

The Academic Cover Letter (a.k.a. Letter of Application)

PURPOSE

This document should always accompany your application. The purpose of this document is not to repeat information from other documents (CV, Teaching and Research Statements) but to summarize your relevant qualifications and experiences as they relate to the job and your ability to do the job. It is not just about what you did, but about why and how you did it and why it is relevant. In this document you should go beyond the facts and details (although you will still include some details) and communicate what you have to offer as a teacher, researcher, colleague, mentor and more.

LENGTH

Since you are including other documents (teaching/research statement, CV) you should be able to communicate this information in 1 - 2 pages. However, in some fields you may need more pages as you may be asked to submit a document that 'demonstrates your skills and experience' in several core competencies which they may specify (for example, clinical skills and experience, obtaining funding, supervising students). You can use the same paper and heading style as on the first page of your CV.

CONTENT

In this letter of application you should address each of the core elements of the job in separate paragraphs (note: teaching, research are the primary areas, but there may be others). Keep in mind your achievements, how you achieved them and why they are relevant. Include information about your involvement in the university and community. For each core element of the job you should be able to communicate your information in one solid paragraph. If there are two distinct aspects of the element you may include two shorter paragraphs in place of one. When you do mention specific qualifications and experiences you do not need to be 'specific' with all of the details. You can simply say 'my experience teaching first year students research skills provide me with the opportunity to learn'

LAYOUT

Opening paragraph

Introduce yourself and your status and indicate your interest in a specific position. Try to capture the reader's interest by providing a strong statement of something unique/interesting about what you have to offer.

Teaching Paragraphs

Since many institutions now request a separate teaching statement you do not need to repeat all of the information here. Briefly summarize the 'gist' of your relevant teaching experience and the courses you could and would like to teach (keep in mind the population and focus of the specific institution). Then, focus on what you would do for the employer and how you would do it (what strengths you bring and how you will apply them to teaching, working with students, developing courses).

Research Paragraphs

This letter may be read by search committee members without the same background as yours, so keep this in mind when discussing your research. Focus on what is interesting about your research. You want to engage the reader by demonstrating what your research has to offer, how it connects with the institution and the community, and how you will use it to benefit students and the institution.

Achievements/University Involvement/Committees

Include a paragraph which demonstrates your achievements, and involvement in the university and community.

Closing Paragraph

Do not repeat the cover letter or even use this paragraph to summarize the above paragraphs. In this paragraph you have the opportunity to really connect with the reader and display your interest and insight into what you have to offer and why you would make a good addition to the institution. Tell the reader that you understand what is required and needed to make a contribution and you are aware of what you have to offer that enables you to make this contribution.