How to Create Digital Letterhead for Your Department and Job Search

By Brian Croxall

We at ProfHacker are quite aware of the onset of the academic job market. That's why you've seen recent posts from Erin about the five things that helped her survive the job market and one from Heather about keeping track of job postings. (Don't miss Heather's call yesterday for your tips on managing the job application process.) If you dig a bit deeper into the ProfHacker archives, you will be able to find posts from Nels offering ways to stand out on the job search; from Erin on using an NFL analogy to explain the academic job market; and from me last May advising you to get started new (then?) on preparing for the job market.

If I had to pick just one tool that helped me survive the three runs at the academic job market that I've had, it would be Interfolio. As Julie wrote previously, using Interfolio to manage your professional documents takes a lot of aches away from what will no doubt be a stressful period of your life. My favorite thing about Interfolio was that I was able to finish a cover letter to a school, upload it to Interfolio, and have the whole dossier package processing within 5 minutes.

There's just one drawback to using Interfolio: you're not able to put your letter on your prestigious school's fancy letterhead. And believe it or not, the academy really does seem to care about prestige. What's more, your letterhead provides a tremendous cognitive shortcut — for good or ill — for your letter's readers. Whether it should matter or not, then, you want that letterhead there. But how do you go about your department's letterhead on an electronic document? After all, you can't simply scan the letterhead since it's difficult to use a word processor to write on top of an image.

It turns out that it's not all that hard to make your own digital letterhead template. In fact, it's so easy that it's on my list of six ways to make adjuncting more effective and fulfilling. Most adjuncts don't have a lot of spare time, so if they can do this, you can too. And even though the job market is bearing down on us, you still have time to put this advice to use. What follows are some basic tips for creating your own digital copy of your department's letterhead.

As a caveat, I'm going to be discussing how to do this in Microsoft Word. There are a lot of other word processors out there, including Scrivener, which is a ProfHacker favorite (just see Ryan's post "Scrivener, Scrivening, Scriverastic"). But it's hard to beat Word for ubiquity and compatibility across different computers. If there are better and easier ways to go about creating digital letterhead that don't involve Word, please let us know in the comments.

How to Make Your Own Digital Letterhead

1. **Make sure a copy doesn't already exist.** Although I stand by my claim that creating your own digital letterhead doesn't take too much time, you shouldn't spend time on a project that someone else has already done. Check with your department administrative staff to see if a digital letterhead already exists. Some very forward thinking departments even have their letterhead on their website, for faculty to quickly access. (I applied to a job at the University of Cincinnati three years ago, but I still remember that they had their letterhead available for all.) If your department administrative staff doesn't have electronic letterhead, that doesn't mean it doesn't exist. You might follow that conversation by checking with your campus brand management office.

2. **Find logos, colors, and fonts at your school's brand management office.** Your school will almost certainly use logos, colors, and fonts on its letterhead that someone who knows a whole lot about design has determined are effective. You don't want to go replacing those carefully planned touches with badly photoshopped images or Comic Sans. Fortunately, your school's brand management office will have most likely published a collection of logos for appropriate campus use. (I believe creating digital letterhead that mirrors official letterhead is a legitimate use of the school's branding materials. And my own schools' branding offices haven't had a problem with what I've done. While your
mileage might vary, it hopefully will not.) There’s a chance that the fonts used on the letterhead will not be part of Word’s standard collection, but branding offices almost always indicate which font is a suitable replacement.

3. **Prepare your Word document.** We all know that Word likes to take over formatting at the least opportune times. To head this off as much as possible, you should not do anything in your document until you’ve set the document so that its header and footer are "different" for its first page. (To reach this on a Mac, choose Format --> Document --> Layout. On a PC with Word 2007, choose the Page Layout tab --> Page Setup --> Layout.)

   ![Image of Word document settings](image)

   Setting the layout in this manner will prevent you from getting your letterhead material on subsequent pages. And if you try to check it later on, it will remove the material from your first page, which is exactly what you don’t want to have happen after the following step.

4. **Measure.** Grab a ruler and measure your physical copy of the letterhead. How far from the margins of the paper do the header or footer start? How far do they extend into the body of the paper itself?

5. **Arrange.** Once you’ve taken those measurements, it’s time to begin arranging the elements — the logos and the words — as best you can on the page. You will want to place all of the elements in the header and footer so you can use the body of the page without throwing off the letterhead’s placement. Do your best in guessing at placement, font sizes, and the like.

6. **Print. Arrange. Print. Repeat.** Once you’ve done your best at arranging all of the elements on the page, print yourself a copy. Compare yours to the original and jot down a list of the differences. How do the margins match up? How about the size of the logos or the fonts? Are any of the logos that you’ve used too grainy once they’ve been put to real paper? (This last is something worth considering because while you submit your materials digitally, they are almost certain to be printed out at some point.) If you’re using a light weight of printer paper, you should be able to simply hold it over the original — which will almost certainly be a heavier weight — and see through the transparency where the differences lie. **Before you make any changes to your file, save a new copy** (name it "v.2" or some way to distinguish the version). You will probably go through several iterations in this process, and you don’t want to be up a creek in case you decide a previous version was the best. Repeat this step until you’ve eliminated as many of the differences as you possibly can.

7. **Recognize that the perfect is the enemy of the good.** It can be tempting to work on this project until you’ve got a perfect match of the original campus letterhead. While you certainly do want to get close to the original, it’s worth remembering that those you are sending your letter to have probably never seen the original letterhead. And if they have, they’ve certainly got better things to do than double-check to see that yours matches the original — especially since they won’t know that you haven’t sent the original. Do what you can to make it usable and then let it go.

![Image of Gollum](image)

8. **Share.** If you’ve spent the time to make your own digital letterhead, you might be tempted to keep it all to
yourself. Try to overcome that urge and make it widely available to others in your program who are currently on the job market. Remember too: digital letterhead isn’t just useful for those on the job market. Increasingly, I have been asked to submit letters of recommendation for students via email or to an online repository. Having the digital letterhead allows me to give its added weight to my students’ application profile.

**Have you created digital letterhead for your own work? What can you share with our readers about your own process?**

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