Remember that my opinion on a cover letter tells you more about me than it does about the ideas and advice that that it contains.

In my humble opinion the cover letter is a chance to let someone get a personal glimpse into who you. It is a chance to set aside the formulaic prescriptive pattern of a bulleted resume. It is a chance to present yourself personally using your normal tone of voice, typical vocabulary, and sense of self.

It is a personal connection with the first tier of review.

Expect that it is not the hiring manager who will perform the first phase of vetting. The person who performs the first phase of review is who I imagine my cover letter is addressed to. It is fruitless to surmise who this person is, their background, their personality, their thinking, or what they are looking for, or how they might judge you, or your resume.

The one thing you can hope for and typically expect is that the cover letter will be read by a person not a machine. To that end I imagine I am talking to a person who is much more like me than different from me.

Imagine for a minute you meet someone you have only previously heard about and have some to respect and would really like to get to know. And imagine you have met in a casual setting, pretend your planes are both delayed four hours because of weather. You have no other place to be. A conversation starts and you seem to hit it off. What does that conversation sound like in your head? That is the conversational tone I try to emulate in a cover letter. I leave the formalities to the resume.

To get started see if the employer of choice has a blog, or find articles written by staff. Hear their tone and image that person is at the airport with you.

Paragraph One.

I think this is a given and does not need to be repeated. Try to connect on a personal note as quickly as possible.

Paragraph Two.

You can indicate how much you know about the institution here, or why you want to work there, but I typically expect that in the first phone interview, and reserve this space for telling him who I am not what I know about them.

Name dropping is tricky. You want to work it in sounding natural and not rehearsed as if you consider it a ticket. Just an example: *Jim Helton, an RN on your ICU, calls work “a culture of excellence”. He says the PI opportunities are fantastic.*

**I have extensive experience and skills that are relevant to this position.**

My advice here: show don’t tell. Don’t tell them their decision that you are qualified, show them who you are and let them see it for themselves. Don’t be a backseat driver.

Here is the place and time to present a powerful, personally revealing, business-value-oriented narrative of your professional life, growth, accomplishments and self-awareness.

EXAMPLE

PP1.

I began at ACME as a software tester, then lead tester. At one point I was testing 12 development tracks simultaneously. Eighteen months into that tenure I was asked to raise the visibility of defects to a wider audience. There were almost 100 developers in three countries and five locations and defects were being tracked in five different team-specific systems. I designed, wrote a Java-PL/SQL application, tested and brought to production a product that collected defect tickets from five repositories. Since they each had their own and different values for status, priority, and lifecycle, I had to develop a data model to normalize all the data from all the engineers so progress could be centrally monitored, resources realigned, schedules condenses and development cost lowered. This data engineering work became visible to a wide audience and I was asked to join the ACME BI Team.

PP2

On the BI Team, I verb……….., which has this outcome………., led to this value…….., and included this transition.

PP3

Repeat PP2 until current.

PP1 is admittedly long winded, and although not necessarily apparent to someone not in software development, moving from testing into development is like moving from apprentice to journeyman. It is a significant career step up in software development.

In most jobs you wear many hats and perform many different roles and achieve many different outcomes some big some small. What I try to focus my cover letter career narrative on are just the things relevant to the specific job title I am applying for. So here I did not mention all the other hats I wore over this 2 year period.