

# Seeking a Position in Academia

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Talk to Physics Graduate Students  
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## Before You Graduate

- Line up people who will write your recommendation letters.
- Plan to set yourself apart
  - Do an internship - hone skills, expand your network, gives you experience, attracts attention to you a job candidate.
  - Arrange for a shadowing experience and put this on your resume or CV.
  - Do independent research - great if work is applied, off-campus, and you can describe how research expanded your skills, abilities, and awareness of field.
- Develop your communication skills.
- Volunteer for communication and leadership activities - in your own student societies, class, or laboratory.
- Join a professional society and try to attend a national meeting
- Do a Self Assessment



## Self Assessment Questions

- What do I enjoy doing?
- What are my personal strengths/weaknesses?
- What are my technical skills and experiences?
- Am I more a leader or a follower?
- Am I an idea person or a detail person?
- Do I prefer a task where I work alone or with others?
- What is important to me - Money? Job satisfaction? Prestige?
- What do I want to be doing in five years?
- What work sector? Industry, government, non-profit, or academia?
- Am I willing to relocate?
- What types of positions or responsibilities are not acceptable?
- What are my salary needs?

See work-related Values Test by Margaret Newhouse, *Outside the Ivory Tower: A Guide for Academics Considering Alternative Careers*



# Cover Letters

- What is a cover letter?
  - Accompanies a resume/CV when applying for a job - should only be one page.
- Is it important?
  - Very important.
  - Often the way to decide between interesting candidate and the discards
- Cover Letter Purpose
  - Makes a connection with your employer
  - Lets employer know what you are applying for
  - Conveys, implicitly, why the employer should hire you
  - Calls attention to pertinent parts of resume
  - Provides the employer a sample of your writing skills



## Cover Letters cont.

- Should include
  - Your return address
  - Date
  - Employer's Name and Address
  - Salutation
  - Body of letter
  - Closing Signature
  - *Telephone number and email address*
- Tips
  - Personalize each cover letter
  - Demonstrate you know something about company or institution
  - If you know a person that employer would know, then identify this person.
  - Identify what your applying for
  - If responding to ad, then link your experiences and skills to the job.



## The Resume and the CV

- A resume is not a CV.
  - Resume is designed to get you an interview
  - Resume tells relevant story, CV tells whole story!
  - Curriculum Vitae includes all of your publications, while Resume does not.
  - Resume is used for most jobs, CV for academia
  - Resume is rarely longer than 2 pages.
  - Resume is often scanned so use good paper and avoid odd-ball formats.
- Format
  - Personal information - name, address, phone, email at top of page
  - Education
  - Experience/Work - summer jobs, internships, teaching assistantships, computer skills, foreign language skills, special things outside of major like a writing or business course.
  - Honors, awards, fellowships, scholarships, etc.
  - Volunteer activity



## Promoting Yourself

Get a good list of action verbs to represent your accomplishments. Your cover letter, resume or CV are really key. Make sure you proofread everything.

- Research skills
  - clarified, collected, critiqued, diagnosed, discovered, elucidated, evaluated, examined, extracted, identified, inspected, interpreted, interviewed, investigated, organized, reviewed, summarized, surveyed.
- Teaching skills
  - adapted, advised, clarified, coached, communicated, conducted, coordinated, enabled, encouraged, evaluated, explained, facilitated, guided, informed, lectured, stimulated, trained.
- Leadership skills
  - administered, assigned, chaired, coordinated, developed, directed, evaluated, organized, oversaw, planned, prioritized, produced, recommended, revamped, scheduled, supervised.

OK! Decide you want an academic job - how do you start?



## Where to apply

- What type of job are you searching for?
  - Research and Teaching
  - Teaching Only
- Tailor your CV and teaching philosophy according to job. Even if teaching position you should emphasize your lab and software skills.
- Send your letter writers anything that needs to be emphasized for the particular job.
- How many places do you apply for?
  - Worry about letter writer burnout
  - Are you going to put a serious effort into preparing everything?
- Select your letter writers
  - Can be different for different jobs
  - Make sure letter writer knows you rather than just being an important person.



## Letters from Referees

- Letters determine whether or not you will get invited.
- It is critical that letter writers rank the candidate. Usually saying in the upper 10-15% is just not good enough. Should be best person in last couple years, top grad student in past couple years, comparable to someone who just got a job, etc.
- Probably best to not compare with someone already at the same institution.
- Best to compare to another person who already has a tenured job at a good institution.
- It is best to talk about the research or capabilities of the candidate. Also good to mention experience at hearing the person talk, leadership potential, etc.
- Adaptability - how is the person at creative thinking and problem solving?
- Collegiality - how is the person's group effectiveness and interpersonal skills such as in negotiation and in teamwork?
- I like to see a statement about the person's ability to learn, to absorb, and to process and to apply information quickly and effectively.



## Got the Interview!

- Find out what kind of interview.
  - Screening Interview (often done at national meetings or at conferences)
  - Phone interview
  - Committee/panel interview
  - One-on-One Interview (most common)
  
- Find out who is on the search committee
  
- What kind of presentation will you give
  - Technical Presentation to search committee
  - Colloquium - what level should you pitch the talk
  - Seminar - how technical should the talk be
  - Teach a class - at what level
  - Always better for the talk to be short than too long
  - Judgement is often made on how you answer questions
  
- Research the department



## Academic Interview questions

- Questions you should think about
  - What kind of courses can you teach?
  - What service committees are you interested in being on? Grad committee, Colloquium committee, undergrad advising, etc
  - What do you need to get started - space, students, questions about sharing resources with other faculty, needed facilities - electronics, machine shop, etc.
  - How do you plan to get the resources you need - have you ever written a grant?
  - Any outreach activities?
  
- Do you have any questions?
  
- How do you handle criticism?
  
- How are you at doing lots of things at the same time? How do you prioritize?
  
- How do you manage stress?
  
- How did you become interested in this field?



## Interview tips

- Dress appropriately.
- Show up on time.
- Be prepared to answer questions.
- Put the interviewer at ease.
  - Fine to take notes.
  - Make eye contact when a question is being asked and when you are answering it.
  - Demonstrate interest by asking questions about department and the institution. You can view each interview as your interview.
  - How do you plan to get the resources you need - have you ever written a grant?
  - Always let interviewer finish her question.
- Body Language
  - Give a firm handshake and walk confidently into the office.
  - Make eye contact
  - Sit still and straight - there are rules about crossing arms as trying to hide something. Try to avoid fidgeting.
  - Avoid long silences and speak slowly.



## Interview cont.

- Questions that can't be asked
  - Your religion, political beliefs, or ancestry.
  - Your birthplace.
  - Your native language.
  - Your age or ages of children.
  - Your maiden name, your marital status, or anything about your spouse.
- After the interview send a email message to the people who matter on the search committee saying how you appreciated the visit. Make it real short.
- Keys to Salary Negotiations
  - Never discuss salary until end of interviewing process, when they say want you.
  - Never be the first to mention a salary figure.
  - Do homework ahead of time on what you need.
  - During interview, try to determine whether salary is fixed or contains room for negotiation.
  - Do research on salaries in your field and for the institution.



## What to negotiate?

- Space - lab location, office location, who will take care of the renovation.
- What is the teaching assignment? How can you get time off or buy your way out of teaching?
- Can you get any funds for shops beyond the start-up package?
- How do you secure support for travel to a conference?
- Can you get a commitment for Teaching Assistant support for a grad. student?
- Postdoc/ Research Assistant support
- Is there any help for writing grant proposals?
- How do you get nominated from OJI, Sloans, Packards, CAREER awards, etc.
- Is there internal (within the university) support you should apply for? At CU, we have JFDA.
- Summer Support
- Can you get added to group grants? Are there institutes or centers in your area?
- Salary - compression exists at all institutions, should ask for more than you think you can get