate cover as well as confidential evaluations of my teaching by xxx. I plan to attend the MLA convention in December and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you then or at your convenience. I thank you for the consideration that you afford my application, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely, x”
Things to add for Teaching Letter

Teaching Philosophy
Include some or all of these:

• Your educational goals
• Your style of teaching / classroom innovations
• How you motivate students
• How you use technology
• How you assess learning
• Courses in your present and future teaching repertoire
More Items to Add for Teaching Letter if requested

Teaching Effectiveness--Evidence may include:

• Sample syllabi
• Sample assignments
• Teaching awards
• Course evaluations

Tip: consolidate this material by devoting one page to each course, with numerical results at the top, select comments at the bottom, and the phrase “complete evaluations available upon request.”
Letters are arguably the single most important part of a candidate dossier.

Do everything in your power to assure that your recommenders write up-to-date, detailed, focused letters.

Recommenders can speak to the completion issue in ways you cannot.
If you only take away three things...

• **Start early and pace yourself**
  Mounting a successful job search takes more time (planning, cajoling) than you might think!

• **Consult widely and often**
  Have your faculty mentor(s) review everything before you submit it. Trust *their* understanding of the standards in your field. Practice with your peers.

• **Relax and be the scholar and teacher you are**
  Search committees are *remarkably* canny.
Select Resources

- *The Academic Job Search Handbook* (Mary Heiberger & Julia Vick)

- CET career resources: [http://www.usc.edu/cet/careers](http://www.usc.edu/cet/careers)


- Your advisor, other faculty, and peers