

# Academic Cover Letter Do's and Don'ts

## Language to Avoid:

- 1. Although** I am not [x] / **do not** have [y]
  - Make sure that you are emphasizing why you are the best candidate.
  - Don't apologize for your great credentials!
- Here, now, I present you with 5 paragraphs about my **path-breaking** dissertation, which treats the fourth century chemist Dr. B in conversation with the fourth century philosopher Dr. C in...
  - Keep your dissertation description to two paragraphs at most.
  - Assume that non-experts will be reading your letter
- I hope to finish my dissertation in the next **decade**
  - Give specific information about when you will complete your degree
- I would be a **great fit** at **your university**
  - Be specific about why you want to be at this particular place.
  - Use the institution's name!
- It would be an **honor** to work with **Dr. X**
  - It may *be* an honor, but you need to show that you are ready to be an equal on faculty
- I hope to hear from you soon**
  - You *look forward* to hearing soon!
- I am **passionate** about teaching.
  - Show your passion through examples. Don't assume the reader will take you at your word
- List your publications and achievements in prose format
  - Your C.V. is a list. Don't regurgitate it
- I will next revise chapter 5 of my dissertation.
  - Think of broader next steps
- My last paper rocked the discipline
  - Take the advice of "The Professor is In" here. It didn't rock the world. And that's okay.

## DO:

- 1. Expect** everyone to read the whole thing
- 2. Provide** examples of how your work contributes to the field
- 3. Anticipate** that you will have readers outside your subfield
- 4. State** your progress and confidence of completion
- 5. Talk** about why you want to be there
- 6. Suggest** collaborations
- 6. Pitch** them on why you are going to be a good teacher of the required courses
- 6. Chart** reasonable next steps for your work
- 6. Confer** with advisors about appropriate length
- 7. Think** of yourself as their colleague

## Always:

- **Use department letterhead if you are still a student or postdoc, or are currently teaching at this or another institution.** You should be able to get it from the department administrator.
- **Keep it to under two pages, single-spaced.** Many letters for postdoc positions and some visiting assistant positions may be kept to 1.5 pages.
- **Be respectful of the reader's eyes.** Margins should be kept to no thinner than .7" and it's imperative to use a font between sizes 11 and 12 pt.
- **Proofread, proofread, proofread.** Did we say it enough times? Proofread your cover letters and have others proofread them as well!

Remember that appointments to review cover letters are available at UChicagoGRAD. Sign up for time with career development staff at [grad.uchicago.edu](http://grad.uchicago.edu).