



<http://www.uicwisest.org/>

WISEST INITIATIVES / POSTDOCTORAL PROGRAM

The Post-doc Institute

Preparing an Application Package

Cynthia J. Jameson

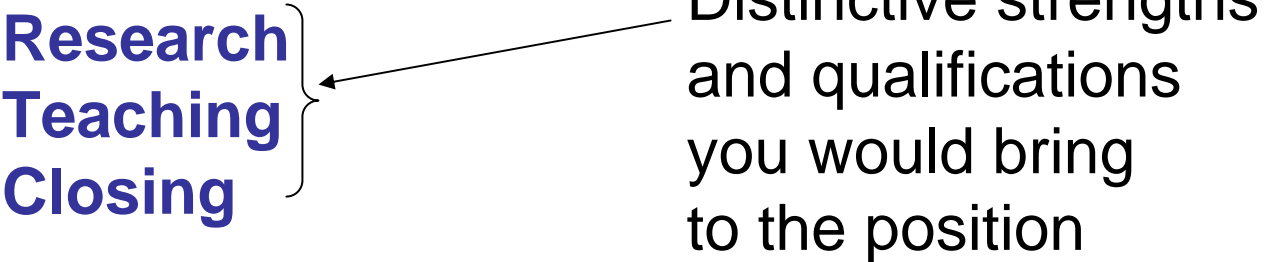
Application Package

- **the cover letter**
- the CV
- the reference list
- the research plan
- the teaching statement
- the small college

the cover letter

Introduction
Research
Teaching
Closing

Distinctive strengths
and qualifications
you would bring
to the position



the cover letter

- should contain a clear statement of your research and teaching interests, and how your qualifications match the requirements of the job description
- tone should be that of a confident professional
- should not exceed a page and a half or two at the most
- the more your profile diverges from the specifics of the job description, the more likely you will want to say more about why you are nonetheless a strong candidate

the cover letter: introduction

- identify the position you are applying for by rank and sub-field in the first sentence or two, how you learned about it
- if you had an excellent conference interview (“meet the faculty candidates”), make reference to it, including the names of the faculty with whom you spoke
- if one of the faculty encouraged you to apply, mention the name

the cover letter: research

- frame your research in terms of your sub-field and discipline
- note the recognition your work has received in the form of competitive grants, awards, publications in refereed journals, and/or presentations at major conferences
- future direction of your research

the cover letter: teaching

- teaching awards you have won
- If your profile does not correspond exactly to the job description, but you believe that you could nonetheless teach the required courses, explain the basis for your confidence
- how you would fit into and enhance the department's offerings, how you would strengthen them as a department

for small liberal arts colleges

- a sincere interest in working closely with students matters.
- advising, participating in non-academic activities, watching your students grow and mature inside the classroom and out, if you value these broader elements of being a professor, let them know.
- if you have taught, or have been an undergrad in a small college, mention it
- if your own experience has been limited to large universities, think about describing an episode where you had a positive impact on the development of a student and the satisfaction you derived from helping him or her

... [more in the small college.ppt](#)

the cover letter: closing

- a sentence where you list the materials you have enclosed (e.g., CV, transcripts, research statement, teaching statement, etc.) and are having sent separately (letters of recommendation)
- if traveling for any significant portion of the job search season say how they can contact you (e-mail, cell phone)
- thank you for your consideration

what is wrong with this cover letter?

- some examples

Application Package

- the cover letter
- **the CV**
- the reference list
- the research plan
- the teaching statement
- the small college

The CV at the winnowing stage

- First task facing members of the search committee: to winnow the stack of files received to the select few, that they will actually read with care. At this stage, **20-30 seconds of initial scanning** is about all you can expect. They are not yet looking for who they might want to interview, rather whom they can safely discard.
- Your CV should **make it as easy as possible** for them to see the strengths and qualities you would bring the position so as to not go into the “discard” pile.

the CV

- **Organization:** your information is presented in a manner that highlights what is most relevant and pulls the reader's eye directly to it, rather than making him/her search for it
- **Clarity:** use of concise, unambiguous language and formatting options that help the reader easily assimilate the information you want to convey
- **Consistency:** a uniform “look” (formatting: bold, bullets, fonts, spacing)

Present early what is your most complimentary information

- Academic institutions vary in their missions and objectives; tailor the order of presentation to different audiences:
- when applying to a **small college**: highlight your teaching experience and commitment.
- when applying to a **research university**: emphasize your research, publications, presentations, and awards.

what is wrong with this CV?

- some examples

Application Package

- the cover letter
- the CV
- **the reference list**
- the research plan
- the teaching statement
- the small college

Application Package

- the cover letter
- the CV
- the reference list
- **the research plan**
- the teaching statement
- the small college

reference letters: whom should you ask?

the research plan

- the research plan contributes to your development as a scientist
- your research plan is a map for your career as a research science professional
- role in your application package:
 - ▷ to demonstrate your intellectual vision and aspirations
 - ▷ to begin to demonstrate the creative and independent thinking required of a successful scientist

choose an important subject

- a subject you are passionate about
(necessary, but not sufficient)
- a manifestly important goal; convince reader that this work is important

manifestly interesting, feasible approaches

- be specific: including only as much detail as the job requires--not more; superfluous details are the hallmark of a poor plan or bad writing
- keep it short and focus on the major themes
- identify your goals, state why those goals are important, define your approach to achieving those goals, and indicate the kinds of evidence that will validate your approach

these will get your application to the discard pile

- if the proposal confuses the reader in almost any way, it is simply tossed out
- jargon is very annoying to those not in your specific subfield and alienates the search committee
- vague generalities
- 'building castles in the sky' research plan, not built on solid data

solid, well-considered realistic plan

- preliminary data offer most convincing argument for viability of your research plan
- two or more compelling approaches all of which have good chance of success, is better than only one
- build on the prior experience of the applicant but are not direct extensions of their postdoctoral work

demonstrate independence

- research plan builds on your prior experience but are not direct extensions of your postdoctoral work
- imaginative ideas that differ from your Ph.D. or postdoctoral research
- heart-to-heart talk to decide what turf is advisor's, what turf is yours

dual purpose of research plan

- must make a good first impression to survive the early stages of winnowing
- must withstand intense scrutiny in the later stages when the research plans separates the “to be invited” from the rest

how to make a good first impression

- clearly stated research goals, the most compelling motivation, and the general approach you intend to take in the first $\frac{1}{2}$ page
- good layout
- good graphics
- focus on contributions to scientific knowledge
- avoid obvious mistakes
- avoid obvious hype

make research plan withstand careful scrutiny

- avoid mistakes
- avoid misrepresentation
- motivate your work (why must this research be done?)
- think it through and present a workable strategy
- use appropriate detail
- include preliminary data
- demonstrate your awareness of other work being done in the field

- **present more than one good idea**
- **customize your research plan to the institution you're applying for**

[research plans sent to predominantly undergraduate institutions should be carefully designed to coexist with substantial teaching loads and to benefit from the participation of undergraduate students]

Based on

http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/previous_issues/articles/1820/writing_a_research_plan

what is wrong with this research plan?

- some examples

recommended features in a research plan: an example

Application Package

- the cover letter
- the CV
- the reference list
- the research plan
- **the teaching statement**
- the small college

teaching statement

examine your own beliefs

- what is teaching and learning to you?
- how do you teach
- why do you teach that way?

your view of learning

- What do you mean by learning and how does it occur?
- How do you facilitate this process in the classroom?
- How have your experiences influenced your view of learning?

your view of teaching

- What do you think is the professor's role in the classroom?
- How does teaching facilitate the learning process?
- How do you challenge students intellectually while supporting those with different learning styles and abilities?
- How have your experiences influenced your view of teaching?

your teaching

- Your teaching goals: what should students get out of your course?
- How do you plan to accomplish (design, implementation) your teaching goals?
- What constitutes evidence of student learning and effective instruction?
- What information do you keep to document student learning and how do you use it?

the teaching statement: suggestions

- Do not use jargon (search committees are annoyed by “educational mumbo-jumbo”)
- Write it in a personal way; write about *your* experiences and *your* beliefs
- Include teaching strategies and methods to help people “see” you in the classroom
- Make it memorable and unique

what is wrong with this teaching statement?

- some examples

Application Package

- the cover letter
- the CV
- the reference list
- the research plan
- the teaching statement
- **the small college**

the small college

- a different application package
- don't bother unless you really love teaching

what constitutes an application package to a small college?

- cover letter
- CV
- statement of teaching philosophy
- statement of research plans
- references

how different from a cover letter to a research university?

- Why this position, in this geographical area, specially appealing?
- There should be evidence that you are familiar with the character of the institution and speak specifically to the particular position to be filled (be acquainted with special programs the institution is known for)
- The cover letter should indicate why you are interested in a small college, and should mention some pertinent teaching experience
- List potential courses you could teach
- Any mention of research in the cover letter has to be in its context in the institution's environment, not your Ph.D. or postdoctoral work

cover letter for small liberal arts colleges

- a sincere interest in working closely with students matters.
- advising, participating in non-academic activities, watching your students grow and mature inside the classroom and out, if you value these broader elements of being a professor, let them know.
- if you have taught, or have been an undergrad in a small college, mention it
- if your own experience has been limited to large universities, think about describing an episode where you had a positive impact on the development of a student and the satisfaction you derived from helping him or her

CV for small liberal arts colleges

- organize in list form accurately and honestly
- list all teaching involvement, including brief informative descriptions of what you actually did, mention tutoring, or working with high school students
- list peer-reviewed journals separately from conference abstracts, popular science articles and other non-peer-reviewed work

statement of teaching philosophy for small liberal arts colleges

- 2 pages single spaced is recommended
- very important to show that you understand an undergrad school like this one (do your web work: know the school).
- experience in teaching undergrads is helpful but the teaching philosophy should show that you have thought about education at a school of their size
- include a discussion of your approaches to teaching, may include concrete examples from past teaching experiences and a list of courses you could teach (tailored to the department)

statement of research plans for small liberal arts colleges

- 2-4 pages single spaced is recommended
- you are addressing non-experts in your sub-field!
- main purpose is to describe the kinds of work the applicant could undertake in the new position, how that work is suitable for a liberal arts setting, how it will involve students, possibly including specific examples of meaningful student projects.
- craft the research plan to clearly state how one's research could be done with undergraduates
- especially important that applicant demonstrate research productivity beyond Ph.D. work
- know about funding sources for small colleges

what else is different?

- “I also provided sample teaching materials. When I interviewed, I taught a class and gave a research presentation. This model is fairly standard for small liberal arts colleges.”
- be prepared to answer many teaching questions, what you do in your classes? what do you want to do in classes you might teach?
- very important that you are in tune with the institution, know the basic facts about the place, their curriculum
- aim research talk at the sophomore level, not a specialized technical seminar, the idea is not to impress the faculty with your knowledge but your ability to share insights with undergrad students
- non-science faculty in the search committee
- teach your own labs: no grad student TAs!
- references should include profs familiar with and will speak about your teaching abilities, not just research

ASSIGNMENT: prepare your application package

- First draft due May 30, to be discussed with the research adviser during the June 2 session
- Revised draft due July 1, for review by a panel of mock search committee members, to be followed by discussion of individual application packages by the panel members during the July 10 session
- Use checklist for self-assessment of application package