

# Cover letter for a faculty position

## Criteria for Success

1. Demonstrate scientific accomplishments and scholastic achievement.
2. Clearly define the vision and impact of your future research program.
3. Differentiate yourself from colleagues, e.g. your advisors and other faculty candidates.
4. Establish what your niche will be in the department.
5. Clearly display excitement and passion.
6. Keep the cover letter to **1 to 2 pages**. The optional second page may contain a list of publications/presentations or a list of references.

## Purpose

The faculty cover letter, as with [cover letters for other positions](#), is the first part of your application to be read by the Faculty Search Committee. Therefore, the primary purpose of a faculty cover letter is to summarize your application by connecting your Research and Teaching Statements, CV, and references.

## Analyze your audience

Knowing what the Faculty Search Committee is looking for will help you tailor your application.

Searches for new hires may focus on specific research areas (e.g. nanomaterials, systems engineering, therapeutic science, renewable energy). In this case, you should customize your application to highlight your work in the specified research area.

Alternatively, departments may concentrate solely on the best candidates regardless of pre-selected scientific disciplines, in which case you have more flexibility in how you present yourself.

In addition, academic employment opportunities differ based on whether positions are tenure-tracked or require teaching, and the type of institution (university, medical school, research institute). Research the responsibilities associated with each of these positions, and include only information relevant to the specific position – don't waste valuable space on irrelevant experiences.

## Structure of a Cover Letter

### SEARCH THE COMMKIT:

e.g. Article, Poster, CV

“A faculty cover letter introduces you to future colleagues and demonstrates your confidence, innovation, and passion as a scientist and educator. It clearly explains how your expertise, values, and goals align with the department and university, and identifies your niche in your future academic community.”



Sara Garamszegi  
Bioinformatics scientist, dedicated to elevating scientific communication  
[View Profile](#)

### OTHER COMMKIT TOPICS:

#### Visual

- [Slideshow](#)
- [Poster](#)
- [Figure Design](#)

#### Technical/Journal Article

- [General Tips](#)
- [Abstract](#)
- [Introduction](#)
- [Methods](#)
- [Discussion](#)
- [Results](#)

#### Professional

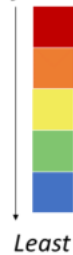
- [Elevator Pitch](#)
- [CV/Resume](#)
- [Cover Letter: General](#)
- [Cover Letter: Faculty](#)

#### Applications

- [NSF Research Proposal](#)
- [NSF Personal Statement](#)
- [Grad School Personal Statement](#)

<b>A Letterhead</b>
<b>B</b> Date Department University
<b>C</b> Salutation
<b>D</b> Brief introduction
<b>E Strong Opening Statement</b>
<b>F Scientific Achievements</b> Pedigree & productivity
<b>G Motivation &amp; Impact</b> Innovation, creativity, & passion Areas of expertise / Aims of future research Demonstrate fit
<b>H Teaching &amp; Mentorship</b> Experience/perspectives that differentiate you
<b>I Wrap-Up</b>
<b>J</b> Follow-Up & Thank You
<b>K</b> Closure

Most differentiates you  
from other candidates



- [Fellowship Application](#)
- [NIHGRI Center application](#)
- [Postdoc Fellowships: Index of L Sciences Fellowships](#)

#### Science Policy

- [Introduction to Policy Commun](#)
- [Policy Elevator Pitch](#)
- [Policy Memo](#)
- [Policy Presentation](#)
- [Congressional Hill Meeting](#)
- [Letter of Support](#)
- [Op-Ed](#)
- [Public Comment on Pending Le](#)

#### MAKE AN APPOINTMENT

Want to talk with one of our Fellows about your project

▶ [MAKE AN APPOINTMENT](#)

#### A. Letterhead

- Critical contact information: name, degree, current position, email, and phone number
- Your professional profile or webpage (e.g. LinkedIn, ResearchGate, Academia.edu)

#### B. Date, department, and university name and address.

#### C. Salutation – “Dear [Faculty Search Committee / Department Head],”

#### D. Brief introduction – Display excitement. State specific terms related to the faculty position, department and university. For example, if you are applying to a “cluster” hire that includes faculty across multiple departments, such as *Systems and Synthetic Biology*, then state this directly. State the position for which you are applying (i.e. tenure-track appointment, assistant faculty position).

#### E. Strong opening statement – Declare your targeted research areas. Establish the foundation on which you will base your research. Emphasize novel interfaces and applications within your proposed research.

#### F. Scientific achievements – Summarize successes highlighted in your CV that demonstrate the breadth and depth of scientific expertise. Demonstrate your productivity, as well as key scientific or technical strengths, with supporting details.

#### G. Motivation & impact – State areas of expertise and indicate specific aims of your future research program. Clearly describe how these aims align with current research initiatives in the department or university.

#### H. Teaching & mentorship – Highlight your experience in the classroom and as a research mentor, and service in the profession or community.

#### I. Wrap-up – “Additional documents are enclosed. Please feel free to contact me if supplemental information is required.”

#### J. Follow-up & thank you – Be clear that you expect to hear back (e.g. “I look forward to your reply”). Thank the committee for their time and consideration.

#### K. Closure – Maintain professionalism. “Sincerely,” “Best regards,” and “Kindest regards” are appropriate closing phrases. Include your electronic signature.

## Skills

### Advocate for yourself

The Faculty cover letter emphasizes your past and present academic career, while promoting your future potential. For many of us, exuding confidence in an open letter of introduction is challenging, but you have to believe in yourself before you can convince others to believe in you.

### State your pedigree

In academia, the institutions and departments you have attended and the advisors for whom you have worked do matter. State this information in **Scientific achievements**. Inform your audience if you have co-taught classes with distinguished professors in **Teaching & mentorship** or emphasize existing collaborations in the **Motivation & impact** section.

### Quantify your productivity

Academia identifies scientific contributions by the following conventions: number of publications, quality, and impact. In addition to research articles, noteworthy contributions may also include opinion articles, book chapters, or your role as a journal reviewer. Emphasize alternative sources of scientific communication (and funding) such as distinguished merit-based fellowships.

Engineering students are likely to be co-authors of patents; state this information.

### Describe your future potential

Beyond reiterating your past accomplishments, you must also show that you are prepared to handle the future challenges of being a Principal Investigator. By far, the most difficult paragraph to write in the Faculty cover letter focuses on the **Motivation & Impact** of your future research program. Clearly articulate the vision of your future research program and describe how your leadership will facilitate an environment of scientific and teaching excellence. Demonstrate expert understanding of your field, and confidently state your qualifications as a leader in research, an educator, and a citizen of the university.

### Define your niche

Your application will be one out of hundreds. You must differentiate yourself and your research program from other candidates, as well as previous or current advisor(s). Ask yourself what you will do that is unique compared to any of your past or future colleagues. How will you fit uniquely into the department — what is your niche?

The **Motivation & impact** section provides an opportunity to concisely define your niche. State specific aims of your proposed research that expand upon the department's core strengths, while simultaneously diversifying the university's research portfolio (e.g. emerging research fields, state-of-the art technologies, novel applications). Carefully consider research centers, core facilities, affiliated institutes or medical centers at the university. In many cases, campus- or state-wide research initiatives may complement your research program.

Finally, take advantage of any experiences you've had outside of academia. Have you previously worked in industry or consulted? Would these former and future relationships lead to additional funding for your lab? If so, suggest more unusual avenues of additional funding. It may no longer suffice to focus primarily on traditional grants sponsored by government agencies. Think of creative alternatives and diversify your future financial portfolio. This, in turn, differentiates your research program from colleagues.

Finally, you will more than likely apply to multiple departments and universities. Therefore, modify your niche for every application!

### Make important information concise and identifiable

Again, your application is one out of hundreds. Helping the Faculty Search Committee easily identify important information in your cover letter will only improve your chances of moving forward in the hiring

process. A Faculty cover letter should not exceed **1 page**, so you must present your qualifications to the Faculty Search Committee in a concise manner.

**Maximize impact of words.** Use verbs that illustrate impact (“led,” “developed,” “innovated”) over verbs that make you sound passive (“participated”). Aim for verbs that are more specific to the actual contribution you made.

Minimize redundancy and wordiness. For every sentence, challenge yourself to remove as many words as possible without changing the meaning of the sentence.

**Use keywords.** Keywords cited by grant-funding agencies, easily recognizable by any faculty member, should be included in relevant sections of your Faculty Cover Letter. Field-specific vocabulary demonstrates your understanding of the field and the department’s needs, but be aware that Faculty Search Committees with mixed expertise may require simpler vocabulary and/or explanations accessible to a broader audience.

**Maintain abundant white space.** In terms of formatting, inclusion of “white space” is easy on the eye while providing a precise transition from one section to the next.

### Devote time!

Crafting your faculty application is a process that will continue indefinitely.

- Devote time to your faculty application, working in consistent increments over the course of weeks not days.
- Take time to brainstorm, reflect, write, edit, critique, and revise accordingly.
- Seek guidance in terms of technical content, emphasis of soft skills, as well as grammatical improvements and aesthetics from colleagues and friends.

**Above all else, remember that the faculty application is a creative process. Enjoy it!**

## Resources and Annotated Examples



### Annotated Example 1

Example Faculty Cover Letter  
887 KB



### Annotated Example 2

Example Faculty CV  
85 KB

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#### CONTRIBUTORS

[Anneke Kramm](#)

[Rita Sulahian](#)

[Suzanne Jacobs](#)

[Sara Garamszegi](#)

**MIT Communication Lab**

**Broad Research Communication Lab**

11th Floor, Stanley Building  
75 Ames Street, Cambridge, MA 02142

[brcl@broadinstitute.org](mailto:brcl@broadinstitute.org)

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