Preparing a Cover Letter
All information has been adapted from:
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/549/1/

A cover letter introduces you and your curriculum vita to potential educational institutions you seek to join. It is the first document a faculty member sees, so it is often the first impression you will make. Take advantage of this important first impression and prepare the reader for your application, stating why you are writing, and why you are a good match for the program and the institution.

Cover letters do more than introduce your vita, though. A cover letter's importance also includes its ability to:

* Explain your experiences in a story-like format that works with the information provided in your vita
* Allow you to go in-depth about important experiences/skills and relate them to requirements
* Show the faculty member that you are individualizing (tailoring) this application
* Provide a sample of your written communication skills

Formatting your cover letter

Your cover letter should convey a professional message. Of course, the particular expectations of a professional format depend on the institution you are looking to join. For example, an accounting position at a legal firm will require a more traditional document format. A position as an Imagineer at Disney might require a completely different approach. Again, a close audience analysis of the company and the position will yield important information about the document expectations. Let the organization's communications guide your work.

For this example, we are using a traditional approach to cover letters:

* Single-space your cover letter
* Leave a space between each paragraph
* Leave three spaces between your closing (such as "Sincerely" or "Sincerely Yours") and typed name
* Leave a space between your heading (contact information) and greeting (such as, "Dear Mr. Roberts")
* Either align all paragraphs to the left of the page, or indent the first line of each paragraph to the right
*Use standard margins for your cover letter, such as one-inch margins on all sides of the document

*Center your letter in the middle of the page; in other words, make sure that the space at the top and bottom of the page is the same

*Sign your name in ink between your salutation and typed name

**Organizing your cover letter**
A cover letter has four essential parts: heading, introduction, argument, and closing.

The heading

In your heading, include your contact information:
- name
- address
- phone number
- email address

The date and institution contact information should directly follow your contact information. Use spacing effectively in order to keep this information more organized and readable.

**Example Heading:**
Craig M. Leroix
2987 W. Taylor Dr.
Portland, OR 45720
890-372-1262
cmleroix@anywhere.com
February 2, 2005

Amy Kincaid, Human Resource Director
Western Electric, Inc
387 Collier Lane
Atlanta, Georgia 30051

**Addressing your cover letter**
Whenever possible, you should address your letter to a specific individual, the person in charge of interviewing and accepting. Sending your application documents to a specific person increases the chances that they will be seriously reviewed by the institution or committee.

When the name is not provided, you can usually research the department online to find department heads, etc. Also, you can call a department staff member (secretary) and ask to whom
the letter should be addressed. If you still cannot find out a name, address it to the Department (Name it) Admissions Committee.

The Introduction
The introduction should include a salutation, such as "Dear Mr. Roberts:" If you are uncertain of your contact's gender, avoid using Mr. or Mrs. by simply using the person's full name.

The body of your introduction can be organized in many ways. However, it is important to include, who you are and why you are writing. It can also state how you learned about the position and why you are interested in it. (This might be the right opportunity to briefly relate your education and/or experience to the requirements of the position.)

In some instances, you may have previously met the reader of your cover letter. In these instances it is acceptable to use your introduction to remind your reader of who you are and briefly discuss a specific topic of your previous conversation(s).

Most important is to briefly overview why your values and goals align with the institution’s and program’s and how you will help them. You should also touch on how you match the requirements. By reviewing how you align with the institution and how your skills match what they're looking for, you can forecast the contents of your cover letter before you move into your argument.

The Argument
Your argument is an important part of your cover letter, because it allows you to persuade your reader why you are a good fit for the program. Carefully choose what to include in your argument. You want your argument to be as powerful as possible, but it shouldn't cloud your main points by including excessive or irrelevant details about your past. In addition, use your curriculum vita (and refer to it) as the source of "data" you will use and expand on in your cover letter.

In your argument, you should try to:
*Show your reader you possess the most important skills s/he seeks (you're a good match for the department's mission/goals and requirements).
*Convince your reader that the department will benefit from admitting you.
*Maintain an upbeat/personable tone.
*Avoid explaining your entire vita but use your vita as a source of data to support your argument (the two documents should work together).

The Closing
Your closing restates your main points and reveals what you plan to do after your readers have received your vita and cover letter. We recommend you do the following in your closing:

*Restate why you align with the department's mission/goals.
*Include your phone number and e-mail address.
*Thank your readers for their consideration.
Before you send the cover letter
Always proofread your cover letter carefully. After you’ve finished, put it aside for a couple of days if time allows, and then reread it. More than likely, you will discover sentences that could be improved, or grammatical errors that could otherwise prove to be uncharacteristic of your writing abilities. Furthermore, we recommend giving your cover letter to friends and colleagues. Ask them for ways to improve it; listen to their suggestions and revise your document as you see fit.