

Professional Methods

Cover Letters

- (1) Find out everything you can about the place you are applying to to show the fit between what you have to offer and what the place needs. Establishing this in a 1- to 1-1/2 page (maximum) letter can be fairly difficult, but all the preparation you do will be helpful if you are then invited for an interview.
- (2) In the first paragraph explain how you heard about the position ("Your announcement in ... " At the suggestion of ..."), and who you are ("I am completing my Ph.D. in ... under the direction of ... ").
- (3) Explain why you are interested in the position and the department. Based on your background research be explicit about connections - what they value, what you value.
- (4) Provide a somewhat detailed overview of your research and relevant experience.
- (5) Highlight your achievements and qualifications, especially those that make you the right person for the position. Connect items in your background with the specific needs of the department.
- (6) For smaller colleges or universities you should try to point out your interests in the institution as well as the department. At larger colleges or universities, you can concentrate more on your interests in the department.
- (7) In the final paragraph indicate what you are enclosing and offer to provide extra materials or additional information. Thank the committee for its consideration and indicate that you are looking forward to meeting with them in the near future.
- (8) While content is primary, how you write is also important. Use clear, simple, direct language.
- (9) Make sure your letter is free of errors. This may seem obvious, but search committees see plenty of letters with mistakes. The readers will assume you had all the time you needed to put the letter together and so are likely to be unforgiving of typographical, grammar, and spelling errors. Have it proofread by at least one other person, then have one of your professors look it over.