

Chapter 3: The Application Packet for an Academic Position

This chapter outlines the process of applying for a job once you have located positions of interest, including:

- Researching the institution
- Developing a curriculum vitae
- Writing an academic cover letter
- Getting good letters of recommendation
- Dissertation abstracts, statements of research interests, and writing samples
- Teaching statements and teaching portfolios

RESEARCHING THE INSTITUTION

When you begin applying for academic jobs, it's important to research the university and the department (or laboratory) to which you're applying. Doing a little research can help you figure out whether the institution fits with your own career plans, and it can also help you narrow your job search. If teaching is your passion, then perhaps that high-powered research university isn't for you – perhaps that little-known liberal arts college is just what you're looking for.

Having done a little research on an institution also pays big dividends when it comes to writing cover letters, since it can help you tailor your cover letters and supporting documents to a particular institution.

Demonstrate your knowledge of an institution and the department to which you're applying and then connect it to your abilities as a researcher, teacher, and scholar. The additional knowledge you glean by researching institutions can only help you in interviews and campus visits, as it will demonstrate your enthusiasm for, and interest in, the institution. For advice on how to quickly get information about an institution that will be useful when deciding whether or not to apply, see the suggestions offered by Gene C. Fant Jr at:

<http://chronicle.com/article/What-If-Ive-Never-Heard-o/45565/>.

What to Look For

The goal of researching an institution is to find out what its departmental structure is like and what defines its curriculum so that you can make a case for how your talents address the needs of that particular department. The following questions are intended as a starting point for researching an institution. Your dissertation director and other faculty members in your department can offer more specific tips on issues you should consider when applying to particular institutions.

- What is the institution's personality? How does it imagine itself? Is the school a large university with an emphasis on research, or is it a smaller liberal arts school with an emphasis on teaching? Or, does it envision itself as some combination of these?
- Who's in the department? What are their areas of specialization and preferred methodologies? How might my areas of specialization add to the department?
- What is the department's size? How large is it relative to other university departments? What kind of funding does it get from the university?
- How many undergraduate majors does it instruct? Is it a popular major among undergraduates?

- What role does the department play in the overall undergraduate curriculum? What kinds of courses do non-majors in the department take?
- What is the nature of an undergraduate course of study in the department? What kinds of survey courses might you be asked to teach given the nature of its curriculum?
- Does it have graduate degree programs? What kinds of graduate courses might you be asked to teach? What kinds of courses could you teach to enhance or expand its graduate course offerings?
- Is the department affiliated with any interdisciplinary majors or research centers?
- What are the department's research objectives? How would your research complement or expand this research program?

Where to find information

- **The institution's website**

Learn about the history of the school, see who's on the faculty, peruse course offerings, and learn about the undergraduate curriculum. A great way to figure out how the institution views itself, its culture, and its place in academia.

- **Department brochures and catalogs**

Call the department or school you're applying to and ask for the information they give to prospective students. Many departments also have their own website with specific information on curricula, special programs, and individual faculty.

- **US News & World Report:** <http://www.usnews.com/>

Provides school rankings, class sizes, number of faculty, and other useful information.

- **Advisors and Faculty Members**

Talk to faculty in your department – chances are, if they don't know a particular department, they know other scholars who do and might be able to offer you an insider's scoop on what's going on in a particular department.

- **The Chronicle of Higher Education**

Posts information on salary surveys for faculty members at most institutions. For subscribers, The Chronicle offers a searchable database of faculty salaries at more than 1,700 institutions.

CURRICULUM VITAE

A Curriculum Vita, or CV, is a cumulative record of professional achievements, academic preparation, and qualifications in your discipline. It includes primarily research and teaching, as well as papers, presentations, awards, and professional contributions. Your CV is one of the most important parts of an application for academic jobs. However, your CV isn't the only part of your application: its main purpose is to secure an interview. A CV is organized to reflect an understanding of the needs of a particular institution or organization. We've developed the following guide for producing a CV.

Developing a CV

A CV is a multi-purpose, perpetually unfinished document. Since a CV is a cumulative record of your academic accomplishments and it's used for a variety of purposes, it's always evolving – you'll create new categories and add recent accomplishments; there is never a final version.

You might wonder, **how is it different than a resume?** A resume is used for non-academic positions. It is carefully tailored to the employer you are addressing: outside of academia. A resume is usually shorter, and includes skills, outcomes and accomplishments related to a specific job.

Uses for a CV

A CV is the most important academic job search tool. However, it has multiple uses beyond the faculty job search. A CV may also be used for:

- Grant/fellowship applications
- Merit or tenure review
- Awards
- Summer positions
- Publications
- Leadership positions
- Academic jobs
- Speaking engagements
- Sabbatical opportunities
- Research positions in industry
- Consulting

Getting Started

The first thing to know about CV development is that while there is no standard format, there are different conventions for every discipline. It is important to consult with faculty, students, and other colleagues to understand what is expected in your field. Don't get committed to one version or format! You may wish to focus your CV for a specific job or grant for which you are applying. As a result, you may find that you develop several versions of your CV. When drafting a CV, keep the following questions in mind:

- A CV is a targeted document: why are you using the CV?
- Type of institution matters: is it all about research, or do they care mostly about your teaching?
- Who is the reader? What do you know about the needs or interests of the employer?
- Length will vary with accomplishments, and purpose of CV use.
- Create new versions, with new categories, as your career progresses.

Sample CVs

Don't reinvent the wheel! See the CareerLAB website for sample CVs. Also consider asking younger professors and colleagues to see their CVs to get an idea of the various formats that are common in your field. There is no reason to hire anyone to write a CV for you. It is important to start a computer file and add entries as they happen. Revise regularly so you will always have an up-to-date document.

What Goes in a CV?

A word about honesty... It goes without saying that everything on your CV should be completely true and accurate. Even the slightest discrepancy can be damaging. Do not state that something has happened if it has not happened yet.

A Note on Style & Appearance

If your CV is dense and poorly formatted, and you make it difficult to read, you have not communicated what you want me to know. Unfortunately, busy people are looking for reasons to exclude applicants. Don't ignore presentation and style!

- Be consistent with grammar and formatting (bolding, font, etc.).

- Don't use abbreviations or course numbers that are specific only to your institution!
- Proofread, proofread, proofread! Spell-checking is good, but proofreading is better.
- In the business world, short resumes are preferred. There is no set length for CVs. It should be as long, but not longer, than necessary to reflect your achievements to date.
- Use white space, bolding, and indenting to make the CV easy to read.
- Put your name and page number at the top of page 2 and beyond.
- Use nothing smaller than 10 point font. Select one font and stick with it.

Content

Start with contact information: name, address, phone number, and email address. A few things to consider:

- Pick one telephone number where you want phone calls. Be sure to have a message that you would want employers to hear. If you prefer that fellow students or others not know about your calls, do not include a lab or office phone number.
- Generally, you should not include personal information such as social security number, marital status, date of birth, height/weight, gender, or dependents. Do not include a picture. Some employers (i.e., government organizations) might ask for inclusion of personal information.

Sections/Categories

The categories you include will depend on how far along you are or how much experience you have. The education section should come first. Include your degrees (most recent first), school name and location, dates, and any academic awards received at graduation. Categories that cover your research and teaching experience should come first, depending on the employer and what they are looking for. Separate academic teaching, research, or other experience from other related contributions, such as high school or community teaching.

Possible categories to use in your CV include:

- | | | |
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| • Research: Dissertation summary, Master's thesis, advisor, title | • Presentations/Posters | • University committees |
| • Research interests: future plans | • Conferences | • Undergraduate activity |
| • Research Experience | • Related teaching | • Professional affiliations |
| • Teaching Experience | • Related experience | • Honors/Awards |
| • Teaching interests | • Related research | • Fellowships/Scholarships |
| • Papers/Publications | • Other professional training | • Skills |
| | • Professional activities:
Sheridan Center, Grad rep GSC | |

In Summary

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|--|-----------------------------------|
| • Make it readable | • Proofread, Proofread, Proofread |
| • Remember who will be reading it | • Honesty, Honesty, Honesty |
| • Ask others to read it before you send it out | |

PRINT RESOURCES

The following titles also present wonderful advice on how to structure and format a CV.

- *Cracking the Academic Nut* by Margaret Newhouse (Harvard Faculty of Arts & Sciences, 1997)
- *The Academic Job Search Handbook, fourth edition* by Julia Miller Vick and Jennifer S. Furlong (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008)
- *How to Prepare Your Curriculum Vitae (How to Series)* by Acy Jackson and Kathleen Geckeis (McGraw-Hill Books, 2003)
- *The CV Book: Your Definitive Guide to Writing the Perfect CV* by James Innes (Pearson Education Limited, 2009)

ONLINE RESOURCES

The following websites and articles provide advice and resources that are useful for those preparing for a CV.

- UC Berkeley's Career Center provides students with a detailed guide to the elements of a CV and how to construct one: <https://career.berkeley.edu/Phds/PhDCV.stm>
- Columbia University's Center for Career Education provides links to sample CVs: <http://www.careereducation.columbia.edu/resources/tipsheets/resumes-and-cvs-curriculum-vitae>
- Stanford's Career Development Center provides a downloadable PDF files on the academic job search, including an overview of the academic job search, CVs, cover letters, and portfolios: <http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/cdc/resumes/cv>
- Search the Chronicle for CV or C.V. In an especially useful series called "The CV Doctor," experts revise submitted CVs and explain how and why they made the revisions they did.
- "Dr. Karen's Rules of the Academic CV" <http://theprofessorisin.com/2012/01/12/dr-karens-rules-of-the-academic-cv/>
- "Academic CVs: 10 irritating mistakes" <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/nov/01/academic-cv-job-10-mistakes>
- "Creating and Maintaining Your CV" <http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/creatingmaintaining-your-cv/26887>

For a CV critique, come to the CareerLAB for a personalized critique of your CV. To make an appointment, visit www.brown.edu/careerlab/advising.

WRITING AN ACADEMIC COVER LETTER

It is essential to include a cover letter with your CV. Also called a "letter of application" or a "letter of transmittal," the cover letter allows you to introduce yourself and provide a context for your CV. It's a chance to emphasize certain elements of your CV, show connections between your abilities and the needs of the department, and present a professional yet personal face to your application materials.

There is no standard format for an academic cover letter. The guidelines that follow are only meant to suggest the basic elements of a good cover letter. Students are encouraged to check with other students, faculty, and colleagues in their department to discuss conventions. Also, content and length will vary depending on the position you are seeking.

For academic positions, the cover letter should be tailored to each specific job. It should include a brief description of why you are interested in this particular job and why you think the search committee should be interested in you for this specific job. Search committees look for cover letters that indicate that the applicant knows something about the institution and is writing to apply for their specific job, not for any and every job. When possible, **address your cover letter to a particular person**, usually the head of the search committee or the chair of the department to which you're applying. If no contact was listed in the job announcement, call the department and ask to whom you should address all correspondence.

Cover letters for academic job applications are somewhat different from the standard cover letter you might use when applying for a job in business. The first paragraph explains why you are writing and where you learned of the position. Make sure to specify the position that you are interested in, as many institutions put out calls for multiple positions at the same time. State your interest in the position. It should be just a few sentences.

A good cover letter will show the employer that you are a good match for the position. Research counts! Knowing how to "read" the job ad, and doing your research about the institution, will help you figure out what to emphasize in your cover letter. The body of the letter will contain a summary of your research experience, and your teaching experience, depending on the job description. If you are applying to a research institution, you'll want to include a summary of your dissertation. If teaching is key, be sure to include information on your teaching experience. If the search committee is looking for colleagues who will contribute to their community as well as teach and research, mention the faculty committee you served on. In other words, use the body of your cover letter to match your abilities to the specific needs of the department or institution.

Finally, end with information about how you can be contacted. Reiterate your phone and/or email address. State that you are available for an interview.

Online Resources

- In, "The Basics of Cover Letter Writing," Richard Reis describes the characteristics of a good cover letter and illustrates with an example: <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Basics-of-Cover-Letter/46259/>
- In "How to Write an Appealing Cover Letter," you will find detailed advice and answers to common questions: <http://chronicle.com/article/How-to-Write-Appealing-Cover/46284/>
- In "What You Don't Know About Cover Letters," Mary Dillon Johnson highlights some overlooked areas of cover letter writing: <http://chronicle.com/article/What-You-Dont-Know-About/46129/>
- In "The Importance of Cover Letters in a Community-College Job Search," Dana M. Zimbleman highlights what recent PhDs should keep in mind when crafting a cover letter for a community college position: <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Importance-of-Cover/46090/>
- Berkely provides detailed advice for recent graduates writing cover letters at: <https://career.berkeley.edu/phds/PhDcover.stm>

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

When applying for academic jobs, you'll be asked to provide several letters of recommendation from faculty who can attest to your promise as a scholar. Depending upon the position you're applying for, you may be asked to supply anywhere from three to five letters. Job search committees will tell you that well-written letters of recommendation that speak, with a reasonable amount of detail, about a candidate's qualifications are crucial to securing interviews and job offers.

How to Get Good Letters of Recommendation

Aside from the obvious – being a stellar student with a first-rate dissertation and several conference papers and journal articles under your belt – there are many things you can do to ensure that you get quality letters of recommendation.

- Consider having several professors and colleagues write letters for you. Select referees who can speak to your different abilities, as teacher, scholar, and researcher. Your advisor and members of your committee may be best positioned to comment on the quality of your research and your potential as a scholar. A professor you have taught for and who has observed your teaching may be best qualified to write about your teaching abilities.
- Above all, it's important to communicate with the people who will be writing letters of recommendation for you. Let them know what kinds of jobs you're applying for, what your qualifications and career goals are, and why you've selected them to write a letter. (If there's one ability you'd like them to focus on, such as teaching or lab work, be sure to explain that to them.)
- Be organized enough to give your referees ample time to complete their letters before the application deadline. This means anticipating things like holidays and semester breaks. If you'll be going on the market in the fall semester, it's often best to meet with your letter writers the spring before.
- Be sure to send thank you notes to those who take the time to write letters of recommendation for you.

Online Resources

- Berkeley's Career Center outlines what makes a good letter of recommendation, addresses how to get a good letter, who to ask, and other frequently-asked questions:
<https://career.berkeley.edu/Phds/PhDletters.stm>
- In "Getting Great Letters of Recommendation," Richard Reis highlights how graduate students can ensure that their letters of recommendation stand out from the rest:
<http://chronicle.com/article/Getting-Great-Letters-of/45570/>

DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS, RESEARCH STATEMENTS, AND WRITING SAMPLES

Whether you're applying for a postdoctoral research position or a tenure-track faculty job, you'll probably be asked to submit either a dissertation abstract or a statement summarizing your research interests (the former is more common in the Humanities, the latter in the Sciences). As we've already said in our discussion of CVs and cover letters, conventions of a research statement or dissertation abstract will vary from discipline to discipline, so consult with your dissertation director and other faculty in your department to find out what the conventions are in your field. Below we've summarized some of the main features and important differences in these supporting documents. **Be sure to proofread all written materials you send as part of your application!**

Dissertation Abstracts and Statement of Research Interests

With the dissertation abstract, your goal should be to stimulate enough interest and enthusiasm about your work to convince a hiring committee that you are their leading candidate. The dissertation abstract therefore should make a persuasive and memorable argument, and provide a clear and highly polished discussion of how your work contributes to the field. It is far more than just a summary of your dissertation research. It should outline the main arguments of your dissertation and situate them in relation to your discipline as a whole. Stress the arguments and results of your work, not hypotheses and conjecture. A dissertation abstract should,

above all, be accessible to generalists in your field, while still highlighting your contribution to a particular field of study within your discipline. Harvard University also provides clear advice for writing a dissertation abstract here: http://www.gsas.harvard.edu/current_students/academic_positions.php#diss_abstract

While a dissertation abstract is a one-to-two-page summary of the dissertation, a research statement, more common in the Sciences and Social Sciences, should emphasize the trajectory of your recent and future research. It should also draw a connection between the work you've already done, either as part of your dissertation or in lab/fieldwork, and your plans for future research. That is, a good research statement explains why your current project is important and demonstrates that your future research will follow logically from what you have done, and that it will be different, important, and innovative. You may also indicate how your research interests fit into work others have done. Be sure to present your research history and future research plans in terms accessible to generalists in your discipline.

Online Resources

- The Science Education Resource Center at Carleton College outlines the purposes of a research statement and provide advice on how to tailor the research statement to a particular job:
http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/careerprep/jobsearch/research_statement.html
- Career Services office at the University of Pennsylvania provide a useful powerpoint on “How to Write an Effective Research Statement:”
http://serc.carleton.edu/files/NAGTWorkshops/careerprep/jobsearch/research_statement.ppt
- Another useful PowerPoint, from Armand Tanguay, Jr. at the University of Southern California, can be found at: http://cet.usc.edu/resources/academic_resources/docs/res_statement_apr05.pdf

Writing Samples

As part of your application you will, in all likelihood, be asked to submit a writing sample. The writing sample provides a search committee with an in-depth picture of how you think and argue, as well as your ability to express your ideas in lucid prose. Do not underestimate its importance. If you have a published article, you may wish to use that as your writing sample. Or, you may wish to choose a chapter from your dissertation. It should be noted here, that, for the reasons stated above, search committees often like to see a chapter from the body of your dissertation, which represents the nuts and bolts of your research, and not the introduction or conclusion. If you submit a chapter from a dissertation, you may wish to include a short explanation of where the chapter fits in the overall structure and argument of your dissertation. Again, consult with your dissertation director and readers about what kinds of writing or which dissertation chapter would provide the best writing sample.

Additionally, Hazel Gold, of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Emory University suggests, “[a] very recent or soon-to-be PhD ought to consider sending a dissertation chapter with a table of contents so readers will understand where this fragment fits into the project in its entirety...When choosing a writing sample, make sure it is relevant to the position for which you are applying. If the department is looking for a medievalist, don't send a piece on contemporary fiction simply because you've written or published one. Departments want to see how you negotiate the texts and critical and theoretical polemics of the particular field for which they are hiring. This is especially important for ABDs; sending an essay unrelated to your field of specialization may raise suspicions that you have not made significant progress toward completion of the dissertation”

(http://www.mla.org/job_dossiers#sample). Additionally, Julie Miller Vick and Jennifer S. Furlong, provide further advice on selecting the best writing sample: <http://chronicle.com/article/Writing-SamplesTeaching/125726/>

TEACHING STATEMENTS AND TEACHING PORTFOLIOS

When you apply for academic jobs, many institutions will ask for a teaching portfolio or statement of your teaching philosophy. Even if you aren't asked to submit either of these, discussions of pedagogy often crop up in academic interviews. As a result, it's important to learn how to highlight the teaching you've already done, talk about your pedagogical preferences, and suggest potential courses you'd teach. This can be particularly important for interviews at small liberal arts colleges that place an emphasis on teaching undergraduates.

A fantastic resource for Graduate Students who want to perfect their teaching skills is the Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning at Brown! www.brown.edu/Administration/Sheridan_Center/

The Sheridan Center offers the following:

- **Teaching Certificate Programs**

- The Sheridan Teaching Seminar: Certificate I Program: A year-long series of seminars and workshops on basic pedagogical issues and practices.
 - The Classroom Tools Seminar: Certificate II Program : A year-long multi-session seminar exploring advanced pedagogical tools for reaching the broadest possible learning population.
 - The Professional Development Seminar for Advanced Graduate Students: Certificate III Program: A year-long multi-session seminar focused on key elements of preparing a Teaching Portfolio and other critical aspects of professional development to help prepare participants for the academic job market.
- **Seminars** including the Brown-Wheaton Teaching Laboratory in the Liberal Arts, teaching in Summer Studies, and creating and grading meaningful writing assignments across the disciplines.
 - **Individual Teaching Consultations** including Individual Teaching Consultation and Presentation Consultation.
 - **Pedagogical Resources** including a Resource Library, electronic pedagogical workshops on syllabus construction and cognitive diversity, teaching handbooks, as well as links to other teaching resources.

Online Resources

- Rachel Narewood Austin details elements of a teaching statement that can help, or hurt, your chances of landing an academic position at: http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_magazine/previous_issues/articles/2006_04_14/writing_the_teaching_statement
- In “4 Steps to a Memorable Teaching Philosophy,” James M. Lang highlights ways to write a statement of teaching philosophy that doesn't sound like everybody else's.
- Here Gabriel Montell outlines how to go about starting the process of writing a statement of teaching philosophy – even if you do not think you have a teaching philosophy: <http://chronicle.com/article/How-to-Write-a-Statement-of/45133/>
- The University of California, Berkeley provide detailed advice on each aspect of the teaching portfolio: <https://career.berkeley.edu/phds/PhDportfolio.stm>
- The Teaching Center at Washington University in St. Louis provides useful questions to think about when writing a statement of teaching philosophy and links to other resources: <http://teachingcenter.wustl.edu/writing-teaching-philosophy-statement>