

Tips on Cover Letters

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The purpose of the cover letter when applying for research positions on Mathjobs is to get across a few specific pieces of information as quickly and efficiently as possible. Those items are:

1. Your name, position, subject area, advisor, Ph.D. date and institution
2. Which job you are applying for
3. The contents of your application, including references
4. Contacts (or people you would like to work with) in the department
5. Any highlights that can be easily transmitted
6. Particular reasons why you want to go to that school

The standard AMS cover sheet on Mathjobs has all of these items already except for number 4 and 6. However, individual schools can ask additional questions via Mathjobs when you apply, and many ask for contacts in the department. As such, the cover letter part of your application is mostly a useless appendage. My guess is that most hiring committee members never open this up when they look at your file.

That said, item 4 above is by far the most important part of the cover letter. This will increase the likelihood that this person will look at your file. (By the way, you should also email that person directly to let them know you applied!) As for number 6, you can mention that you have family in the area, or your spouse already has a job in the area, etc. But keep it brief and professional.

Keep the letter brisk, informative, and formal. The simpler the better. Try for one page, 12 point font. Don't show character. Don't read too many articles on how to craft a cover letter for the business world; there is no need to sell yourself. (Also ignore most of the web pages you find if you search for advice on academic cover letters.)

On the next page, I have included a standard letter for a postdoctoral search. Good luck!

October 20, 2012

Your Name
Department of Mathematics
ADDRESS 1
ADDRESS 2
PHONE NUMBER

To the Hiring Committee:

My name is NAME. I am a graduate student at SCHOOL, working in the areas of AREA 1 and AREA 2. I expect to receive a Ph.D. from SCHOOL in YEAR, under the direction of ADVISOR. I would like to apply for a post-doctoral position in your department. I am particular interested in working with CONTACT 1 and CONTACT 2.

With my application, I include the standard AMS cover letter, a curriculum vitae, a research statement, and a teaching statement. I will also have NUMBER letters of recommendation sent. There will be research letters from REFERENCE 1 (EMAIL), REFERENCE 2 (EMAIL), and REFERENCE 3 (EMAIL), and one teaching letter from TEACHING REF (EMAIL).

Some highlights of my file are:

1. RESEARCH AWARD/FELLOWSHIP
2. TOP JOURNALS
3. TEACHING AWARD

Please let me know if there is anything else I can provide. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



NAME
SCHOOL