

## How to write a cover letter

Don't use the cover letter to just summarize your CV. The aim of your cover letter is to persuade, put your application in context, and explain what cannot be seen in your C.V. (e.g. motivation for the position, including how this fits to your long-term career aims). A cover letter should be an example of your best writing and should:

- set you apart from all other candidates
- be used to highlight and expand on how your experience and motivation matches the position
- provide a glimpse into your personality
- provide further evidence that you can communicate in an organised and effective way
- be no more than 2-pages; for a postdoc application 1-page should be sufficient

The structure of the cover letter generally comprises four sections: Introduction + Why me? + Why you? + Closing.

**Introduction:** If written effectively, it will encourage the group leader / selection committee to read the rest of the letter. This section may include details about how you learnt about the position, your current role, lab and institution. It may also include a short 1-2 sentence of the key selling points of your application:

- **For postdoc positions:** consider including a summary of the most important technical skills you have that fit to the project; or describe your experience in a relevant field for the lab.
- **For faculty positions:** it usually includes a 1-2 sentence summary of your research interests.

**Why me?:** This is one of the main sections of the cover letter, which has to be tailored to the position:

- **For postdoc positions:** This should include a short summary of your previous research, focusing on the topics and / or technical skills that are most relevant for the lab you are applying to. You should describe your work in a way such that the impact of it is clear, and you ideally give the impression that you are independent, collaborative, motivated and capable of finishing projects. You can also consider including an example of how you work to demonstrate this.
- **For faculty positions:** This section should include the “movie trailer” for your research statement. It should include a short summary of what you would like to work on as an independent researcher, and summary of your career to-date that shows that you have a track record of delivering research outputs, including those that have an impact on your field. As fundability is also relevant, you should also mention previous experience of attracting funding. If applicable, describe how your future plans build on your prior work, and what your scientific niche will be – e.g. are you tackling an important question from a different angle to other labs, do you have access to niche technologies? For positions with a teaching focus, you will generally be asked to provide a teaching statement – in this section of the cover letter, include a short paragraph here that summarizes / refers to your teaching statement.

## Why you?:

- **For postdoc positions:** This is the most important paragraph(s)! Explain why you are interested in joining this lab, and what you hope to get from the postdoc position. Ideally (particularly for unsolicited applications) you should propose a project direction and describe how this provides a good link between your specific research interests and those of the lab you are joining.
- **For faculty positions:** This section should describe why you are interested in joining this institute / department, how your research fits to their future plans, and where you can see potential venues for collaboration with other faculty. You can also highlight how you see yourself contributing to the department and evidence that you have contributed to service activities (e.g. teaching, committees, seminar / conference organization) previously.

**Closing:** Be positive. You can also state your willingness to provide additional information and desire to further discuss the position in an interview. Finally, offer thanks for the consideration of your application.

- If you are sending an unsolicited postdoc application, show willingness to discuss potential funding opportunities and apply for independent postdoctoral fellowships.

We suggest preparing to write your cover letter by:

1. Reading several examples of cover-letters for positions at the same level / field as you.
  2. Considering what points, you want to bring across in YOUR cover letter.
  3. Working on a narrative that will bring across these points, using the examples as inspiration.
- **Do NOT copy large sections from templates.** This is plagiarism, and you want your application to be written in a way that highlights YOUR unique selling points, and reflects your own style of communication. If you copy the exact structure and wording of well-publicized examples, the group leader / selection committee are likely to notice that it's not your own work.

| DO   | DONT's   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Visualize where you may be adding unnecessary details by printing out your draft and highlighting the parts that addresses the most important requirements</li><li>• Sound positive and confident:</li><li>• Consider changing could / would / may to will / can</li><li>• Remove any double "hedges" (this may possibly ... -&gt; this may). Also avoid "I had the opportunity to visit", simply write "I visited"</li><li>• Include the title and any reference number for the position you are applying for</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feel you have to cover all the requirements for the position; focus on the main points and make sure your C.V. backs up anything you did not mention.</li><li>• Leave the most important things until the end, they might not read that far!</li><li>• Start every sentence with 'I': having the same sentence structure doesn't read well. Overuse of 'I' may also indicate that you are not showing teamwork and/or are focussing on what you will gain from the position rather than what you will bring into the lab</li></ul> |