

# COVER LETTERS FOR ACADEMIC | | JOB APPLICATIONS

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# COVER LETTERS

## FOR ACADEMIC JOB APPLICATIONS

### OVERVIEW

A cover letter must accompany any application you submit for an academic job. The purpose of a cover letter, also sometimes called a letter of application or job letter, is to introduce yourself and to demonstrate the fit between your background and the advertised position. Use your cover letter to guide the employer's attention to the most significant portions of your CV, to explain how your particular experiences have provided you with the skills you need to be successful in the position, and to convey enthusiasm for the position for which you are applying.

- ✓ **Be concise & professional**
- ✓ **Introduce yourself**
- ✓ **Demonstrate why you are a good fit**
- ✓ **Direct reader's attention to your CV**
- ✓ **Highlight education & experience**
- ✓ **Convey enthusiasm**

### Content and Structure of an Academic Cover Letter

Although most cover letters follow a similar structure, you should tailor each one for the job to which you are applying. If you are applying to dozens of positions, this might not be feasible, but do at least customize the letter for the type of institution and position. Carefully read the job posting and fashion your letter based upon the information gleaned from the ad; the university and departmental web sites may also provide valuable background information.

**1** Prepare your opening paragraph with great care, since it sets the tone for the rest of the letter. Introduce yourself, mentioning the degree you are pursuing and the university you attend. Refer to the specific position for which you are applying, and indicate how you learned about the position or organization. If you have not yet finished your degree, you should state when you expect to receive your degree or defend your dissertation. You may also want to briefly mention what attracted you to the university to which you are submitting your application (i.e., strong undergraduate programs, commitment to research and development, excellent faculty).

The body of your letter should consist of one or two paragraphs that highlight your interest in the position, your strongest attributes and your strong qualifications. This is your opportunity to “sell” yourself. Use this opportunity to elaborate upon the distinctive strengths and qualifications you would bring to the position and attempt to persuade the search committee that you are a highly qualified candidate deserving additional consideration. Many people find this type of self-promotion difficult, and are concerned that such comments sound arrogant. Modesty is not

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rewarded in the job search, and you may be the only voice articulating your qualifications to the search committee.

If you are applying to a major research institution, it is also important to stress your interest in conducting research, possibly elaborating upon your current research or dissertation topic. For liberal arts or teaching colleges, it is appropriate to express your interest in teaching and in undergraduate education. Consider the specialization(s) that the job ad calls for, and draw as many parallels as possible between your area of specialization and the position.

Address any other requirements that the job posting requests, as well as any other qualifications or experiences that you possess. If any information on your CV is confusing or may cause questions among the search committee, address these topics in the cover letter.

Conclude your letter by reinforcing your interest in the position and in obtaining an interview. Indicate the other materials you are enclosing in your application packet and whether any other materials are being sent under separate cover. Offer to provide extra materials or additional information if necessary, and thank the reader for his or her consideration.

## **Technical Aspects of Academic Cover Letters**

### **Cover Letter Salutation**

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Use a formal title in the opening of your letter, such as “Dr.” or “Professor.” If possible, direct your letter to a specific individual. This is not always possible however, and if no individual is named in the job posting or you are instructed to respond to the search committee, it is acceptable to address begin your letter with “Dear Committee Members” or “Dear Members of the Search Committee.”

### **Length and Format**

Letters in the sciences and social sciences should be approximately one page long; letters in the humanities may be longer (up to two pages). It is customary to single space text and double space between paragraphs. Use high-quality paper (at least 24-pound) that matches your CV. Some individuals use a consistent heading on the cover letter and CV, and this can help unify the two documents.

### **Writing Style**

Write as concisely and effectively as possible, but don’t abandon complex sentence structures in favor of bulleted phrases. Hiring committees consider cover letters to be a sample of a candidate’s writing ability, so your letter must be well-written. Have at least one other person proofread your letter. Seek advice and feedback from your advisor or another faculty member from your department, since they are familiar with your area of study.

502 W. Main Street #221  
Houston, TX 77204

November 9, 2012

Music History Search Committee  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
422 South 11th Street  
Indiana, PA 15705

Dear Members of the Search Committee:

I am writing in response to your advertisement for the Assistant Professor of Music History position at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, as advertised on HigherEdJobs.com. I am currently a Ph.D. student in Musicology at the University of Houston and will complete my degree in May 2011. I respectfully submit this letter of application, for I believe my experiences and commitment to teaching make me well qualified to meet the needs of IUP's dynamic program.

As a teaching assistant at the University of Houston, I have gained valuable experience leading undergraduate discussion sections for both music majors and non-majors. In addition to classroom instruction, I have advised students on appropriate research topics and edited and evaluated their work. Based on student evaluations, I have earned the Graduate Teaching Award for every semester that I have taught and have been listed four times among the top ten percent of teachers rated at the University of Houston. I also co-created a public Music Appreciation course entitled *Music for All*, which attracted the interest of concertgoers of all ages and backgrounds. I am firmly dedicated to the education of music students as well as general audiences and eagerly welcome an opportunity to develop similar programs at IUP.

My course work has covered a wide range of topics in the various musical eras. My research, comparing Beethoven's symphonies with the more modern compositions of late-twentieth century American composers, has provided me with the opportunity to draw connections between the different periods and to communicate difficult concepts clearly to students of all levels. I am committed to an interdisciplinary approach to scholarship and teaching, and all of my courses are structured with this in mind. Rather than simply lecturing to a class, I strive to cultivate an interactive environment in which students can express themselves freely while learning to engage with the past in meaningful ways. I emphasize critical thinking and the need to consider music within its larger social, historical, and intellectual contexts. IUP takes great pride in its training of young scholars, and I feel that it is my responsibility to uphold these standards and to encourage and challenge students to work up to their potential, in hopes that their experiences in my classes will teach them far more than the history of music.

In addition to the standard period surveys, I am fully prepared to develop courses on opera history, Lieder, music and rhetoric (with special emphasis on the Baroque period), Twentieth century music, Romanticism, and music and the visual arts.

I welcome an opportunity to discuss my teaching and future research projects with you. I have enclosed my CV, and you will be receiving my letters of recommendation under separate cover. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

*Dion Wade*

Dion Wade

502 W. Main Street #221  
Houston, TX 77204

November 23, 2012

Dr. John Matthews  
Civil Engineering  
University of Texas at Austin  
Box 19308  
Austin, TX 76019-0308

Dear Dr. Matthews,

I am writing to apply for the position of Assistant Professor in Structural Engineering beginning Fall 2011, as advertised on the University of Texas website. I am currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Houston and fully expect to complete my Ph.D. degree requirements by May 2011. I am extremely interested in obtaining a faculty position at the University of Texas, as its engineering research programs have a stellar reputation that is known worldwide.

I believe that my academic training and my six years of experience working as a structural engineer prepare me to be an effective researcher and instructor in your department. My doctoral dissertation was conducted under the direction of Prof. Mark Daniels, and looks at the use of a relatively new methodology for the design of joints, walls, footings, and other portions of reinforced or prestressed concrete structures. In my research, I developed an integrated design and analysis environment for this methodology in which both strength and serviceability requirements are explicitly satisfied. This was delivered in a computer-based program that is freely available to the community and has been downloaded by more than 2500 people.

Although my dissertation focuses on a single topic, other areas that interest me for my future research stem from my goal of developing improved analytical models and methods for design, evaluation, and upgrade of concrete structures subjected to monotonic and reversed loading and structures equipped with passive systems. One of the studies that I have started is the development of a performance-based seismic design under the auspices of a project from the Applied Technology Committee, a national organization.

During my graduate training, I have been fortunate enough to also serve as a teaching assistant and occasionally instruct for an intermediate level course on reinforced concrete design. My five years of professional experience as an engineer have provided me with a broad view that is useful in assisting students with projects and assignments. Through my participation as a teaching assistant, I have developed confidence and an interest in teaching and look forward to the opportunity to both teach assigned classes and to develop my own classes.

I would enjoy discussing this position with you in the weeks to come. In the meantime, I am enclosing my Curriculum Vitae and statement of teaching and research interests. Letters of recommendation will arrive under separate cover. If you require any additional materials or information, I am happy to supply it. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*Stephen Thompson*

Stephen Thompson

502 W. Main Street #221  
Houston, TX 77204

November 21, 2012

Professor Michael Smith  
Chair, Classics Search Committee  
University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

Dear Professor Smith,

I am writing to apply for the Assistant Professor of Classics position, as advertised on the American Philological Association's website. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Houston, and I will complete degree requirements by May 2011.

Teaching has been an important part of my training at the University of Houston, and I believe my background would be useful in your department. I have had considerable undergraduate teaching experience in several types of courses, including first- and second-year Latin classes and discussion sections of the Classical Mythology class. The latter experience introduced me to the pleasures of leading class discussion and the challenges of transforming new material—some of it unfamiliar to me—into useful discussion sections each week.

I have been equally devoted to the research side of my graduate training. My dissertation, directed by Dr. Robert Palmer, is entitled "Model Behavior: Generic Construction in Roman Satire." This study investigates the metaphorical language used to describe satire, and its implications for the poets' self-presentation. With this research, I have been working to secure a place for myself in the scholarly community. In the past two years, I have delivered papers at regional meetings such as the Classical Association of Atlantic States, and at national meetings, including the American Philological Association. My most recent conference paper was a collaborative effort; I helped to organize a panel on the satiric persona for the APA meeting in December.

Although my dissertation focuses on a single genre, it reflects interests that I expect to resurface in teaching contexts in the future. One area that fascinates me is the place of ancient comic genres in the literary canon and cultural contexts of Classical antiquity. Comedy, satire, and related genres make excellent material for courses on ancient culture, and I eagerly welcome the opportunity to develop such a course at some point. Another special interest of mine is ancient literary criticism, which I studied intensively for a Ph.D. exam on the ancient reception of Homer. Moreover, while both of these areas interest me, I believe that I can also parlay them into general civilization courses such as Iowa's Freshman Humanities courses.

I would enjoy discussing this position with you in the weeks to come. In the meantime, I am enclosing my Curriculum Vitae; letters of recommendation will arrive under separate cover. If you require any additional materials or information, I would be happy to supply it. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*Laura Hayes*

Laura Hayes