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Early Career Development Workshop:

COVER LETTERS

Objectives: create an instantly memorable 'personal brand'
demonstrate your fit for the position

Name, current status, position applied for	
Any non- professional reason you would be a perfect fit?	<i>e.g. you are an alumnus, your family lives in the area, etc.</i>
Research highlights (1-2 paragraphs) <i>NB: reverse the order of Research and Teaching for teaching-intensive institutions</i>	<i>How you complement or enhance existing faculty expertise; ≤1 paragraph on doctoral work; 1-2 sentences on other published work and/or other current and future projects</i>
Teaching highlights (1 paragraph)	<i>Courses that are mentioned in the job description, that you've taught, that you'd like to teach; any honors or other qualifications</i>
Service highlights (1 paragraph)	<i>Events/programs organized, membership or leadership in professional or community organizations</i>
Something distinctive about the department	<i>How you would contribute to departmental undergraduate societies, outreach programs, etc.</i>
Concluding summary of dossier	

<https://theprofessorisin.com/2016/08/26/why-your-job-cover-letter-sucks/>

"So, anyone reading this now, here is why your cover letter sucks, and what you need to do to fix it.

1. It Is Too Long. And 1a. It's Not on Letterhead. And 1b. It must follow proper letter norms of etiquette

Your letter must be on letterhead if you have a current academic affiliation of any kind. This is not negotiable. It has come to my attention that some departments are denying their graduate students access to letterhead. This is unacceptable, and any act is justified in response. You may steal the letterhead. You may Photoshop the letterhead. Do what you must, but send all professional letters of every kind on the letterhead of the department with which you affiliated.

If you do not have an affiliation because you finished your Ph.D. and have no academic employment at all, including adjuncting, then you must submit without letterhead (although a very sober, understated, and proper personal letterhead can sometimes be a nice touch). You may not use letterhead to which you're not entitled. That is unethical, and it is also stupid, because your readers are smart, and they notice.

Your letter must be two pages max. No longer. Do not argue with me. If you are arguing with me, you are wrong. It must be two pages max.

It must be 12 point (ok, *maybe* 11.5) font, and have a minimum of 3/4" margins.

It must follow normal letter etiquette, which means that it will include the date (fully written out) just under the letterhead, then a space, then the full snail mail address of the person/committee to whom the letter is being sent just below the date, left justified, and then a space, and then the address: "Dear Professor XXXX/Members of the Search Committee:" Then it will have another space, and commence: "I am writing in application to the advertised position in XXX at the University of XXXX. Etc. Etc." Nothing in this heading material may be left out. Similarly, nothing beyond this may be added in, including any kind of memo heading or title such as "Re: position in XXX." LETTERS DO NOT HAVE TITLES!

Why must it be these things? I will tell you. Because the care you show in the norms and forms of proper letter etiquette represent you as a fully adult, functioning professional. It demonstrates that you are a full-fledged member of the tribe, and not an embarrassing wanna-be.

And the length? Because the faculty members on the committee reviewing your letters are tired, distracted, irritated, and rushed. They will give your cover letter 5 minutes. They will not hunt for your main point, they will not squint, they will not strain their eyes, they will not pore over it.

Serve up your brilliance, your achievements, and your delightful collegial personality loud and clear, in legible large font, and a considerate quantity of verbiage. You are respecting your future colleagues' time and eyesight, and believe me, they notice.

Do I hear whining, that you "can't possibly say all you need to" in 2 pages? Tough. Do you want a job or don't you? Do it.

2. You Are Telling, Not Showing.

All academics in the world, by virtue of being academics, require evidence to accept a proposition. Even the wooiest humanists have to be persuaded with some form of evidence that a claim is valid.

Your letter must include evidence. Empty claims like “I am passionate about teaching,” or “I care deeply about students,” or “I am an enthusiastic colleague” contain no evidence whatsoever. They can be made by anyone, and provide no means of proof. They are worthless verbiage.

Show, don't tell: Instead of “I am passionate about teaching,” you must write, “I used new technologies to create innovative small group discussion opportunities in my large introductory classes, technologies that were later adopted by my colleagues in the department.” Or, “I worked one on one with students on individual research projects leading to published articles. Several students later nominated me for our campus's “Best Undergraduate Teacher” award, which I won in 2011.”

Get it? Don't waste our time with unsubstantiated and unsubstantiatable claims.

3. You Drone On and On About Your Dissertation

We actually don't care about your dissertation. Seriously, we don't. Your dissertation is in the past. It's in the past even if you're actually still writing it. It's what you did *as a student*, and we're not hiring a student. We're hiring a colleague....

4. Your Teaching Paragraph is All Drippy and Pathetic

5. You Present Yourself as a Student, Not a Colleague

6. You Don't Specify Publication Plans

7. You Don't Have a Second Research Project

8. You Didn't Do Your Homework

9. You're Disorganized and Rambling

10. You Didn't Tailor

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Early Career Development Workshop:

INTERVIEWING

Objectives: use questions to direct attention to your strengths
demonstrate your fit for the position

Interview question on research:	<i>Be ready to summarize your doctoral work in 3-5 minutes</i>
Interview question on teaching:	
“Do you have any questions for us?”	<i>Demonstrate that you know what the institution is about, and what distinctive contributions you plan to make</i>
Interview question:	
Interview question:	
Interview question:	

<https://career-advice.jobs.ac.uk/jobseeking-and-interview-tips/top-5-academic-interview-questions-and-answers/>

1. Why do you want to work here?

Bad answer: ‘Because I desperately need a job’

This is a tough one. What they are asking for is some thoughts on what you have seen and heard about the way they do things that make you want to work for them. The emphasis in the question is on the word ‘here’. So, to answer this question you need to know a lot about the university and the department. Look at the person specification for the job. If they are obviously looking for someone who is a good teacher rather than an international researcher, answer this question by prioritising teaching.

Good Answer: ‘I wanted to move to an institution like this that prioritises good teaching practice and dedicated pastoral care of students. I believe I can offer this because of [x and y examples of experience from your previous career].’

2. What makes you different from the other candidates?

Bad answer: 'Um, they all seem to be much more confident and professional than me and I am very intimidated'

This question is not requesting that you attack the character of your fellow candidates or compare yourself negatively to them. It is short-hand for 'why should we hire you?' or 'why are you special?' Again think about the **person specification** and make sure you know what sort of academic they are looking for. Tailor your own responses to that as much as possible. Make sure you give examples from your own history to support your assertions. So, for example, if it is an up and coming department looking for a high-flying researcher to boost their reputation, emphasise your role in this. If there is anything you do that makes you stand out, for example a skill or area of experience, mention that here too.

Good answer: Although I am an all-rounder and could contribute to departmental life in many ways, I know that I have the international research profile that you are looking for. [Go on to give details of books and articles written, prizes won etc.]

I also think I am unique in that I have direct experience of running online courses and would be happy to take a lead on introducing that here if colleagues were interested.

3. What are your plans for research?

Bad answer: 'Not sure. I have been so caught up with trying to find work that I haven't thought about it.'

This question is obviously asking you to look forward to the future, so drawing up one year, five year and ten year research plans is helpful before going into an interview. (If you are completing a PhD and looking for your first job this might sound a little excessive, but believe me, it will make you stand out and be taken seriously). They will not just want to hear about the topics you wish to cover but will crucially be interested in two other areas: research funding and your output (i.e. publications). As well as telling them about your exciting projects, tell them how you're going to pay for them (which grants you will apply for) and what published benefits there will be in concrete terms. Aim high at this point; you don't want to sell yourself short. You *can* write that monograph or get an article into a world-renowned journal. The scope of your ambition will help to sell you as the ideal candidate here, so don't worry about sounding arrogant.

Good answer: 'in the next year I will be finishing up the revisions on my manuscript for *x book* which is due for publication on *x date*. I have several other projects on the go that I wish to pursue after that [give details]; if my **funding applications** to the *x* and *y* grant bodies are successful I should be able to see those projects to publication by [give date].'

4. What courses could you offer to teach?

Bad answer: 'I am so desperate for a job that I will teach anything you ask me to'.

You want to seem keen and flexible and show that you are happy to fit in with the department's teaching requirements but they also want to hear about new courses that you would like to offer. In order to answer this question, you need to look at the department's current undergraduate curriculum. That way you can be sure the courses you have invented will fit in with what they offer now. So if the department already has a course on Nazi Germany, do not propose to offer a new one. You have to be careful here: do not let your creativity run away with you. If you do get the job, your new colleagues might say 'I loved that course you proposed in your interview, can you run it next year?'

Make sure you suggest something that you could feasibly teach, preferably based on your previous experience. Think about whether you would offer it in the first, second or third year,

and briefly state what some of your teaching exercises and assessment strategies might be. If you can make use of technology then mention that too.

Good answer: 'I would be happy to contribute to some of the existing courses you run, such as x and y but I also have a few ideas of my own that I feel would appeal to students in the x year of their education. [Describe the course] I feel that it would fit into your curriculum particularly well because it complements your other courses in x field but is unique because it covers an earlier time period or uses different resources [examples].

5. How would you contribute to the administration of the department?

Bad answer: 'Don't you dare find me a time-consuming admin job to do. That's not why I became an academic!'

Here they want you to talk about your past admin experience if you have any, and to show your enthusiasm for this side of things! Fake it if you have to. Pretending that you are desperate to become the new admissions officer will help you to get the job if that's what they are looking for. If you have experience of running your own courses, managing an entire programme, or doing a specific administrative task then mention that. If you can, give an example of a contribution or innovation that you instituted in that role. If you are at the very start of your career then simply show even more enthusiasm and emphasise the transferable skills that are vital in these roles, i.e. being efficient, well-organised and a good communicator.

Good answer: 'I look forward to having the opportunity to fully contributing to the life of the department. I have a special interest in the area of admissions/ exams/head of year etc'. I had some experience in this role at my last institution and realised that I have the skills necessary to do it well [name them] and actually implemented changes to their policy on x. However, I realise the need for flexibility here and would happily take on the challenge of any administration role that would suit my level of expertise.

<https://theprofessorisin.com/2015/11/16/the-dreaded-fit-question-comes-first-by-kellee-weinhold/>

"Why do you apply for this job?" is the oblique way of asking "Why do you think belong here?" Which is basically demanding, "Prove to us that you fit the hole we are trying to fill and that you're just like us." Because that's really what anyone who is looking for in a colleague: someone who solves the problem that they have and also won't freak them out.

As the client wisely notes, your preparedness for this question is even more important given that a significant percentage of our clients report that this is the FIRST question of the interview.

Here is the four-point, "you do...I do... approach" that I use with my interview intervention clients:

Address the question of fit in four areas 1) the department 2) the faculty 3) programs, initiatives and institutes in the department and on campus 4) the classroom.

Think of each area as a bucket that you are filling with information and are prepared to pour out no matter which way the question comes.

Structure the answer for each as a comparison between the department and you and your contribution. In other words, “You (department) do this and I do this.”

Here’s an example, which I assume you know by now not to use word for word or run the risk of being TPII cookie-cutter material.

1) I am particularly interested in this department because of its commitment to examining media communications from a global perspective, challenging the western media normative model, which I’m doing my own work by examining media portrayals of race and class in the coverage of labor unions in the US and Chile.

You will note, I did not say that I fit. I did not say that I would be a good addition. I simply said you do this and I do this. You want to follow the same pattern with each of the other buckets.

2) I see interesting intersections with my work and [Margaret Smith] (not Professor Smith! first name-last name) and her work on gender normativity and social media.

3) I would look forward being involved with your Institute for Racial Justice, which is examining many of the same issues that I have in my work with XXX

4) I look forward to teaching your courses in X and Y and bringing my expertise in Z to the XXX classroom.

Got it? Four buckets: you do this...I do this....

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Early Career Development Workshop:

ALT-AC

Objectives: identify your transferrable skills
translate skills into qualifications for the position

The Simple Way to Translate Your Skills From Your PhD to a Non-academic Job

by

[Kristine Lodge](#)

Updated

10/16/2020

1. Make a List of What You Like to Do

Something inspired you to go back to school. Maybe it was the desire to become a subject-matter expert. Maybe you loved learning and sharing ideas. Maybe it was writing. Whatever it was, that motivation was unique to you. Make a list of everything it is that you *like* to do in your current role.

If you feel stuck or overwhelmed, start with answering these two questions:

1. What do you love doing every day?
2. What lights you up and inspires you to keep working through setbacks and frustrations?

For example, do you love helping students learn calculus? Or, presenting your results to an audience of specialists? Or, coming up with ideas and persuading people to agree with you?

If so, your list might look like this:

- Finding ways to explain math concepts to students that make sense to them
- Creating visuals of my data that are engaging and get my audiences talking
- Understanding my audience so I can create arguments that appeal to them and make them more likely to agree with me

2. Turn Those “Likes” Into Skills

Once you have a list of concrete things you do that you love, break down the [transferable skills](#) behind them. What does teaching calculus require, for example? What do you need to be good at to present complex information?

Keeping those same “likes” from above, here’s what you would turn those into:

- Can break down complex ideas into parts
- Can come up with creative ways to explain information
- Can speak in front of a large audience
- Can communicate information in a variety of ways (visually, verbally, and on paper)
- Can persuade people to see a different viewpoint

Once you’ve written them down, do you see any patterns? In the list above, you can see that creativity, communication, and the ability to teach and persuade are part of multiple activities. You’ll find your unique set of skills popping up when you write your own list.

3. Start Talking to People in Your Desired Field

Once you have this list, the next question becomes: How do you know if those skills translate into a job?

That's when it's time to schedule some [informational interviews](#). Reach out to people who have jobs you're interested in, and ask them to describe the skills they use in their jobs or what skills they think are most valuable.

These can be friends, friends of friends, people you've met at events, or complete strangers you've come across on LinkedIn. Even if you're not super close or they seem intimidating, it never hurts to ask for 20 minutes of their time ([here's how to do it right](#)).

4. Put it All Together on Your Resume

Now that you've done some research and you know what skills motivate you and you want to use in your next role, it's time to put those on your resume. Put the skill on your second list together with the experience you identified in your first list.

For example:

Graduate Assistant, University of Tampa, Tampa, FL, 2017–Present

- *Identify examples of how we use Calculus in daily life to teach non-math majors basic concepts*

- *Create infographics that tell a story to better educate my audiences on math literacy challenges*
- *Co-authored a grant to create a new math literacy program for second graders that was fully-funded*

5. Make it Compelling for Your Interview

Then, the experiences you have above can be turned into great interview answers.

For example, if you're asked an interview question about solving problems or overcoming challenges, you can talk about how you convinced students that they can learn math, despite their initial doubts. If you're asked about your communication skills, you can explain why you chose that specific grant to apply for and what research you did to craft an application that was persuasive.

Once you nail down your transferable skills, you'll have all the material you need for great interview stories that are grounded in your real experience and will make sense to a non-academic audience.

Your PhD program helped you develop a unique skill set that can be used widely outside academia. Once you put some work into identifying the skills and experiences that motivate you, you'll successfully translate them from your graduate work to other industries. And, you'll be able to talk confidently about them to all kinds of people—relatives, people you meet at networking events, and, of course, hiring managers.

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Early Career Development Workshop:

RESOURCES

Cover Letters

<https://theprofessorisin.com/2016/08/26/why-your-job-cover-letter-sucks/>

Interviewing

<https://career-advice.jobs.ac.uk/jobseeking-and-interview-tips/top-5-academic-interview-questions-and-answers/>

<https://theprofessorisin.com/2015/11/16/the-dreaded-fit-question-comes-first-by-kellee-weinhold/>

Publishing

Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks, by Wendy Belcher

<https://wendybelcher.com/writing-advice/writing-your-journal-article-in-twelve/>

Alt-ac

<https://www.themuse.com/advice/transerable-skills-phd-nonacademic-job>

<https://philosopherscococon.typepad.com/blog/alt-ac-workshop/>

Job Listings

<https://philjobs.org/>

<https://www.jobs.ac.uk/>

Other

<https://philosopherscococon.typepad.com/> general resources for early-career philosophers

<https://tatp.utoronto.ca/teaching-toolkit/teaching-dossier/preparing-teaching-dossier-guidelines/> often required in North America

<https://theprofessorisin.com/2017/09/29/please-sir-i-want-some-more-employment-applying-for-uk-jobs-part-i-the-lay-of-the-land/> overview of UK academic market