



Cover Letters

Academic Job Market Summer Camp
July 14, 2020



Camp Schedule

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



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
4. Final Thoughts



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

Serifs: Garamond
Georgia
Palatino Linotype

Sans Gotham Light/**Bold**
Serifs: Helvetica Neue Light
Century Gothic
Trebuchet MS

Size: 11 – 12



Formatting

1"
MARGINS



University of Chicago
Department of Standards
5801 South Ellis Avenue, Suite 223
Chicago, IL 60637

← LETTERHEAD

September 1, 2014

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

FULL SNAIL MAIL
ADDRESS &
FORMAL SALUTATION

Dear Members of the Search Committee:

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 *Blab 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 handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A-J Aronstein'.

A-J Aronstein
University of Chicago

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



Structure and Flexibility

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



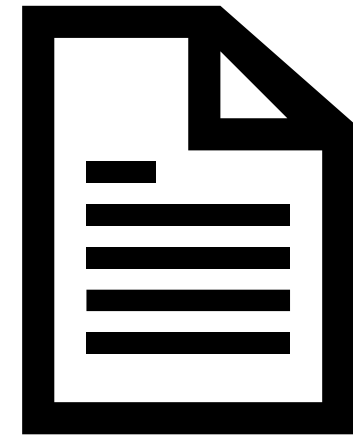
Agenda

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**

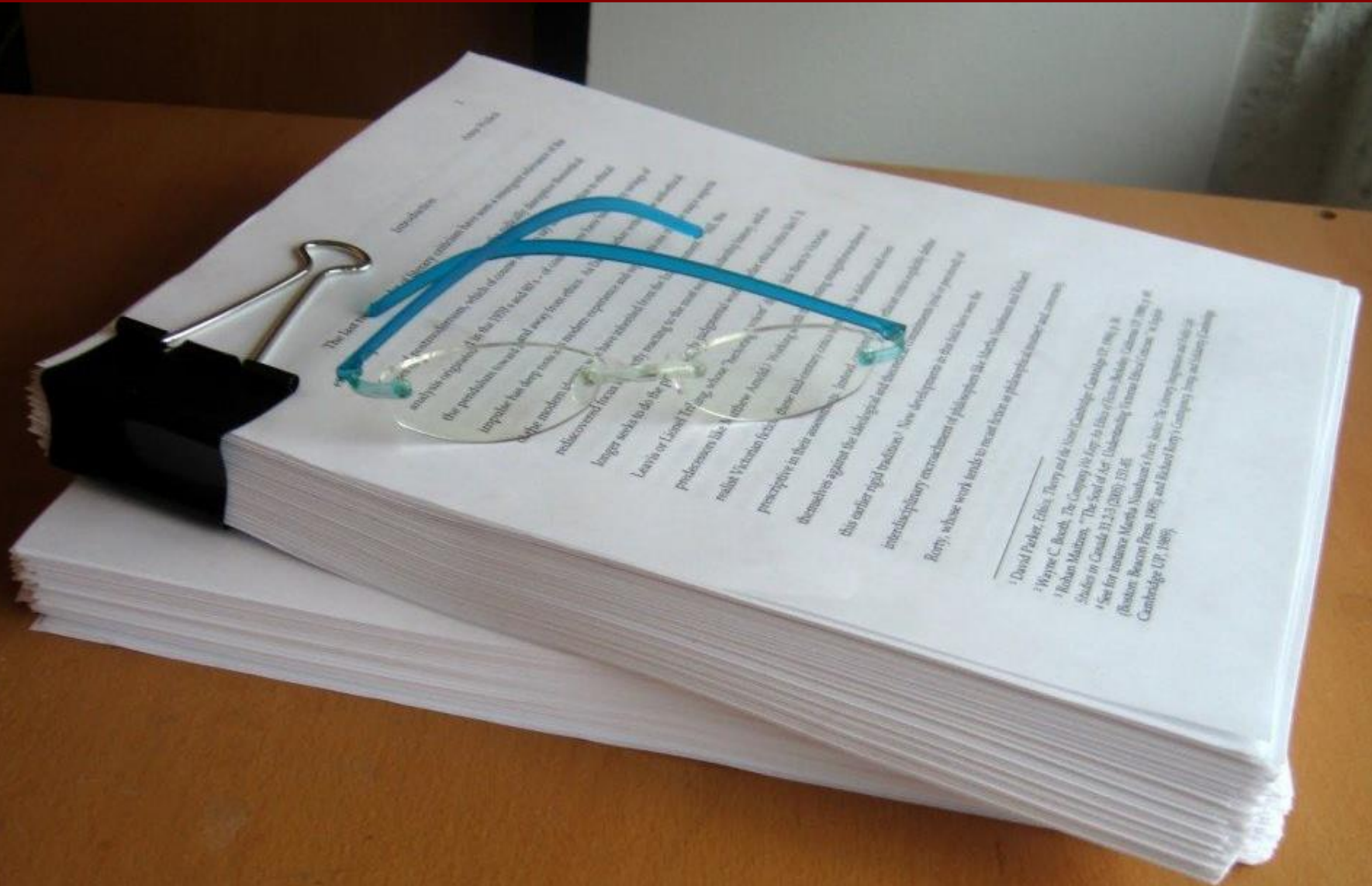


Agenda

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



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



Discussing Your Teaching



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



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

The screenshot shows the Williams College American Studies program website. The header features the word "Williams" in a purple bar. Below it is a navigation bar with "SEARCH" and "MENU" icons. The main content area has a background image of a historical map with the word "MARDIEL" visible. Text on the page reads: "Our courses use interdisciplinary approaches to develop students' understanding of the complexity of culture(s) usually labeled 'American.'" Below this, it states: "Created in 1940, the American Studies Program at Williams College is one of the oldest American Studies programs in the country. Our courses use interdisciplinary" followed by a small photo of two students. On the right side, there are three expandable menu items: "The Major", "Faculty & Staff", and "Courses".

The screenshot shows the Vanderbilt University research website. The header includes the "VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY" logo and a search bar. Below the header is a large yellow banner with the word "research" in white, followed by "@Vanderbilt" in a smaller font. Below the banner is a navigation bar with links for "RESEARCH AT VANDERBILT", "COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS", "RESOURCES FOR RESEARCHERS", "INITIATIVES", and "RESEARCH NEWS".

A-Z Interdisciplinary Research Centers and Institutes

Vanderbilt actively promotes research and teaching that crosses disciplines, departments and institutional lines through a multitude of centers and institutes.

- [Advanced Computing Center for Research and Education \(ACCRE\)](#)
- [African American Mental Health Research Scientist Consortium](#)
- [Bill Wilkerson Center for Otolaryngology and Communication Sciences](#)
- [Brain Institute](#)
- [Breast Center](#)
- [Center for Biomedical Ethics and Society](#)
- [Center for Bone Biology](#)
- [Center for Clinical Toxicology](#)

The screenshot shows the UC Santa Cruz Chancellor Blumenthal's vision page. The header includes the "UC SANTA CRUZ" logo and a search bar. Below the header is a navigation bar with links for "Biography", "Communications", "Vision", "On the Job", "Contact", and "Quick Start". The main content area has a blue sidebar with "Vision" selected. The main text reads: "Chancellor's Vision for UC Santa Cruz" and "CAMPUS MISSION". Below this, it states: "UC Santa Cruz is a leading research university with a tradition of innovation in the education of students—built on values of social and environmental responsibility." and "UCSC VISION". Below this, it states: "UCSC will be internationally recognized for our scholars and students who work in and across disciplines to create knowledge and transform paradigms." and "We will do important things together as we build upon UCSC's legacy of achievement and excellence. We will do important things together as we continue, even accelerate, our upward trajectory. We will do important things together as UCSC strives to serve California as a top-ranked research university and the leading institution for the education of students. A place that fosters a culture of excellence, inquiry, creativity, diversity, and public service." A small photo of Chancellor Blumenthal is visible on the right side.



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
2. Sample Documents
3. Content that Works
- 4. Final Thoughts**



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?

Briana Konnick

bkonnick@uchicago.edu

Courtney Wiersema

cwiersema@uchicago.edu

Appointments & Events

gradgargoyle.uchicago.edu