
ASA Prep Talk:

Writing a cover letter for the academic
job market

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I don't have PhD students going on the market, but if I did, here's some of what I would tell them after serving on a dozen search committees, reviewing hundreds of applications, and sitting thru dozens and dozens of job talks, breakfasts during the interview...

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Cover Letter: Make it 1.5 pages. No more than 2. Have others read it, ESPECIALLY someone (at least 1 person) who is not a social scientist. If they think parts of it are boring, they're right. Cut the jargon. No typos. No crazy-long paragraphs. Strong lead sentences.

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Cover Letter cont: Use it to highlight your accomplishments, point us twd other parts of your packet. Here's the key: CONTROL THE NARRATIVE. You should tell us exactly why you're awesome/perfect f/ this position and how literally everything you've done supports that fact.

*Purpose:
Introduce who you are
as a scholar and
potential colleague*

Tips for successful cover letters

- Who you are as a scholar and current position
 - Fact-based statements that highlight your accomplishments
 - Tailoring to department
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What to avoid

- Excessive detail
 - Jargon
 - Hyperbole
 - Positioning yourself as a grad student – *write as a potential colleague*
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Q&A
