



## **1. Instructional Materials. Guide to useful cover letter practices**

*This document gives instructor and student guidance on how to write a useful cover letter to elicit desirable feedback. The guide contains three sections: (i) Facilitator guidelines, (ii) student guidelines, and (iii) instructions for a reflective group workshop to improve cover letter practices.*

### **Instructor notes**

These instructional notes give a *steps and moves* model for writing cover letters within the context of doctoral students. However, the instructional material can be adapted to students at all levels of study. Primarily, the materials are intended as a resource for writing practitioners to guide the content of their student cover letters.

### **Take a reader's perspective**

For all steps and moves, the authors consider the reviewing competencies and time of their intermediary audience (their writing group members). Reviewers value well-crafted cover letters that are written concisely, clearly, and politely. As a general rule of thumb, cover letters of around 170 words (e.g., the length of an abstract) seem to be the most appreciated. However, shorter, and longer cover letters are sometimes necessary depending on writing stage and complexity.

### **Move 1. Contextualising the writing**

In this move, the author sets the tone, and describes the context and purpose within the scope of their writing project.

#### **Step 1. Set the tone**

The author opens the cover letter with a friendly salutation and expresses advance appreciation for their reviewers' time (e.g., "*Dear Writing Group*"; "*Thank you for taking the time to read my text.*"). When appropriate, they also communicate meaningful affective information (mainly apologies) using expressions such as "*I'm sorry for the delayed Submission*"; "*I'm sorry for posting this late – I lost all control of the last week.*"

#### **Step 2. Describe the writing genre, status, and audience**

The author describes the writing project genre and how their draft text fits within (e.g. "*The introduction section of my research article is...*"), and their target audience and/or journal (e.g., "*and will be of interest to a broad audience of Environmental and Ecotechnologists.*"; "*[This is] an article to a journal which is typically more in the social sciences, but has agreed to give out a special literature edition.*"). If they are at an initial stage of writing and/or experiencing anxiety,



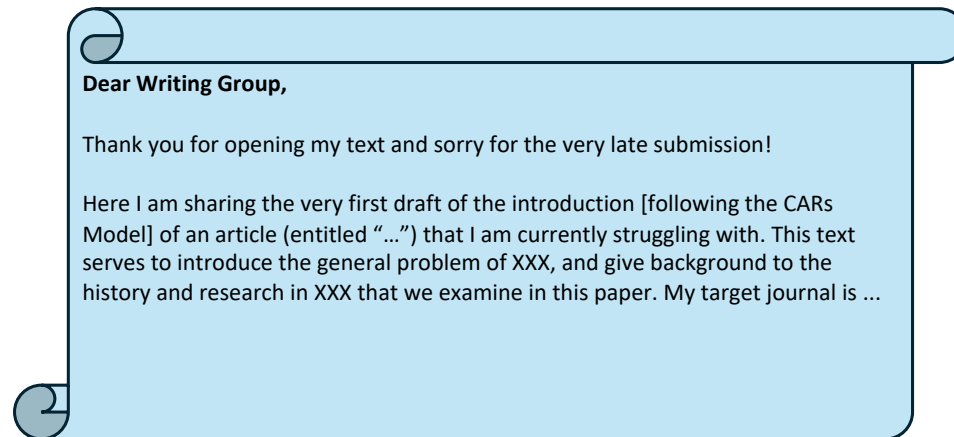
they state the honest status of their draft using appropriate hedging devices to signal their vulnerabilities using expressions such as “*It’s quite a raw portion of my methods section ...*” and “*I also believe it’s by far the ‘weakest’ section of this article.*”

### **Step 3. Explain the writing purpose**

The author explains how the text is organised (e.g., “*It is divided into three parts.*”), what each part contains (e.g., “*The third paragraph contains some problems in our field.*”), the overall writing purpose (e.g., “*My aim is to create an article on a cohort of ...*”), and the intended purpose of the draft text (e.g., “*At the same time, in the introduction I would like to give an idea that ...*”).

### **Step 4. Describe the writing content**

The author outlines text-specific content (e.g., “*This section introduces ...*”), explicitly mentions the project title (e.g., “*My project has a preliminary title of ...*”) and discipline-specific concepts (e.g., “*Possible theories I have considered including the title of the writing project*”) that will help the reviewers grasp the gist of the draft text at a glance.



Example of Move One (Contextualising the writing)



## **Move 2. Communicating Feedback Expectations**

In this move, the author communicates their affective and effective reviewing criteria and priorities. Having contextualised their writing and given clear reviewing instructions (i.e., justifying their explicit instructional comments for help), they ask for holistic and/or specific textual help on predominantly global issues.

### **Step 1. Communicate author affect**

The author explains their affective criteria on the degree of expected feedback directness. These expressions include: *“I would appreciate short, concise, and as specific comments as possible.”* and *“Please give your honest feedback on my draft.”*

### **Step 2. State what to comment on and what not to comment on**

The author explains what thematic aspects they do not want feedback on (e.g., *“I tend to do lot of typos, if they don’t intrude understanding of the text, please ignore them.”*; *“Try to ignore the lack of citations.”*) or holistic aspects they do want feedback on (*“I would appreciate your feedback to be focused just on the “big picture”.*).

### **Step 3. Explain what to prioritise or not to prioritise**

The author explains what feedback and text to prioritise or not to prioritise using expressions such as *“However, I’m personally most interested in the following: ...”*; *“The yellow highlights are notes to myself about places where I need to elaborate on something.”*

### **Step 4A. Ask for reviewer help (start of writing process)**

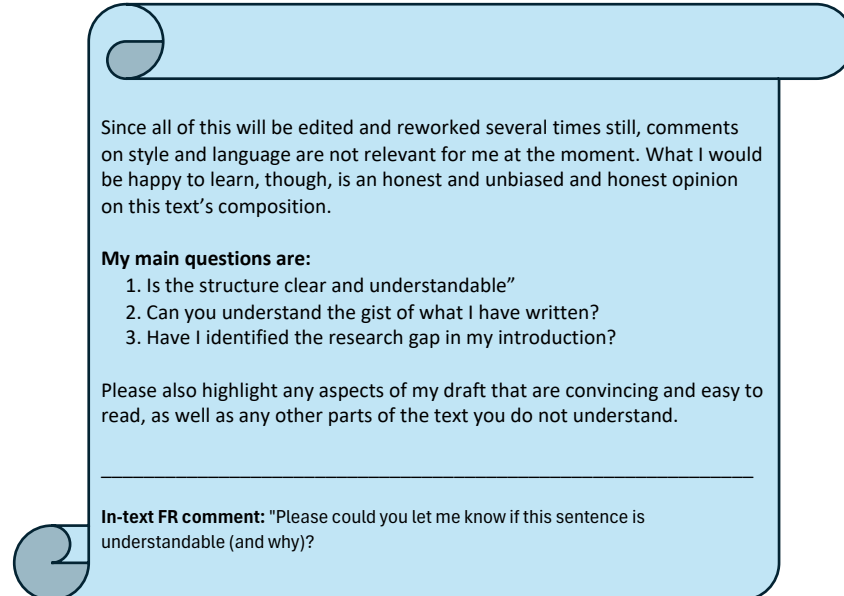
At the start of the writing process, the author may not be competent to ask for help on specifics. Instead, they ask one or two holistic and global questions on textual structure and/or understanding (e.g., *“Is the structure of the introduction logical?”*; *“Is the text is understandable, logical and easy to follow?”*).

### **Step 4B. Ask for reviewer help (developed writing process)**

As the writing process develops, the author asks a reasonable number of specific, justified, and global questions (typically around three; e.g., *“Most of the readers would not be familiar of the method of sequencing that we are using. Is it clear enough?”*). For specifics, the author writes in-text cover letter comments directly in their draft Submission (e.g. *“Is this sentence understandable?”*) that can elicit feedback comments on the same textual aspect from multiple



reviewers. In addition, they ask one open question asking for general help on any textual aspect not already specified (e.g., “*And any other comments are welcome too, of course!*”; “*Do you find the text easy or complicated to read?*”). Alternatively, the author asks one or two open questions on textual aspects that may cause readability issues (e.g., “*Please leave a comment at those sentences/paragraphs where it’s hard to understand what I’m trying to say 😊*”), and on aspects that have been well-crafted (e.g., “*Please highlight any aspects of my draft that are convincing ...?*”). Also, reviewers appreciate when the reviewer instructions for help are written in a reader-friendly format (i.e., as a numbered list or with bullet points).



Since all of this will be edited and reworked several times still, comments on style and language are not relevant for me at the moment. What I would be happy to learn, though, is an honest and unbiased and honest opinion on this text’s composition.

**My main questions are:**

1. Is the structure clear and understandable”
2. Can you understand the gist of what I have written?
3. Have I identified the research gap in my introduction?

Please also highlight any aspects of my draft that are convincing and easy to read, as well as any other parts of the text you do not understand.

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**In-text FR comment:** "Please could you let me know if this sentence is understandable (and why)?"

Example of Move Two (Communicating Feedback Expectations)



### **Move 3. Closing the Recipe.**

In this move, the author uses indicators of social presence of affect, meaningful communication, writing norms, smileys, and exclamations to close the feedback recipe.

#### **Step 1. Communicate meaningful information**

When appropriate, the author uses mitigation to explain the current status of their Submitted draft even if they communicated their writing vulnerabilities in Move 1 (e.g., *“Since I don’t have the complete dataset yet it is a bit messy, but I hope still understandable at least in general.”*) and/or give a specific solution to resolve any reviewing difficulties at a later synchronous meeting (e.g., *“If you encounter any difficulty ... please ask me during our next group meeting.”*).

#### **Step 2. Refer to future contact**

The author expresses, in advance, their appreciation and excitement on receiving feedback letters from (e.g., *“I’m looking forward for your feedback!”*) and future contact with (e.g., *“I look forward to our next meeting.”*). Depending on the author’s personality, this is where affective punctuation (e.g., smileys and exclamations) is often used.

#### **Step 3. Close the feedback recipe**

The author closes their feedback recipe with a friendly and appropriate closure and/or with their name (e.g., *“All the best, Claire”*; *“Best wishes”*; *“Claire”*).

*Feedback Recipe (amalgamated)*

I did find this section hard to write, because it seemed so connected with what should come before. If you also encounter any unfamiliar terminology or have any difficulty following my introduction, please feel free to ask me during our next group meeting discussion

In the meantime, I very much look forward to receiving your comments and suggestions.

See you all on Monday!

All the best,  
Bob

Example of Move Three (Closing the Recipe)



## **2. Instructional Materials (Students): Guide to writing a useful cover letter**

### **What is a cover letter?**

Your cover letter should be added as a separate text to the beginning of the draft you are submitting to your colleagues for review. The cover letter is the method by how you communicate to your colleagues about how they should assess your draft. It should include all the information that the reviewers need to know in order to give you useful and critical feedback. This includes background information about your draft article and any specific areas that you wish to seek advice on. There is no set format for this, so you are free to write your cover letter as you think is best.

### **Why should I write a cover letter?**

It is very important that you write a clear and concise cover letter so that your writing group members know exactly how to assess your text. This is because without a cover letter, the reviewers can only guess what feedback you require. Another advantage of writing a cover letter is that authors often find this helps them to identify weaknesses in their own current draft. It is for these reasons that we strongly encourage you to take time and consideration in composing a cover letter.

### **How do I write a useful cover letter?**

A useful cover letter generally contains some or all of the following information:

1. Background information about the text.

*“What I submit below is the first draft of the introduction of a paper ...”*

2. Clear guidelines on what aspects of the text feedback is expected on (this can include both positive and negative features). Consider your reviewers’ time and prioritise your feedback to two or three specific requests.

*“Have I clearly identified the research gap in my introduction?”*

*“Please also highlight any aspects of my draft that are convincing and easy to read.”*

3. If you are at the start of the writing process, ask for general help on areas you are uncertain about (e.g., readability and logical sequencing of ideas) and also ask for reasons for your peers response (e.g., Please explain your answer”).

*“Can you understand the gist of what I have written?” “Why, why not?”*

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4. An invitation to comment on (or not comment on) other issues not included in the cover letter  
*“Please do comment on any other parts of the text you do not understand.”*  
*“Please don’t comment on local issues (e.g., spelling and grammar) unless they impede understanding.”*
5. In-text comment boxes on specific points within your draft that specific help is needed with.
6. Other information (not specified above) that is relevant that will help the reviewers give useful and critical feedback.
7. Keep your cover letter brief and concise, and make your feedback requests explicit (e.g., use bullet points).

Furthermore, we would recommend that you write your cover letter in a polite and friendly way. You can use openings (e.g. “Dear Writing Group”), closings (e.g. “All the best, Anu”), and other friendly language such as reference to past feedback (e.g. “Thank you for your comments from last week.”) and to future contact (e.g., “I look forward to our next meeting.”).

In addition, do take a realistic and reviewer’s perspective. Consider what your peers can give you useful feedback on and also their time.

### **Take a reviewer's perspective**

*Consider that you are going to give feedback on your own draft(s) based solely on your cover letter. Look back through the cover letter you are writing (or have written) and consider the following points:*

1. Do your cover letters include all or some of the points mentioned above?
2. If you were the reviewer, would you know exactly how to give useful feedback on your draft.
3. Have you received useful and/or expected feedback on your draft based on your cover letter?
4. If not, how could you improve your cover letter(s)?

**Please remember to include your cover letter on the same document (and before) your draft for submission.**



### **Materials. Writing Group Reflective Workshop (Instructor notes)**

These prompts are intended to be given to the students as a reflective tool to improve their cover letter practices. We suggest allowing time after the students' first cover letter (e.g., a day or a week) before conducting this workshop.

### **Workshop Prompts (Students)**

#### **Aim**

- To reflect upon how you can improve your cover letters to obtain useful feedback
- To improve your writing and feedback processes through these reflections

#### **Required materials for the Workshop:**

- Your feedback cover letter
- Your draft text(s)
- The feedback comments you gave to your writing group members
- The feedback comments you received from your writing group members

#### **As a group, discuss the following points:**

It is very important that you write a clear and concise cover letter so that your group knows exactly how to assess your text. This will ensure that you receive relevant and useful feedback.

#### **Please spend a little time thinking about how your group's feedback cover letters helped you evaluate their text and discuss the following:**

- What types of comments in the cover letters helped you give effective feedback? Why?
- If you had no cover letter to help your review, what did you give feedback on?

#### **Now look back at the cover letter you wrote and share your thoughts (if you wish) with your group:**

- Did you get the feedback you asked for in your cover letter? Why? Why not?
- If you were reviewing your own draft text, would you find your cover letter helpful? Why? Why not?

*As a group, agree on what makes a useful cover letter? Please share your thoughts(3-5 sentences)*