

Academic Cover Letter Template



What is it?

The academic cover letter is a key application document that communicates your scholarly fit with the position, organization and department you are applying to. The cover letter should expand on your most relevant accomplishments by providing context on your future trajectory and most importantly situate your work in the context outlined by the position. Cover letters are often scrutinized by search committees for fit.

When is it Used?

All academic positions will require a cover letter and because the academic job market is so competitive, it has become frequent practice for search committees to ask just for a cover letter and cv, eliminating the research and teaching statements. If this is the case, there is a need to include abbreviated teaching and research statements, highlighting your future trajectory that is not articulated on your cv. Some disciplines have a very specific format, so be sure to work with your department to align your cover letter with disciplinary standards. Avoid overly verbose or overly humble language and use this document to communicate about yourself as a future colleague.

Tips for condensing research and teaching

- › Your materials should create an overall picture of you as a scholar. This means that you should consider each document within the context of the other materials required.
- › Begin by drafting longer statements about teaching (the teaching statement) and research (dissertation abstract, research statement)
- › Pare down these statements for different lengths: one page, one paragraph
- › For the cover letter, take your one-paragraph versions of your teaching and research statements and edit them to market yourself as a scholar and teacher – how do you want the committee to perceive you? What's the main take-away you want them to know about you?
- › Because the materials required vary widely, keep in mind that the cover letter should be able to act as a standalone document – any other materials should expand and reinforce the cover letter

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Date

Search Committee Chair

Department

University

Address

City, State Zip Code

Dear Search Committee Members,

Introduction State the position for which you are applying. In one or two sentences introduce yourself and include your dissertation title, chair, and degree completion date. You can end this paragraph by explaining the topic and findings of your project and the fields in which it intervenes which should include the field(s) to which you are applying.

Dissertation/Thesis Give a slightly more detailed version of your project's main findings – this can include methodology as well as a snapshot of what you're examining. Follow this up with a statement about how your work extends or corrects existing scholarship. What gap in the field do you address? Provide a short overview of the dissertation trajectory that includes where you begin and where you end. If you have publications from your dissertation or thesis, mention the most impactful and relevant manuscripts.

Future Research This paragraph is about your future research, productivity and your ability to earn tenure or promotion. Outline your planned future projects as they relate to your research interests, highlighting your range and focus – and how you can further complement departmental offerings. Clarify who your audience is by specifically identifying journals and presses you plan to submit projects to, to further demonstrate your research productivity. For a teaching-focused position or for shorter cover letters, you might have a single paragraph on research that covers your dissertation, publications, and future research plans.

Teaching Briefly state your approach to teaching or pedagogical orientation. Give one or two examples that demonstrate your teaching philosophy in action. These examples should not replicate the examples you use in your teaching statement/philosophy. Tailor the examples to the position, thinking about the size of classes and topics you would be teaching if in this position. Try to demonstrate similar teaching examples.

Tailor To The Job Ad This is where it pays to research the department to which you are applying. Experts disagree on whether or not it's a good idea to list specific courses you can teach or additional departments and institutes you could work with: some think it's a good idea, others think that you risk stepping on other people's toes. It is important to show how your research and teaching complement current course offerings and/or departmental initiatives. For new and growing fields, you might find that the department doesn't have any current course offerings or research groups related to the field they are hiring for, which is why they're hiring for that position. In that case, feel free to pitch the kinds of courses you would like to teach including at least one lower division course and one advanced undergraduate/graduate student course, and research groups or initiatives you could contribute to.

Closing Thank the hiring committee for their consideration and emphasize your interest in the position by giving a reason specific to the school/department. Note which materials you've included in your application and state your availability for interviews – this usually means you will be at the conference where interviews will be held.

Sincerely,

Your name typed

Use university letterhead specific to your department. Keep in mind that this is the only document you will prepare that requires official letterhead.

If you cannot find the name of the contact, you can address the letter to the search committee.