Cover Letters

Academic Job Market Summer Camp

July 14, 2020

grad.uchicago.edu
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>9:30-10:00</td>
<td>Welcome and Overview of the Academic Job Market</td>
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<td>10:00-11:15</td>
<td>A View from the Hiring Committee</td>
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<td>11:30-12:30</td>
<td>CV Best Practices</td>
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<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>9:30-10:45</td>
<td>Cover Letter Best Practices</td>
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<td>11:00 to 11:50</td>
<td>Research Statement Best Practices (STEM)</td>
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<td>11:00 to 11:50</td>
<td>Research Statement Best Practices (HUM/SS)</td>
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<td>12:00 to 1:00</td>
<td>Navigating Identity on the Academic Job Market</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>9:30-10:30</td>
<td>Diversity Statement Best Practices</td>
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<td>10:30-12:15</td>
<td>Teaching Statement Best Practices</td>
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<td>12:30-1:30</td>
<td>Creating a Scholarly Website</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
<td>9:30-10:20</td>
<td>Interviewing Best Practices (Recorded Webinar)</td>
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<td>10:30-11:20</td>
<td>Campus Visit and Teaching Demo Best Practices</td>
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<td>11:30-12:30</td>
<td>Interviewing Panel and Q&amp;A</td>
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<td>Friday</td>
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<td>Applying for International Academic Positions</td>
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<td>Getting a Postdoc in STEM</td>
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<td>10:30-11:20</td>
<td>Getting a Postdoc in the Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
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<td>11:30-12:30</td>
<td>Considering Lecturer, Visiting, or Adjunct Positions</td>
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Optional Working Groups

Academic Job Market Working Groups

- Support, community, and feedback, facilitated by GRAD advisors
- Meetings begin on Wed., July 29 @ 12:00
- Interested? Sign up in GRAD Gargoyle > Events > Academic Job Market Working Group
Agenda

1. Form and Formatting
2. Sample Documents
3. Content that Works
4. Final Thoughts
Agenda

1. Form and Formatting
2. Sample Documents
3. Content that Works
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### Mastering the Genre

#### What CAN a strong cover letter do?

- Give **dimension** to a CV
- Demonstrate your **fit** to an institution
- Show you’ve done your homework
- Present you as a **future colleague**
- Project confidence
- Get you an **interview**

#### What CAN’T a strong cover letter do?

- Get you a job
- Stand in for genuine **interest** in a position
- Obscure a lack of **attention to detail**
- Tell the **entire** story of your research
- Neglect the **future**
- Go onto a third page
## Considering Fonts

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September 1, 2014

University of Undergraduates
Attn: Weights and Measures Department Search Committee
185 College Avenue
University of Jobs, XY 99902

Dear Members of the Search Committee:

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 Biz: 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
STEM & LAB-BASED SOCIAL SCIENCES

Like your CV, your cover letter works in sections:

- Introduction
- PhD research overview
- Postdoc research overview
- Future research projects
- Teaching***
- Service to the department/institute
- Well-researched comments about institution
- Formal sign-off
Structure and Flexibility

HUMANITIES, SOCIAL SCIENCES, DIVINITY

Like your CV, your letter works in sections:

▪ Introduction
▪ Dissertation overview
▪ Critical conversation, publications, and future work
▪ Teaching approach and experience
▪ Plans for teaching at the hiring institution
▪ Service to and fit with the hiring institution
▪ Formal sign-off
Agenda
1. Form and Formatting
2. Sample Documents
3. Content that Works
4. Final Thoughts
Analyze Sample Letters

- Review the sample letters in Box
  - The link will be provided in the chat box below

- Take a few notes on what you see
  - Why do you think these letters were effective?
  - What are some best practices that you can borrow?
  - What, if anything, surprises you?

- Using the Q&A function, share your comments and questions
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Discussing Your Research
## Discussing Your Research

### STEM
- Paragraphs on doctoral, postdoc, & future work
- Focus on **outcomes** and **impact**
- Save details for the research statement

### HUM & SS
- Usually 2 paragraphs
  - ¶ 1 gives the dissertation argument
  - ¶ 2 gives the dissertation interventions and next steps

- Make sure that your description can be understood by someone **outside** your subfield
- Mention major **fellowships** and **grants**
- Communicate efficiently and as a **colleague**
- Gesture toward the **publications** and the **next projects** that will grow out of current work

[grad.uchicago.edu](http://grad.uchicago.edu)
Discussing Your Teaching

- **1 paragraph** on teaching for research-oriented jobs *(or even less for a STEM R1 position)*

- **2+ paragraphs** for liberal arts or teaching-intensive jobs

- **Tailor** to each institution’s needs, including courses listed in the job ad

- **Potential Topics**
  - Summary of past teaching/mentoring experience
  - Summary of teaching philosophy *(inclusive pedagogy)*
  - Short, distinct examples of your approach
  - Specific plans for teaching at the hiring institution
  - Teaching awards, prize lectureships, CCT fellowships
Show, Don’t Tell

- **Telling** (weak)
  - “Teaching is something I value . . .”

- **Showing** (better)
  - “In ‘Introduction to Islam,’ I demonstrated research methods by integrating materials from our library’s Special Collections Department into my course...”
  - “In ‘Introduction to Organic Chemistry,’ I worked with the lead instructor to develop a new lab module...”
Communicating Fit

YOU ARE HERE

YOU SHOULD BE HERE

UCHICAGOGRAD
Communicating Fit

- Mention **previous collaborations** or conversations with faculty from the department (if appropriate)

- Name **required classes** that you will have to teach and how you might teach them

- Suggest ways to make use of **local and on campus resources** in your teaching, research, and mentoring

- Speak to your **interest** in university institutes, working groups, or interdisciplinary programs

- **Arrange** the contents of your letter to reflect the institution’s priorities
DEI Matters

- You can include sentences or a paragraph on your contributions to diversity, equity, and Inclusion
- This can preview your *diversity statement*
  - STEM: “In all my courses, I intentionally emphasize contributions made by researchers from underrepresented groups and include studies with a diverse range of research subjects.”
  - SS: “After participating in a workshop dedicated to Race and Pedagogy at the University of Chicago, I was inspired to co-organize a Gender, Sexuality, and Pedagogy roundtable during which faculty and graduate students were invited to explore strategies for and challenges related to teaching gender and sexuality across disciplines.”
  - HUM: “Through curating events featuring Transparent producer Zackary Drucker and RuPaul’s Drag Race semi-finalist Shea Couleé, I have strengthened institutional ties to Chicago’s broader LGBTQ communities.”
Do Your Homework

- Effective tailoring requires homework
- Talk to existing contacts with knowledge of the institution
- Study the profiles of current faculty members
- Review course offerings
- Explore relevant institutes, centers, and affiliated depts.
- Read departmental, divisional, and institutional missions
Language to Avoid

- “I would be thrilled . . .”
  - Don’t use verbiage that you wouldn’t say *aloud*
- “I was honored to be given the opportunity to . . .”
  - Cast yourself as an *agent*, and use strong verbs
- “I hope to speak to you soon . . .”
  - Hope springs eternal and conveys uncertainty
- “It would be a dream to teach with Dr. Smith.”
  - Even dream jobs are *jobs*
- “My paper shocked the discipline and won me enemies in the field.”
  - Don’t be conspiratorial, and don’t be a diva
Agenda
1. Form and Formatting
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Top 10 Cover Letter Do’s

1. **Expect** everyone to read the whole thing
2. **Read** the job advertisement closely
3. **Research** the institution and department
4. **Tailor** your letter thoughtfully
5. **Anticipate** readers outside your subfield
6. **Use** concise, confident language
7. **Discuss** how your work contributes to the field
8. **Chart** reasonable next steps for your work
9. **Mention** specific courses that you would be able or required to teach
10. **Think** of yourself as their colleague
Next Steps

- **Write** a cover letter in sections. Don’t worry about length at first; plan to cut later.

- **Share** your letter with someone outside your field and at UChicagoGRAD to see how it communicates.

- **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/researcher, and a person.
Questions?

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Appointments & Events
gradgargoyle.uchicago.edu