

Reflective cover letter

December 6, 20XX

Dear Professor Ashdown:

Addresses audience directly.

“Writing is difficult and takes a long time.” You have uttered this simple yet powerful statement so many times in our class that it has essentially become our motto. In just ten weeks, my persuasive writing skills have improved dramatically, thanks to many hours spent writing, revising, polishing, and (when I wasn’t writing) thinking about my topic. The various drafts, revisions, and other materials in my course portfolio clearly show this improvement.

Reflects on improvement.

I entered this first-quarter Writing and Rhetoric class with both strengths and weaknesses. I was strong in the fundamentals of writing: logic and grammar. I have always written fairly well-organized essays. However, despite this strength, I struggled throughout the term to narrow and define the various aspects of my research-based argument.

Analyzes overall strengths and weaknesses.

The first aspect of my essay that I had trouble narrowing and defining was my major claim, or my thesis statement. In my first writing assignment for the class, the “Proposal for Research-Based Argument” (1A), I proposed to argue about the case of Wen Ho Lee, the Los Alamos scientist accused of copying restricted government documents, but most of the major claims I made were too broad. I stated, “The Wen Ho Lee incident deals with the persecution of not only one man, but of a whole ethnic group.” You commented that the statement was a “sweeping claim” that would be “hard to support.”

Analyzes first piece included in portfolio.

After seeing the weaknesses in my claims, I spent weeks trying to rework them to make them more specific and debatable. I came up with so many claims that I almost lost interest in the Wen Ho Lee trial. Finally, as seen in my “Writer’s Notebook 10/16” (5A), I analyzed my argument and decided that I had chosen the Lee case as my topic in the first place because of my belief that the political inactivity of Asian Americans contributed to the case against Wen Ho Lee. Therefore, I decided to focus on this issue in my thesis.

Explains process of revising and strengthening claim.

While my new major claim was more debatable than previous claims, it was still problematic because I had established a cause-effect claim, one of the most difficult types of claims to argue. Therefore, I once again revised my claim, stating that the political inactivity did not cause but rather contributed to racial profiling in the Wen Ho Lee case. In 6C, 6D, and the final draft, I tempered the claim to make it more feasible: “Although we can’t possibly prove that the political inactivity of Asian Americans was the sole cause of the racial profiling of Wen Ho Lee, we can safely say that it contributed to the whole fiasco.”

I also had trouble defining my audience. I briefly alluded to the fact that my audience was a “typical American reader.” However, I later decided to address my paper to an Asian American audience for two reasons. First, it would establish a greater ethos for myself as a Chinese American. Second, it would enable me to target the people the Wen Ho Lee case most directly affects: Asian Americans. As a result, in my final research-based argument, I was much

Explains process of defining audience.

more sensitive to the needs and concerns of my audience, and my audience trusted me more.

The actual process of writing the essay was also important. For instance, when I wrote my first informal outline for the “Structure and Appeals” assignment, I had not yet put much of the research-based argument down on paper. Although the informal outline made perfect sense on paper, as I began actually to write my research project, I found that many of the ideas that were stressed heavily in the informal outline had little relevance to my thesis and that issues I had not included in the informal outline suddenly seemed important.

Reflects on how ideas changed with inclusion of research.

I hope to continue to improve my writing of research-based arguments. The topic that I am currently most interested in researching is Eastern medicine—a controversial topic, and one that interests a diverse audience. I plan to apply for undergraduate research funds to work on this project, and I will be able to use all of the argumentative firepower that I have learned in this class.

Concludes with future plans.

Sincerely,
James Kung