

Applicants applying to any of the labs in CDASR should submit:

- a CV/resume
- A cover letter (one single spaced page) addressing:
 - Your interest in research
 - Previous relevant experience
 - Any relevant coursework
 - Anything else you would like us to know about you!

Resources

Please note that these resources are here for those who need a starting point. This is not an exhaustive description of every possible way to structure or write a cover letter.

What is a Cover Letter?

Many labs hiring RAs may ask for a cover letter. Cover letters are just as important as your CV/resume, as they allow you to expand on your skills, research interests, and explain why you would be a good fit for the lab you are applying to.

General Format of a Cover Letter:

- Introduction:
 - Start your first paragraph off by introducing yourself and stating the specific position you're applying to. This should be individually tailored to each position and each lab.
 - Briefly discuss your personal research interests and tentative future plans
 - Discuss why this lab and position are of specific interest to you:
 - Is there research going on in the lab that you find interesting? To identify recent work, search the PI's recent publications and consider mentioning one of these. Lab websites may also discuss active projects in the lab.
 - What skills do you want to learn?
- Body Paragraph(s)
 - Discuss any experiences or skills that you have and try to be as specific as possible
 - It is a good idea to read the job description, search for key attributes that the hiring team is looking for, and explain specifically how your prior experiences have helped to develop those skills/attributes.
 - Show, don't tell – Don't just say you have good communication skills or have experience working with a certain population, describe what you've done and what you've learned from these experiences.
 - Labs in the CDASR are often hoping to hire RAs with the following skills/experiences. No one applicant has all of these, but to whatever extent you have experience with any of these, it may be helpful to emphasize: Past research experience, including undergrad volunteer or paid work in faculty labs, lab courses, and senior thesis experiences.

- Experience with recruiting, consenting, or running participants through research studies.
 - Past work or volunteer experience in which you interacted with people with psychiatric disorders
 - Past work or volunteer experience in which you interacted with people with developmental disabilities
 - Quantitative skills: background in calculus, linear algebra, etc.
 - Computer skills, especially programming (Python, MATLAB, R)
 - Background in neuroscience, biology, physics, or chemistry (w/ lab)
 - Communication skills including verbally navigating potentially challenging interactions, interviewing, and writing skills
 - Attention to detail, multitasking, prioritization, ability to handle multiple demands in a fast-paced environment
- This is a great space to bring up any relevant coursework and to explain how this has helped shaped your interests.
- Conclusion:
 - End with talking about any skills or traits that make you a strong applicant (ex: team player, hardworking, open-minded etc.) and restate the lab and position you are applying to
 - You can thank them for reviewing your application or mention how you look forward to potentially working at the lab.

Extra Tips:

1) Depending on the position you are applying for, it is typically okay if you do not have extensive research experience. Be sure to highlight any experiences you have that make you an ideal candidate. Find a way to take the skills you have and make them applicable to the lab you're applying to. For example, if you had a leadership role in an extra-curricular activity as an undergraduate, describe in your cover letter how your role prepared you to coordinate a study and work on a study with a team.

2) Try to be as specific as possible about why you want to work with this lab. What was it about this lab in particular that drew you to apply?

3) RA positions often involve a lot of writing, and this is an opportunity for you to demonstrate this skill. Have someone proofread your letter and make sure that it is error-free. Write persuasively, describing how there is a match between your background and interests and what the PI is looking for when hiring an RA. Use good basic letter etiquette: use formal forms of greeting and sign-off, spell all names correctly, etc. You can read more about formal style for cover letters here:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/job_search_writing/job_search_letters/cover_letters_3_writing_your_cover_letter/index.html

Sample Cover Letters:

Below we share different cover letters from RAs in different labs within our center. These are cover letters used to apply to CDASR and highlight varying levels of research experience across applicants who were all selected for positions in our labs.

More cover letter help:

- <https://cogs.indiana.edu/student-portal/undergraduate/career-preparation/writing-a-cover-letter.html>

CV Resources

For more information and examples on formatting a CV please the resources below:

- https://psychology.unl.edu/psichi/Psi_Chi_Sample_CV.pdf
- https://www.psychologicalscience.org/members/apssc/undergraduate_update/undergraduate-update-summer-2013/how-to-write-a-strong-cv
- <https://www.psichi.org/page/092EYEWin05dLandrum#.X6Lwp5NKhjd>