

Cover Letter Self Review

Cover letters make an argument about your qualifications for the job that respond to the needs of the audience. Look at the job posting—what is the employer looking for? What skills, qualifications, experiences do you have that meets his/her needs?

Argument: claim/major premise (thesis)

- Supported by good reasons (answer the question ‘why’)
 - Supported by specific examples

Implicit Argument of a cover letter: *You should interview me for this position.*

Because...? **Good reasons:**

I have (will soon earn) a degree in Zookeeping. (Good reason #1)

I have previous experience doing xyz. (Good reason #2)

Support: Now talk about the above. Give specific examples that ‘prove’ your argument such as relevant classes, skills you have acquired, specific job-related experiences you’ve had.

‘Good reasons’—meaning the reason is good **for the audience (not the applicant)**

- ~~“This job will allow me to expand my skill set in abc and gain experience in xyz.”~~
- ~~This job pays really well, and the benefits are outstanding.~~
- ~~Your location is perfect.~~

The above lists great reasons for you to take a job, but they’re not good reasons for employers.

Genre Conventions:

Style: use a mostly direct formal style; minimal hedging, no passive voice, minimal ‘to be’ verbs; use 1st and 2nd person—talk to the reader directly: “my qualifications align well with your interests for this position” “I look forward to possibility of speaking with you about the position” (be direct, but polite)

Real examples in cover letters for academic jobs (each of these is too direct—the applicant comes across as arrogant):

- You will not find a better qualified candidate.
- My track record speaks for itself.
- I can take your writing program to the next level.

Letter format; use paragraphs for intro, body and conclusion.

- *Introduction*—2-4 sentences
 - State your purpose (“I am writing to apply for this job” or “I am writing to be considered for this position”)
 - Provide ‘background’ or contextual info about yourself that demonstrates why you’re a good fit for the position (“I will graduate with a B.A. in English in May 2015 with an emphasis in professional writing”)
 - Forecast your argument (“My internship at xyz company this fall as well as my education at the University of Delaware make me well qualified for the position”)

- *Body*— 2-3 good reasons with support (1-2 specific examples to illustrate); develop each good reason in a separate paragraph
 - State a good reason in the topic sentence.
 - Give your ‘best’ good reason first—what is the most compelling reason the employer should hire you?
 - (Generally speaking) include one paragraph about education and one paragraph about experience—you can also include a paragraph on specific skills (again, put strongest good reason first)
 - Go from broad (good reason) to specific example
 - Provide adequate support
 - Good Reason #1—support—give a specific reason that explains this
 - Good Reason #2 —support—give a specific reason that explains this

- *Conclusion*
 - Thank the reader (Thank you for considering my materials)
 - Provide contact info (Please contact me at xyz company to further discuss...)
 - Look to the future (I look forward to speaking with you...)

Common Mistakes:

- Applicant discusses why job is good for him/her
- Applicant fails to make an argument (does not use cover letter effectively)
 - Does not provide specific examples to back up claims (“I have experience as a technical writer. For instance, I worked at XXXX where I interacted with subject matter experts in producing technical reports, proposals, and user manuals. In producing these documents, I XXXX”)
 - Refers readers to resume without sufficient detail in the letter (the resume is ‘big picture’; it lists everything that you make qualified for the job; the cover letter explains the details you want to highlight).
- Applicant lists intangible skills without adequate support (the sentences below are claims—you can make any of these arguments, but provide support to back these up)
 - “I excel at problem-solving”
 - “I’m good at working with subject matter experts”
 - “I learn quickly, and I manage my time well”