



ACADEMIC CAREERS: Cover Letters

Purpose and length

The **cover letter**, also known as the letter of application, is uniformly requested in academic job postings and is an important document. You should spend time writing and proofreading targeted letters for each job. As with all of your materials, have a faculty member in your department look over your letters before you send them.

The cover letter is your chance to express enthusiasm for the position, department, and university. Your letter of application is your first opportunity to describe the congruence between your experiences and the requirements of the open position. The cover letter is also an effective way to demonstrate your writing and overall communication skills.

Cover letters for academic positions can be one to two pages. Relative brevity is still encouraged, but a second page might be appropriate if:

- > You are applying for a position that is not a direct match with your previous experiences.
- > The job description does not request separate research or teaching statements.
- > The institution to which you are applying is significantly different from the type of institution from which you are graduating.

Content

Opening Paragraph. Indicate the position for which you are applying and mention how you heard about the position. Briefly introduce your background (degree, university, expected completion status, etc.). Begin expressing enthusiasm about the position and demonstrating the ways in which you will be able to contribute to the department.

Middle Paragraphs. Applicants typically discuss their teaching experience in one paragraph and their research experience in another paragraph. The order of these paragraphs will depend on the job description, your personal strengths, and how the paragraph flows from your intro paragraph. You might consider using an additional paragraph to discuss other relevant skills or experiences that help demonstrate your value to prospective departments, but doing so is not necessary.

Teaching: Including a teaching paragraph is especially important if you are applying to a teaching school or if the institution has not requested a separate teaching statement.

- > Describe the courses you have taught and your associated responsibilities. Go beyond logistics. Describe how you teach.
- > Discuss your teaching strengths, using concrete examples.
- > Explain what you like about teaching.
- > Mention any teaching awards you have earned.



- > Consider indicating the courses you are interested in teaching and feel competent to teach based on your qualifications.
- > If you have ideas about new courses you could offer in the department, share them: but, make clear that you are excited about teaching the department's core courses as well.

Research: The research paragraph is particularly important when you are applying to a research-focused position and when the job description does not ask for a research statement.

- > Include information about your research experience to date. Be sure to discuss the context for your work and the way in which your work contributes to the field because members of the search committee may not be familiar with your area of expertise.
- > Mention publications, presentations, grants, and awards associated with your research.
- > Discuss your short term and long term research plans so members of the search committee will know that you are forward-thinking, passionate about your work, and interested in research.

Service: If the job description emphasizes service as a job responsibility or the institution has a strong service mission, consider discussing your academic, community, or professional service activities.

Other: If you have other work experiences that significantly contribute to your worth as a future faculty member, describe these experiences and their relevance to the job description.

Closing Paragraph. Summarize the strengths you will bring to the position. This is also your logistics paragraph. If you will be attending conferences in the near future you might indicate interest in meeting with department faculty members at those events. Include the best method of contacting you. Remember to also express appreciation for the committee's consideration. After your closing sign your letter.

Additional Resources

- > University of California at Berkeley - <http://career.berkeley.edu/PhDs/PhDAcademic.stm>
- > University of Pennsylvania - <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/gradstud/resources/>
- > The Chronicle of Higher Education - <http://chronicle.com>
- > Kelsky, K. (2015). *The professor is in: The essential guide to turning your PhD into a job*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- > Vick, J. M., Furlong, J. S., & Lurie, R. (2016). *The academic job search handbook (5th ed)*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.



August 2, 2016

Sample Biology Cover Letter

Applicant Address

XX Search Committee
Department of XX
Regional College XX
City, State Zip

Cell Biology Search Committee:

I am writing to apply for the assistant professor position in cell biology beginning August 2016. Dr. Peter Hardy encouraged me to apply after learning of my qualifications from my advisor, Sam Wyman, at a recent conference. I am currently a doctoral student in cell biology at the University of Washington. Having already completed three chapters of my dissertation, I should complete all requirements for my degree and will defend in May 2017. I believe my qualifications are an excellent fit with your department.

As indicated on my enclosed curriculum vitae, I received my undergraduate degree in biology from a small liberal arts college. Having spent the last seven years in a large research institution, I feel confident about my desire to return to the small college environment. I value the education, mentorship, and outside learning opportunities provided to students at XX liberal arts college.

I have developed a diverse teaching record. I have taught both undergraduate and graduate courses, as well as lab sections as small as 11 students and lecture sections as large as 250. The courses I have most enjoyed teaching are introductory undergraduate courses of approximately 25 students. My favorite part of teaching is helping a struggling student learn challenging material by altering my approach to meet his/her needs. I take joy in creating new instructional strategies to convey material – games, debates, guest speakers, clickers, and television shows are among my favorite activities. I am prepared to teach introductory cell biology, introductory genetics, and graduate-level courses in those areas.

My passion for cell biology is due, in part, to my involvement in research at the undergraduate level. I look forward to supervising students interested in the research process, as I have mentored several undergraduate research assistants at the University of Washington. Our research team, consisting of faculty and students at all degree levels, has published two peer-reviewed journal articles regarding XX. I have also published on XX with XX. More specifically, our work examines XXXX. We also have two projects underway. As our research area is rather broad, my next narrower focus on XX will lead to a number of projects that could provide undergraduate and graduate students at XX the opportunity to get involved in research.

In addition to teaching and research, I am involved in campus service activities. An important part of postsecondary education is the learning that takes place outside the classroom. I am interested in serving as a faculty sponsor for student organizations such as the Biology Club and being a member of the Campus Cares committee promoting healthy choices.

My background in liberal arts education, passion for teaching, interest in collaborative research, and commitment to campus service would be an asset to the cell biology program at XX. I look forward to continuing my career in academia, yet moving from a research-focused university to a smaller liberal arts college. I believe the environment at XX and in the community of XX will enable me to flourish professionally and personally, and I look forward to visiting with you about this opportunity in more detail. Please contact me if you have questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Avery Jackson



August 2, 2016

Sample Psychology Cover Letter

Applicant Address

XX Search Committee
Department of XX
University of XX
City, State Zip

Clinical Psychology Search Committee:

I am applying to the Clinical Psychology faculty position recently advertised in The Chronicle of Higher Education. I will complete my doctorate in clinical psychology from the University of Washington in June 2017 and my strengths, experiences, and interests make me a strong candidate for an assistant professor position in your department. In particular, my research record, solid teaching background, and clinical experience with adults in prison settings would be an asset to your department.

I have a demonstrated commitment to research, principally in the area of criminal behavior. My primary research interest concerns the interface among family of origin factors and criminal behavior in middle adulthood. The ultimate goal of my research is to understand the family relational variables that influence criminal behavior starting after age 35, and my dissertation on this topic will be completed by March 2016. I have published seven manuscripts in peer-reviewed journals, books, and professional web magazines and I have presented my work at national and regional conferences. Additionally, my work has earned two research awards and I was interviewed by the public affairs office of the American Psychological Association about my research at the 2014 annual convention. Collaboration with faculty, students, and practitioners in diverse departments at different institutions is a key part of producing quality research and I am continuing my work with Martins and Herrera at XX Other University on two forthcoming papers in XX Journal. I look forward to developing new collaborations with faculty members XX, XX and XX.

I have a strong teaching record in addition to my research background. I am currently teaching a course called Working with Offenders in the clinical psychology graduate program at the University of Washington (UW). I have taught the course twice and will teach it two more times during the 2016-2017 academic year due to high student demand for the course. I received the departmental teaching assistant award after four quarters as the teaching assistant for an undergraduate class on The Psychology of Criminals at the UW. I get students excited about the study of psychology through field trips, class discussions, popular movies, and building individual, mentoring relationships. I also frequently structure lessons plans around problems that students work to solve in teams over the course of several weeks. If hired, I am prepared to teach criminal psychology, abnormal psychology, and other core courses within your program. I am also interested in the possibility of developing an elective course on the topic of sexual-based crimes.

My clinical experiences would be a particularly useful asset for your department as I have worked with adults in many types of correctional facilities: men's prisons, women's prisons, state prisons, and federal penitentiaries. This breadth of experience has provided me with insights into many different types of criminals and would greatly contribute to my teaching and research efforts in this area. My clinical experiences in correctional facilities would also enable me to serve as a clinical supervisor for students completing practicum experiences in prisons.

As discussed, my research record, teaching background, and clinical experience with adults make me an excellent candidate for an assistant professor position in the Clinical Psychology program at the XX. I would appreciate the opportunity to further discuss the ways in which my skills and experiences would be an asset to your program. Please feel free to contact me by mail at the address listed above, by phone at XX, or by email at XX. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Bailey Kemp