

## STEP 5

# Building an academic career

What you need to know about writing job applications

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**A WELL-WRITTEN JOB APPLICATION SHOULD MOTIVATE AN EMPLOYER TO INVITE YOU TO ATTEND AN INTERVIEW AS PART OF THE SELECTION PROCESS. THE APPLICATION SHOULD BE PROFESSIONAL AND MAKE A STRONG FIRST IMPRESSION, GIVEN THAT RECRUITERS MAY SPEND ON AVERAGE LESS THAN TWO MINUTES READING A RESUME.<sup>[1]</sup> APPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIC POSITIONS CAN INVOLVE THE PREPARATION OF A NUMBER OF COMPREHENSIVE DOCUMENTS, AND MAY REQUIRE SIGNIFICANT TIME, EFFORT AND RESEARCH TO ENSURE YOUR SKILLS AND EXPERIENCES ARE PRESENTED IN THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY.**

### WHERE DO I START?

- Once you have identified an advertised position, review the position description, person specification and other information provided to determine your capacity to fulfil the job requirements.
- Analyse the position within the context of the school and university/ institute and review strategic plans if available at both a departmental and organisational level.
- Consider ways in which the position is influenced by factors such as research focus of the department, other staff members, teaching areas, professional linkages, funding priorities etc. LinkedIn and research networking sites can be useful to research other professionals' profiles.
- Contact the staff member mentioned in the advertisement regarding the position via a polite email or short phone call. Have a specific question prepared such as "Which key research areas are you targeting?" or "What strengths would an ideal applicant need?" Be brief and professional.

### WHAT DO I NEED TO PREPARE?

When applying for academic positions, you will usually need to submit the following documents:

- A **résumé** (also called *Curriculum Vitae*) written specifically for academic positions. Tailor your application each time for the specific position, such as making teaching the focus of a résumé aimed at a teaching-intensive role.<sup>[2]</sup> Résumé length will vary depending on experience as well as across disciplines and countries, so check what is appropriate prior to applying.

- A **cover letter** which accompanies the résumé and provides a succinct summary of your suitability for the position. This one-page formal letter should demonstrate what you can contribute to the organisation and how your skills, attributes and experience make you a strong candidate for the position. A letter can be an opportunity to provide the reader with a narrative which highlights key accomplishments and achievements relevant to the role, points which may be missed in a resume.<sup>[3]</sup>
- **Selection criteria responses** providing substantial written responses to key criteria outlined in the advertisement, as requested. Effective responses are evidence-based involving recent, relevant examples and quantifiable achievements, and often follow a structure such as STAR (Situation, Task, Action and Result) or CAR (Circumstance, Action and Result)<sup>[4]</sup>
- **Other documents /evidence** as requested such as a teaching portfolio, statement of research interest, writing sample etc.<sup>[3]</sup>

Resume

Cover Letter

Selection  
Criteria  
Response

Supporting  
Evidence

## WHAT DO I INCLUDE IN AN ACADEMIC RÉSUMÉ?

Research output is seen by some university staff as the main selector for an academic position,<sup>[5]</sup> although teaching and service activities can also play an important role in selection. Consequently, academic résumés may vary in style and content but usually include:

- **Teaching experience** including lecturing, tutoring, supervising, marking, curriculum design, course administration/coordination. Where relevant, provide details of course content, student level, teaching approach, course evaluation results, etc. Include a section on any professional development you have undertaken in relation to learning and teaching e.g. workshops, on-line courses, conferences, etc.
- **Research experience and output** including any funding received (grants, scholarships, awards), publications (journals, books, conferences - include impact factors where applicable), and esteem indicators (best paper awards, prizes, etc). Include a separate section on your skills and experiences (managing projects, technical skills, industry engagement).
- **Service activities** including leadership roles, committee involvement, professional roles and affiliations, community engagement etc.;
- **Other content** will be similar to non-academic résumés and may include higher education qualifications, employment, professional memberships, referees etc. Consider including a table highlighting key achievements at the start of your résumé (see Figure 1).

Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• PhD, School of Physics, Queensland University of Technology, 2015</li><li>• 2 x Journal Publications &amp; Best Paper Award, 2014</li><li>• Skills in SPSS data analysis and project management</li></ul>
Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tutored in undergraduate physics core subjects</li><li>• Guest lecture on Postgraduate Course</li><li>• Completed Teaching Advantage Program at QUT</li></ul>
Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Volunteered as study skills advisor 2011-2015</li><li>• Organised QUT Year 10's Science Open Day 2013-2015</li></ul>

Figure 1. Example table highlighting key achievements

## WHAT CAN GO WRONG WITH MY APPLICATION?

- Do not submit the same application for multiple positions. Ensure you tailor your application each time for a particular role and obtain feedback from peers, supervisors or University Career Counselling staff to check readability and effectiveness prior to submission.
- Only include relevant information on your résumé. Do not include personal information such as marital status or age, previous job duties that do not contribute to the profile you are trying to present, papers that have been rejected, grant applications that have been unsuccessful etc.
- Make sure that it is professionally presented and easy to read. This means using a reasonable font size, leaving white space, numbering pages. Etc. The reader should be able to quickly and easily identify your key strengths and achievements.

### References

1. Bright, J., & Earl, J. (2008). Résumés that get shortlisted: proven strategies to get the job you want. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
2. Joy, S. (2013). Academic CVs: ten irritating mistakes. *The Guardian*. Higher Education Network. <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/nov/01/academic-cv-job-10-mistakes>
3. Queen, R., & Curzan, A. (2007). Perspectives on the academic job-search. *Journal of English Linguistics*, 35(4), 374-377.
4. Villiers, A. (2005). *How to write and talk to selection criteria: improving your chances of winning a job*. Hawker, ACT: Mental Nutrition.
5. Edwards, D., Bexley, E., & Richardson, S. (2011). Regenerating the academic workforce: the careers, intentions and motivations of higher degree research students in Australia: findings of the NRSS. <http://research.acer.edu.au/>

### Further Reading

- <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers/pursuing-an-academic-career/applying-for-academic-jobs> .
- <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers/researcher-cv-examples>