

SWEETLAND DISSERTATION WRITING GROUPS

HOW TO WRITE A COVER LETTER TO INCLUDE WITH YOUR WRITING

Providing a brief set-up, no more than one page, for your readers allows you to guide their feedback in the direction that best suit your needs. For example, you might be at a stage in your writing that style is not that central an issue, since you're still figuring out your argument through your writing. In that case, receiving feedback on your style would not give you useful suggestions for revision. So, by telling your reader to focus on argumentation, and not on style, you're providing a feedback frame that will be most useful to you.

To understand the utility of writing such a cover letter for your readers, think about the fact that you will have to write such a letter if you plan to enter the academic job market. In most situations, you will be asked to provide a writing sample, which will have a specific page number. Usually, what they ask is shorter than a chapter, so you will have to contextualize that section in a way that invites your readers' understanding. Consider that writing this cover letter for your group will function as practice for your professional future.

In order to systematize and simplify the drafting of a cover letter, you can follow the template below.

Paragraph 1

Briefly set your writing context for your readers. Think about answering the following questions: what do your readers need to know about what comes before, so that they can understand the rhetorical situation of the text you're workshopping? Where does this particular section fit within your chapter? At what stage in the composition process is it? Is it a very first draft? A restructured third draft? Close to being submitted to your advisor? Have you already received any kind of feedback from your advisor? If so, what was it? Answering these questions allows your readers to participate more actively to your writing process, and they will be able to provide the feedback you desire.

Paragraph 2

Guide your readers toward your most pressing questions and concerns. Think about these questions: what would you most like to find out about this specific writing? What would most help you in revising this text? Remember that you are in charge of your writing, and your readers are not there to evaluate your work--they are there to help you reach a comfortable and confident level so that you can submit your writing to your advisor. This might be a good moment to share with your readers if you know of any recurring issues in your writing, that maybe former teachers or consultants made you aware of.

Paragraph 3

Briefly reflect on what's coming next. A dissertation is a complex writing endeavor, with a fractal logic. The logic you follow in the text you're workshopping must be situated in the overall logic of your chapter and dissertation. By sharing your bigger structure with your readers, you help them consider if the text you're sharing makes sense in your specific writing context, made up of what comes before and what's coming next. Your readers might provide you with useful comments on your overall logic. In short: where does the particular chapter you're working on fit within your dissertation?

This cover letter is an important tool to actively guide your readers to your questions and concerns. Don't be shy in asking for exactly what you feel you need.