What to expect today
Cover Letters are a Genre
...a genre that has discipline-specific rules
...and also some that apply generally
Mastering the Genre:
Don’t Bore us to Sleep
Create a Review Community
Create a Review Community

- Don’t Go it Alone
- Faculty, Department Support
- Career Advising
- Chicago Center for Teaching
- Co-Curricular Programming
- Career Development
- Oral Communications
- Writing Advising

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Academic Job Cover Letters
What the Genre Does:
### What the Genre Does:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What can a strong cover letter <strong>ACTUALLY DO?</strong></th>
<th>What CAN’T a cover letter do? (No matter what).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Give you a chance to do the <strong>easy stuff</strong></td>
<td>- Get you a <strong>job</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Give narrative <strong>shape</strong> to your C.V.</td>
<td>- Stand in for genuine <strong>interest</strong> in a position</td>
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<td>- Demonstrate your <strong>FIT</strong> to an institution</td>
<td>- Obscure a lack of <strong>attention to detail</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Show you’ve done your <strong>homework</strong></td>
<td>- Tell the entire story of your dissertation’s evolution from the shadow of an idea to the core focus of your academic life.</td>
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<td>- Get an <strong>interview</strong></td>
<td>- Go onto a <strong>third page</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Present you as a future <strong>colleague</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Project <strong>confidence</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Arial
Times New Roman
Calibri
Cambria

Yeah Yeah, You Got it...Comic Sans

The Calvin and Hobbes font...also not great
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serifs:</th>
<th>Garamond</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Georgia</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Palatino Linotype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sans</td>
<td>Gotham Light/Bold</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serif:</td>
<td>Helvetica Neue Light</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Century Gothic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Size:</td>
<td>11 - 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Easy (to forget) Stuff

1"
MARGINS

LETTERHEAD

FULL SNAIL MAIL ADDRESS & FORMAL SALUTATION

BRIEF INTRO

I am writing in application to the advertised position of Assistant Professor in the Department of Weights and Measures. I am currently an advanced graduate student in the Department of Standards at the University of Chicago and will defend my dissertation Blah Bingo Bix: Blathering Blisters in Binghamton in December of this year.

I'm excited about the prospect of working in the Department of Weights and Measures at the University of Jobs and I look forward to speaking more soon.

Sincerely,

A-J Aronstein
University of Chicago

A SHORT, CONFIDENT (AND SIGNED) CONCLUSION THAT GESTURES TO FUTURE CONVERSATIONS.

Signature

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Questions So Far?
Giving Narrative Shape to Your C.V.
KNOW YOUR JOB

DESCRIPTION
Know your Job Description

- **Disciplines**: Length of letter varies by discipline
- **Types of Positions**: Postdocs vs. full-time TT and Visiting Assistant Positions
- **Institutions**: Liberal Arts, R1, Community College, Large State Teaching Focus, Etc.
- **Responsibilities**: Teaching, Research, Service
Flexibility in Structure

- Like your CV, your letter will work in sections:
  - Introduction
  - Dissertation overview
  - Critical conversation (and future project)
  - Relevant research or fieldwork
  - Teaching
  - Service to the department
  - Well-researched comments about institution
  - Formal sign-off
Talking About Your Diss.

- Discuss your dissertation as efficiently as possible
  - A two-paragraph format
    1: The argument (stasis, instability, consequences, stakes)
    2: The intervention (where does it fit into crit. landscape?)
    *Bonus: are you in conversation with someone in the dept.?

- In terms legible to someone outside your subfield
- With confidence of completion
- As a colleague and not a graduate student
- Gesturing toward the next project (and/or class) that will (and preferably has already begun to) grow out of the dissertation
Teaching (Show Don’t Tell)
Teaching (Show Don’t Tell)

- Show Don’t Tell (lesson one for creative writers)
  - Telling (weak):
    Teaching is something I value and I have taught couzzzzZZZZzzzzZ
  - Showing (better):
    In *Introduction to Fonts*, I made it a goal to demonstrate the ordinary life implications of font kerning by integrating materials from our library’s Special Collections Department, assigning essays that asked students to engage with primary sources.

- Consider the institutional demands
  - Courses required; courses you can teach
  - Research-related teaching and/or
  - Teaching-related research
Let’s Talk about Service

- **Planning** conferences, panels, other events
- **Committee** work (hiring, policies, etc.)
- **Coordinating** workshops
- **Communicating** your work to broader audiences
- **Mentoring** undergraduates, other grad students
Language to Avoid

- “I would be thrilled…”
  - Or, don’t use verbiage you wouldn’t say aloud

- “I hope to speak to you soon…”
  - Hope springs eternal and conveys uncertainty

- “It would be a dream / honor / thrill to teach with Doctor [x].”
  - Even dream jobs are jobs

- “My conference paper on Comic Sans shocked the discipline and won me enemies in the field.
  - It almost certainly didn’t, so don’t be a diva.”
Don’t be Russell Crowe.
Be Hugh Jackman.
Communicating Fit...
...without saying the word FIT.
Communicating Fit

- **Express ONLY** real familiarity with the work of faculty. If you have had REAL and LASTING collaborations with faculty or EXTENDED conversations, (do not, for any reason, simply name drop)

- **Suggesting** ways that you would look forward to using campus resources, study abroad opps, undergraduate mentoring—all good!

- **Name** classes that you might teach that are in line with the description. Suggest that you can teach required classes if the description asks for that competency.

- **Speak to** geographic or institutional affiliations

- **Order** the letter based on the institution’s mission
Next Steps

- **Write** a cover letter in sections
  - Don’t worry about length at first
  - But be prepared to cut

- **Share** your letter with someone outside your field to see if it communicates your research

- **Compose** a few paragraphs (for yourself) about the process of getting your dissertation done

- **Read** job descriptions with a highlighter, identifying key words that you should mention in a letter

- **Research** institutions in an organized way—keeping spreadsheets about opportunities

- **Throughout, be honest** about your priorities as an applicant, a scholar, and a person
Fall Quarter Trajectory
Fall Quarter Trajectory

- **Jobs are being posted**
  - Know your discipline’s primary job posting sites

- **Schedule**
  - One-on-one career advising appointments for letter edits
  - Be sure to secure faculty feedback

- **Looking Forward**
  - Start prepping for first round interviews
  - Keep an eye on postings
Questions?
aj@uchicago.edu