



Crafting Competitive Applications for Awards, Applications, & More

Any time you apply for an award, write a cover letter for a job, draft a personal statement for graduate school, answer a job interview question, or even give an “elevator pitch” about yourself or your work at a networking event, you are telling your story, to a particular audience, for a particular purpose. To make that story as compelling as possible you need to keep these things in mind:

Know your genre. How much “real estate” do you have to tell your story? A page, two pages, a sentence or two? How personal should be you in this genre? How much should you focus on professional information? What information can you gather from the ad/application instructions?

Know your audience. Who will be reviewing your application? What do you know about them? How can you find information about them?

Decide what makes you stand out to your audience. What is your audience looking for? Conversely, what might be a “red flag” to them?

Be concrete and provide examples. What are specific qualities or achievements that make you a competitive candidate? What examples can you include as evidence of those?

Think about structure and be selective. You’re not writing a chronological narrative, and you’re not providing an information dump—you’re selecting the most persuasive and compelling information about you and creating a structure that best showcases that information.