Framing Your Story:
Questions to Guide Your Cover Letter

A great cover letter:

- Communicates that you are knowledgeable about the organization and the field
- Shows you are a candidate who “gets” the role
- Gives solid evidence that you have the skills and knowledge to do the role well
- Clarifies why you (the applicant) and the employer are a mutual fit
- Demonstrates confidence and enthusiasm
- Is presented with your audience in mind (i.e. uses relevant terminology and examples, appropriate formality of tone)
- Is clear, concise and direct
- Is free of grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors

When applying to a job, it may not be sufficient to say that you can do the role – show what makes you a great fit for the role.

Your answers to the following questions will provide background information that may be helpful to incorporate into a cover letter:

- For what job are you applying?
- Why are you interested in this job? This organization? This field/industry?
- Describe the organization, its work, and its clients/customers/products.
- What do you feel distinguishes this organization from its peers?
- What specific skills and knowledge is the employer seeking for this role?
- How have your prior experiences influenced your interest in this job / this organization / this field?
- In what ways have your accomplishments during your prior experiences (extracurricular, volunteer, work, other) prepared you to excel in this role?
- What aspects of your academic experience will help you succeed in this role?
- Considering your competition (other people who may apply to this role), why might you be uniquely qualified for this job?
- How will the company/organization benefit from hiring you?

Your letter may not need to include answers to each of these questions, but a well-written cover letter will address many of these items and should indicate that you have considered the remaining elements.

If you have difficulty answering any of these questions, you may not be ready to begin writing a cover letter. Revisiting the job description, further research on the organization, and clarifying your own skills and interests will help you address these items.