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6/30/2016

Complete Name

With Title and Full Address

Use an actual mailing address

Get this right and you’ll look good

Dear Dr. Person:

The first sentence of this introductory paragraph is not indented. Make this opening paragraph three sentances long—four at most—and use punchy writing with a final sentence that makes it clear to the reader why you are writing to them.

 Therafter indent your paragraphs. For the salutation, I believe in assuming that the academics you are writing to have finished their PhD and should be acknolwedged as Dr., if not some other title like Dean or Professor. If you don’t credit someone properly you might offend them. The worst case is that they will be flattered and think you are being generous.

 This format should generally work for the cover letter of job applications, nomination letters for awards, and reference letters for your students and colleages.

 Even though you should follow the traditional layouts of formally typed letters, there are a few unique features of the modern academic letter. Most of the people who read your letter will be doing so on a screen. First, a little color, just in your institutional logo and signiture, helps make the document distinct. Second, it means that some strategically chosen embedded links can let a reader click directly through to relevant digital artefacts, such as a CV or article or professional website. Always double check that the links you embed work!

 Remove the footer below with the Creative Commons Licensing information.

 If a few extra hard returns between the lettterhead and the date line pushes a little more substance into the final page, do it. But don’t go overboard, or do too much fidgeting with fonts. For the most part, 11, 11.5 and 12 point fonts are the right range. Larger looks too childish, smaller is too hard to read. Print it off on a color printer so you can see what the finished product looks like *before* you send it anywhere.

 For academic letter writing, avoid the zany personal letterhead templates. Your department probably has a version of its electronic letterhead but it is easy to create this using Word. Replace the information at the top of this letterhead with your information. Use one consistent font up there, and a second consistent font for the body of the letter. Search online for a high resolution, color image of your institution’s logo, crest or achievement. If you want to be a stickler, you can find out what your university’s official font is and acquire it. You can use it for your letterhead, but keep the body of your letter an easy-to-read font, like Times Roman or Calibiri. As a design rule, if your letterhead uses a font with serifs, chose a font without serifs for the body (or vice versa). If you can legitimately claim to be part of the academic institution’s intellectual community—and other community members would verify this—you can use the letterhead.

 The letterhead of a professional letter should include professional information, so don’t include a Facebook address, Twitter handle or other platform-specific link unless it really is an important part of your professional identity. If any of your electronic identifiers are goofy or offensive you might exclude them from the letterhead or consider getting new ones.

 Do page numbers, starting on the second page. Left indent the body of the letter.

 Make a high resolution scan of your signiture done with a color pen. Not a silly color just use blue. Paste it in below and align it so that it loos like this, and print this word document to a PDF so that it appears like a nicely scanned and formatted letter. Submit that pdf, not the word document. Don’t sign off with “Best” or “Yours Truly”, just say “Sincerely.”

 The last paragraph should reiterate the point of this letter and encourage further contact. You can embed a link to your email address if you want to make it easy for the reader to email you. If I can tell you more about this exciting publication, do not hesitate to contact me by email at pnhoward@uw.edu or by phone at (206) 612-9912.

Sincerely,



Philip N. Howard