

# Writing Academic Cover Letters & Research Statements

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# COVER LETTERS

**An Introduction to Your Application Package**

# Purpose

- › First opportunity to make an impression
- › Demonstrates qualifications
  - › By offering concrete examples and descriptions
- › Connects your experience to job requirements
- › Showcases your writing ability
- › If possible, identifies you as a diversity hire; background should demonstrate your value (research, teaching, service)



# Guidelines

- › Use UCR letterhead
- › Never exceed two pages; it's okay to exceed one page for an academic position, but not for industry
  - › Some science & engineering sources suggest 3-4 paragraphs on one page
- › Always address it to a person: figure out the search committee chair
- › Use full names (e.g. “Ed Hernandez”) rather than “Professor Hernandez;” present yourself as a colleague rather than as a student



# Guidelines

## Avoid

- › Submissive language:
  - › “privilege to...”
  - › “honor to...”
  - › Be confident! You earned it!
- › Repetition
  - › Is it on your cv?
  - › Is it in your research or teaching statement?



Wordiness

# Guidelines

- › Use active voice:
  - › “Funding was obtained from NIH...” is passive
  - › “I obtained funding from NIH...” is active
- › Don’t use long, complex sentences
  - › Scanning/skimming vs. reading
- › Avoid excessive jargon
  - › What counts as jargon?
- › Be concrete
  - › “My teaching evaluations were outstanding.”
  - › “My evaluations placed me in the top 10<sup>th</sup> percentile on my campus.”



# Guidelines

- › Highlight specific, impactful information
  - › Not every conference or publication or guest lecture
  - › Prioritize by significance and relevance
- › Pay attention to detail
  - › Review before sending – don't leave in that other institution's name from a prior application in the final sentence!
  - › File naming: not “Cover\_Letter6,” but “Hammond\_CoverLetter\_Stanford”



# Components

- › Introduction: which position, who you are, why you're perfect for this job
- › Research: *brief* discussion of your primary project's framework & methodology
  - › This can include descriptions of peer-reviewed publications or presentations at major conferences in your field, if applicable
  - › Again, don't repeat the CV – elaborate on it and show what's important/original about your work





# Components

- Next steps: Brief discussion of expected next project (where your work leads)
- Teaching (if applicable)
  - Provide concrete examples of your approach, experience, and others' assessment of you
  - This can be streamlined a bit if you must also submit a statement of teaching philosophy
- Conclusion: other materials (included or available on request), contact info and interview availability



# Tailoring

- › Research the department website, course catalog, and web pages/publications of search committee members
  - › Cast a wide net: look at Academia.edu, LinkedIn, etc.
  - › Also check out the office of the president or provost for materials on the university mission, strategic plan, student demographics, and other key documents and data



# Tailoring

- Strike a warm but professional tone; you want to seem likeable!
- Know the institution and what it values.
  - Small institution: core institutional mission & values
  - Large institution: focus on the department
- Know what your potential colleagues do and how your work complements/contributes to theirs.
- Not just about you! What do they need?  
Tricky balance: don't come off as arrogant



# Tailoring

- › Include how your research/teaching will contribute to this institution & department
  - › How will your research complement your colleagues' work? Are there programs or centers with which you might affiliate?
  - › What existing classes can you teach? What new ones might you propose?
  - › Can be discussed either throughout the body of the letter or in a final paragraph before the conclusion



# Tailoring

- › Pay careful attention to the wording of the announcement.
  - › If they say they're planning Zoom interviews, take out the sentence about how you're available to interview at the annual meeting.
- › If you have a genuine connection to the institution's location, especially if it's considered undesirable, mention that.



# RESEARCH STATEMENTS

**The Past, Present, and Future of Your Work**

# Purpose

- › Summarizes your previous research, current project, and future directions
- › Demonstrates that you have a relevant, realistic, and concrete plan
  - › The significance of your research topic
  - › Your strengths and capabilities as an academic/researcher
  - › How you would build on your past/current research at your target institution



# Guidelines

- › Typically around 2-5 pages in length
  - › Depending on discipline
- › Format for readability
  - › Use a professional (Times New Roman, Arial) and easily readable (11 or 12 point) font
  - › Use 1-inch margins
  - › Use headings/subheadings and bullet points where appropriate
  - › May include relevant figures and diagrams to further illustrate your research





“I work on transitions in the care of the elderly in Japan. I am particularly focused on the recent growth in government run care facilities. I use ethnographic methods to address the nature of the care given in these facilities, and I explore how the care is received by the patients and their families. My dissertation explores one such facility in northern Japan.”

“The rapidly aging society is one of the primary challenges facing Japan in recent decades. Both the public and private sectors have hastened to respond to emerging needs of the elderly and their families. Over 200 new government run elderly care centers have been built in recent years. In my dissertation, I conduct an ethnographic study of one such facility in northern Japan, in order to explore the nature of the care provided there, as well as its reception by the elderly themselves and their family caregivers.”



# Guidelines

- Focus on your research---not yourself!
  - Use “I statements” in moderation
  - <https://theprofessorisin.com/2011/10/21/the-golden-rule-of-the-research-statement/>
- Use discipline-specific vocabulary but avoid excessive jargon.
  - Should be easily understandable to someone within your department but outside your immediate subfield



# Components

- › A brief overview of your main research topic and how it relates to your field
  - › Why does your research matter?
- › Recent/current research projects
  - › Focus, methods, results, and conclusions
    - › If collaborative, specify your role and contributions
  - › Publications and presentations stemming from the projects
    - › If collaborative, specify whether you were first or second author



# Components

- › Describe your research plan
- › Outline a proposed future project (or projects)
  - › What would your goals be for the first 3-5 years at the institution?
  - › May include aims, rationale, design, data analysis, and impact
  - › Explain how the proposed project(s) will build on your past research
  - › Include any preliminary data



# Components

- Mention potential sources of funding.
  - Also highlight any significant fellowships/grants you've secured in the past
- If tailoring to a specific institution, mention relevant resources and potential collaborations.
  - Specialized equipment or facilities
  - Scholars or centers you would seek collaborations with
- How you would involve undergraduate and/or graduate students (if relevant)



# General Resources

- › Resources

- › The Professor is In

- <https://theprofessorisin.com>

- › The Chronicle of Higher Education

- <https://www.chronicle.com>

- › The Graduate Writing Center

- <https://gwc.ucr.edu>

- › UCLA Career Preparation Toolkit

- <https://career.ucla.edu/file/ee6798d6-7646-4ac1-8f6d-0711029ede9a>



# Sample Application Materials

- › Sample cover letters
  - › <https://grad.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/pdfs/academiccoverletters.pdf>
  - › <https://career.ucla.edu/file/fbeba27e-7ced-4661-a050-fef93cb00eaf>
- › Sample research statements and application packages
  - › <https://career.ucsf.edu/phds/academic-careers/academic-samples#Samples>



# Questions?