Annotated Postdoctoral Cover Letters | Fictional Examples

Two complete invented applications with editorial notes • No real university, applicant, grant or research result is represented.

The following letters are original teaching examples. Names, research projects, roles, previous experience and vacancy details are entirely fictional. The methods and letter structure illustrate good practice, not achievements the reader should claim.

Example 1 | First postdoc in materials chemistry (fictional)

Invented vacancy: Model Materials Institute is seeking a postdoctoral researcher to examine the repeatability of model catalyst measurements using sample preparation records, electrochemical methods and data quality checks. Required: completed or near-complete PhD; relevant experimental research; reliable documentation. This institution and vacancy do not exist.

Dear Selection Committee,

I am applying for the postdoctoral researcher position in experimental materials measurement at Model Materials Institute. I am completing a PhD in chemistry, where my dissertation investigates how sample preparation choices affect comparisons among model oxide materials. The project's focus on repeatability is close to the questions that have shaped my doctoral training.

For my dissertation, I prepared model samples using documented procedures and compared characterisation records across repeated experimental runs. I was responsible for maintaining the sample-preparation log and checking how procedural differences entered later data analysis. That work taught me to distinguish a plausible materials trend from variation introduced during handling and measurement. My dissertation analysis remains in progress, and I am completing a structured comparison of the recorded procedures before drawing final conclusions.

Your advertised project would let me extend this work to structured electrochemical comparisons. I have practical experience preparing oxide samples and interpreting characterisation records; I would be keen to learn the group's more specialised electrochemical validation methods. In the early stages of the project, I could contribute to careful workflow documentation while developing a better understanding of the research questions behind the group's measurement protocols.

Thank you for considering my application. I have included my CV and the contact details requested in the advertisement. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss how my experimental background could contribute to the proposed study.

Sincerely,

Nila Mehta (fictional candidate)

Editorial notes on Example 1

- The opening names a specific question and a clear connection to the invented project; it avoids generic praise.
- The evidence and fit paragraphs distinguish genuine responsibilities, thesis status, existing skills and methods the candidate wants to learn. Replace every invented claim in a real application.

Example 2 | Computational research postdoc (fictional)

Invented vacancy: Centre for Community Data Methods invites applications from postdoctoral researchers to analyse longitudinal education datasets, evaluate missingness and work with researchers from different disciplines. No such vacancy or institution is represented here.

Dear Selection Committee,

I am writing to apply for the postdoctoral research position at the Centre for Community Data Methods. My recent work has focused on the reliability of statistical conclusions when observational datasets contain incomplete and inconsistent records. The centre's proposed project on longitudinal education data interests me because its questions require both careful computational analysis and close attention to how data were collected.

In an illustrative earlier research appointment, I developed analysis scripts in R and Python for exploratory checks, model comparison and reproducible reporting. I worked with collaborators to document variable definitions and to flag records that needed further checking. My individual contribution was developing and testing the data-validation routines. This work gave me practice documenting modelling assumptions and explaining the limitations of the analyses to collaborators from different disciplines.

I would bring experience in version-controlled workflows and evaluation of modelling assumptions. I am also interested in learning the group's approach to longitudinal study design and stakeholder engagement. Before proposing a particular analysis, I would want to understand the dataset's permissions, missingness patterns and the research team's priorities. This would help me make a useful contribution without assuming that results or access can be guaranteed in advance.

Thank you for reviewing my application. I have submitted the CV, writing sample and referee details specified in the advertisement. I would welcome a conversation about the methods needed for this project and how my experience could support the team.

Sincerely,

Ari Sen (fictional candidate)

Editorial notes on Example 2

- The applicant demonstrates relevant skill through a specific responsibility, not a list of programming languages alone.
- The letter names the project's methodological risks, explains realistic fit and does not promise a result.
- The closing refers to the materials actually requested by this invented job; real applicants must verify their vacancy.

Before-and-after | Tailoring one paragraph

Both paragraphs below are invented. They illustrate how to replace a vague claim with evidence, not a claim of an actual project.

Weak generic draft

I am a highly motivated researcher with outstanding data science skills. I know I would be the perfect fit for your world-class team and deliver impactful, innovative results.

Specific revised draft

My recent work involved writing reproducible analysis scripts and checking inconsistent records in a collaborative observational dataset. That experience is relevant to your project's emphasis on documenting missing data and comparing models. I would like to build on those skills while learning more about longitudinal design from the research team.

What changed?

Removed	Added
Unverifiable claims of being "outstanding" and a "perfect fit"	A specific responsibility: reproducible scripts and records checking.
Generic praise for a "world-class team"	A named methodological connection: missingness and model comparison.
Promise of "impactful results"	An honest distinction between existing skills and goals for learning.

How to use these examples

Read the letter for its reasoning: why this specific project, why this applicant, what the evidence demonstrates and what needs to be learned. Do not reuse the names or research claims. A good postdoctoral application is a specific, verifiable explanation of fit—not a fictional biography.