

CRAFTING A PERSUASIVE JOB LETTER

The job letter is the first piece of writing your committee will read. They will read it before your writing sample, before your CV. If written well, it can make for a powerful first impression. To consider then: highlight your strengths. Shine a light where you want it to shine. If there are any weaknesses in your application, make a positive spin on them. (In the letter attached, for example, the candidate realized that her area of expertise could appear too specialized and thus estrange her from the department. In her conclusion, therefore, she shows how her work intersects with the work of several professors there and how she will engage with and build on the available resources at the University).

To Workshop:

- Underline the most important sentences of the/your letter. Were they easy to spot? Could they be better placed (at the beginning/end of a paragraph)? Do these sentences adequately highlight your strengths?
- Are there any weaknesses in your application that need to be addressed in the cover letter? If so, 'spin' them to your advantage.

STRUCTURE

While the content of job letters change, the format is fairly constant. Readers will expect the following:

1. Research: One-Two Paragraphs
2. Teaching: One-Two Paragraphs (length varies depending on whether the institution is a teaching or research institution)
3. Good Citizen/Service: One Paragraph

Note: Show in your final paragraph that you've thought about the specific department and how you can contribute to it. Show your readers that you can jump aboard and become an engaged colleague. If you are applying to a small department, it is best to be inclusive and not single out individual professors (that you want to work with). If you are applying to a very large department with sub-departments/programs, you may want to identify certain professors whose work intersects with yours—but this is not necessary.

To Workshop:

- Look at the order of your paragraphs (research/teaching). Move them as need be, given this guide.
- How specific is the final paragraph relative to the department you're writing for? Is this paragraph the same for all your letters? Does it sound fairly generic? Try one of these strategies:
 - a. Go back to the department website and see if you can capture its tone
 - b. If there are first person professor profiles on the site, see if you can match your language to theirs
 - c. Imagine yourself speaking to the committee and getting a chance to tell them how much you want to be there: try and convey this in the final paragraph.
 - d. Say something specific about the University in this paragraph: its museum, collections, Arts Initiatives, Art-related programs.

LANGUAGE

1. Because your committee will have your CV and Dissertation Abstract in front of them, it is critical that you not repeat language from these documents in your letter. The reason: you have limited space/words to show off your strengths/thinking. Use the letter to offer another, clear account of what you're doing. It may help to think of your Diss. Abstract as telling the story of your dissertation and the Job Letter as the elevator pitch, highlighting the most significant questions and discoveries.
2. Your readers will not be specialists in your area of expertise. They will include Deans as well as Professors. It is critical, therefore, that you describe the significance of your research in broad terms, in clear language.
 - Avoid Technical, Theoretical LanguageEnvision your reader as the most anti-theoretical professor to sit on a department, someone against all post-structuralist theoretical language and framing—and write for her.

To Workshop:

- **Identify the strongest sentences: writing that is clear and powerful and vivid.** When you get your writing back, identify the structure and language of these sentences and apply to this next step as you rewrite:
- **Underline all technical, theoretical language/jargon.** Rewrite the

entire sentence without using these words.

- Underline any sentences/phrases that were unclear—that you didn't immediately understand. Read intuitively for this step—don't read twice. When you get your writing back, simplify the sentence structure of these sentences and rewrite them for greater clarity.
- Pull up your CV and DA. If there is writing in the letter that repeats what is in these docs, underline and rewrite. Think of this as an opportunity to offer the clearest, most broadly appealing account of your research.

TONE/VOICE

While it is necessary to write in a professional tone, it is important to convey your voice. How can you avoid writing in a 'dry' style? Convey a sense of 'you' in your language, in your verbs, in your authentic enthusiasm.

1. The concluding paragraph can be an easy place to express your voice: Here you can convey your excitement, your eagerness to contribute to the institution and to the department.

To Workshop

- Read the letter and underline where you see evidence of someone –speaking-, where you get a sense of the particular person writing. Explain why in the margin. Then go back to your letter and see if you can add this voice in 2 more places, while still sustaining your professional tone.