

# Academic Cover letter

PDCO Career Resources

Writing a cover letter can often be one of the most difficult parts of preparing for the academic job search. Your cover letter should be both engaging and readable, but professional and scholarly. It should effectively relate why you are uniquely qualified to work in the position at the specific institution to which you are applying and give concrete examples that show you fit the specific qualifications outlined in the job advertisement. It should **NOT** be your CV in a letter format. View the cover letter as an opportunity to showcase your writing abilities and to show enthusiasm for the position, department, and institution.

Write the letter as an assistant professor and colleague, not as a postdoctoral fellow or graduate student. Present your qualifications as an independent researcher or instructor, not simply as a list of research experiences, tasks, or courses you have taught. Your job application is not a time to be modest; market your strengths and accomplishments without being boastful.

## Tailoring your cover letter

Tailoring your job letter to **EACH** position to which you are applying is essential to constructing effective applications for academic jobs. Adjust the mix of emphasis on research versus teaching to fit the expectations outlined in the job advertisement.

- Answering the following questions will help you to tailor your job letter appropriately:
  - Are you applying to a research university that is at the cutting edge of academic research in your field?
  - What are the research and publication expectations for your position? Will you be expected to secure funding (such as a K99 or RO1 grant) for your research and proposed laboratory group?
  - Are you applying to a liberal arts university that emphasizes undergraduate teaching and mentorship?
  - What are your anticipated teaching requirements? Will you primarily be working with undergraduate students? Will you be expected to advise master's or graduate students?
- Thoroughly research the university, department, and future faculty colleagues
  - Think about the ways in which your academic trajectory aligns with the mission of the university and department.
  - Identify faculty with whom you would be interested in collaborating or co-teaching.

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- Identify initiatives or research centers you would be interested in contributing to as a faculty member.

### **The DON'TS of Academic cover letter writing:**

- No two cover letters should look the same: **Do not** use a generic cover letter template that you send out for multiple positions.
- **Do not** make generic claims about your “fit” or qualifications for the position.
  - Many applicants will be appropriately ‘qualified’ for each position. In what specific ways are you **UNIQUELY** qualified for this position? How has your academic history prepared you for this position in particular?

### **General tips for formatting your cover letter:**

- Each academic cover letter will be between 1-2 pages in length (no longer than two pages).

#### **Header:**

- Cover letters should be on professional letterhead whenever possible (especially if you are currently associated with an academic department)
- Today’s date under the letterhead, aligned left
- The mailing address of the employer, aligned left
- Greeting “Dear (Name of Chair/ or Members of the Search Committee)”

#### **Paragraph One:**

- View this paragraph as your 30-second commercial that makes the search committee want to read more.
- Name the position title and express interest. Briefly state why you are interested in the position and the institution beyond regurgitating the mission statement.
- Briefly describe in 1-2 sentences what makes you an ideal candidate for the position you are applying to. What three key strengths do you want the search committee to know about you? Remember, you can elaborate on these three strengths in the body of the letter- you only want to catch their attention in the introductory paragraph.
  - Mention grant acquisitions, high impact publications, your alumnus status at that institution, or teaching credentials, where relevant.

#### **Body paragraphs:**

- Typically, 3-5 body paragraphs per cover letter

#### **Specifics for research-focused cover letters:**

- If you are applying for a position that emphasizes the importance of faculty research, your research, publication, and grant acquisition history and should take precedence in your letter.

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- More extensive detail can be provided in your research statement- your body paragraphs in your cover letter should cover the “highlights” of your research and inspire the search committee to read the rest of your application.
- What is your current research project? What is your research vision? In what ways does your research make significant contributions to your field?
- Name one or two significant publications and indicate their impact factor or citation rate.
- Indicate if you have secured or contributed to any projects funded by major research grants (such as the K99 or R01).
- Include research plans and indicate what grants you plan to apply for in future, especially if you plan to establish your own laboratory group as a faculty member and/or identify funding agencies whose priority funding areas match your proposed research agenda.
- Briefly describe past teaching, advising, and mentoring experience, where relevant.

### **Specifics for teaching-focused cover letters:**

- If you are applying for a position that emphasizes undergraduate teaching and advising, your letter should begin your body paragraphs by outlining your teaching credentials: classes taught, quantitative teaching reviews, and teaching awards.
  - More extensive detail can be provided in your teaching statement.
- Outline your teaching philosophy. What is your approach to teaching? What makes you uniquely qualified to teach at that institution? What upper-division courses would you like to offer to advanced undergraduates?
- Indicate the ways in which your academic research has shaped your teaching. How do you plan to continue your research at that institution? In what ways would you encourage your students to pursue advanced undergraduate research?
- Have you previously taught diverse populations at the collegiate level? Underrepresented groups? First generation college students? Describe your experience and discuss where relevant.

### **Final Paragraph:**

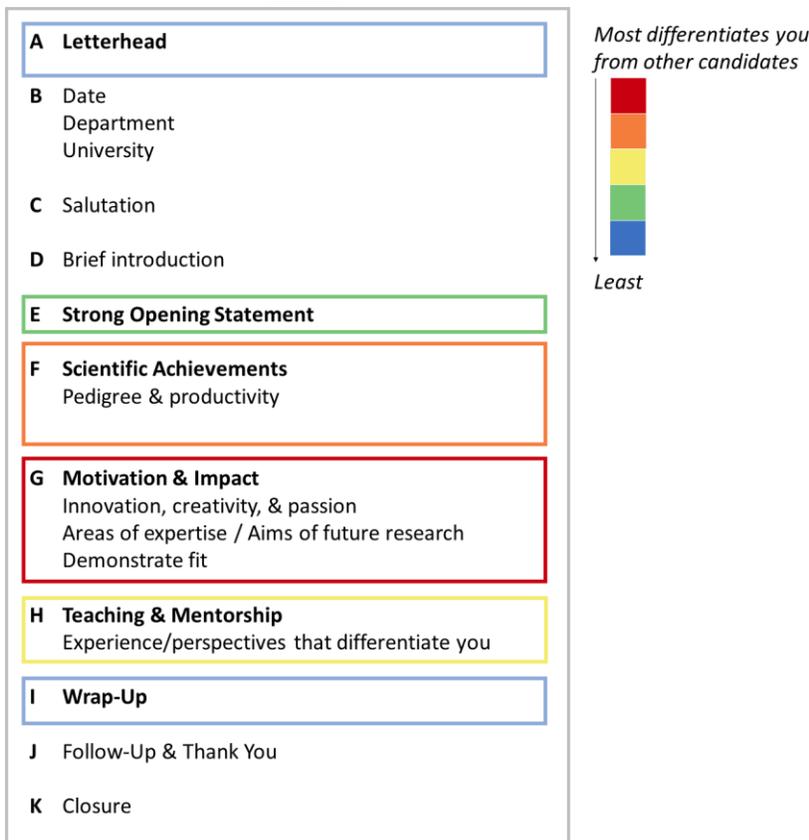
- If you have not already done so, make sure to use your final major paragraph to indicate the specific ways in which you are interested in the position, the department, and the university:
  - Include colleagues in the department with whom you would like to collaborate on research or teaching.
  - Name specific centers or initiatives you would like to contribute to as a member of faculty.

### **Closing:**

- Describe what you are sending the search committee in your application portfolio  
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- Example: "Enclosed are my curriculum vitae and research and teaching statements"
- Thank the committee for their consideration of your application
- Provide a salutation
  - Examples: 'Sincerely' or 'Regards', aligned left
- Leave several lines of space and type your name, aligned left
- Sign the letter if sending via mail

The Broad Institute crafted the following image that outlines the structure of a cover letter and the relative importance of each section to differentiate you from other candidates. The full article can be found [HERE](#).



## Resources

- [Writing a winning cover letter](#)
- [Samples for Academic Positions- UCSF](#)