

Jobs and Careers

How to Get a Job

It doesn't matter much whether you are looking for a first academic job or a new one, the process is much the same.

Rule 1. Finish your PhD or know exactly when you will be finished. You can get hired before you complete, but if you start working before you complete, you may have real trouble finishing. *Do not work full-time in academia before you have completed your degree.* You will be exploited and dumped. Working part-time you will just be exploited, but you will still have a future.

Rule 2. Letters of Recommendation count. Find well-known people in addition to your mentor, or people who know specific senior individuals in the department to which you are applying, to write letters for you.

Rule 3. Know where your research is headed next. The most common and important question you will be asked in an interview is where your research program is headed. You do not have to stick with your answer, but you have to have a good one. It should connect to your dissertation but go beyond it in some interesting way. Doesn't hurt if you mention an interest in work by senior people in the department or those whom they respect; refer only to theories or approaches, not to individuals (unless they have theories named after them).

Rule 4. Advertise your teaching range. In theory you get hired as a potentially productive researcher, but in practice they need you to teach courses. Let them know you can teach a wide range of courses; or research what their needs likely are and mention those areas you have some competence or experience in. Your part-time teaching background is a plus here.

Rule 5. Do your homework. Before an interview find out as much as you can about the department, its key researchers and programs, its strengths and weaknesses, its reputation in personnel matters. Be prepared to sound relevant to what they are doing, and to ask some penetrating, but not embarrassing questions of your own.

Your CV and Website

When you are on the job market (and many academics are always on the job market in that they will take a better job if one comes along), you need a good website.

The core of your website is your CV. A curriculum vitae (the course of your life, Latin) is like your academic bank statement or credit report. It mainly lists your publications, and if you are beyond your 4th or 5th year as a faculty member, it may be all that hiring committee members look at in your CV.

You should have a PDF file of your CV that looks nice, like printed ones did in the old days. But you should probably also have an html version that visitors can scan through without downloading.

You can make your homepage be your CV, in effect, especially if you are just starting out. If you are further along, you should invest in a decent web design.

Include:

- Contact information, including email address and cellphone
- Educational history (PhD with dissertation title and Advisor's name)
- Academic employment history (and if new, relevant non-academic jobs)
- Teaching history (even as a teaching assistant, best if you were the instructor). List individual courses by name (not number)
- Publications (include in-press/accepted, and in-preparation)
- Conference presentations
- Current research interests

The convention is to put everything in reverse chronological order, most recent first (except Education: BA first, MA if you have one, PhD). Have separate subheadings for publications that are Submitted but not yet accepted (include name of journal or publisher) and those that are just In Preparation (meaning planned or underway, not finished yet).

If you were not born in the country to which you are applying for a job, include in your CV, but not on your website, your immigration or citizenship and visa status.

Do not include in a CV: your high school, your hobbies, your non-academic work.

On your website, if you want to include things other than your academic information, put them in a separate menu called Personal or something like that. Even so, be very aware that academic visitors may see all that stuff and find some of it undignified. I recommend a totally separate personal website.

What you can include on an academic website, other than the CV information, are links to or best of all PDF copies of your publications. Cautiously, you can also include some photos of your fieldsites and very cautiously short videos of your research. Caution here means respecting privacy of participants, your IRB agreements, and the visual and professional or documentary quality of what you present. All will be judged.

Your Job Talk

The "job talk" is the formal presentation you make during your interview visit. Many people may attend it, including students. Only the faculty's opinion matters, except in regard to quality of how you present, which is judged as relevant to your teaching skills, and where students opinions might be counted.

Be sure your talk is timed to be well under the maximum time available. The questions and answer period is at least as important as the talk itself.

Use powerpoint slides or something similar. Don't read, just talk and follow your slides, except for the occasional quotation. Use video if you can, but keep it brief. Use photos and diagrams where possible. Be prepared for the possibility that a live internet connection or wireless networking may not be working.

Keep the presentation simple. Mention theories, but don't describe them in any detail. Describe research methods. Highlight findings and implications. Mention future directions. Smile and sound confident, but not arrogant. Use the restroom before your talk.

Keep your answers to questions brief and to the point. Refer to data whenever possible, but don't produce the data unless necessary, or just show a slide of it. Answer faculty questions more thoroughly, others' questions more briefly.

Always go for a drink or dinner with faculty after your talk, or later that day. Let them lead the conversation, and show that you know more than just what was in the talk, including other aspects of the field. Ask them about their own research.

Interviews and Negotiations

You will usually interview with a lot of people. Every meeting you have on a job interview visit is an interview. Even dinner or drinks. The most important ones are those with: members of the hiring committee, very senior and influential members of the department who are not on the committee, administrators.

Have a list of your own questions and ask them. Only discuss money and perks with administrators. Otherwise ask about strengths of the department, plans for the future, technology and library resources, teaching load, students, curriculum. Support for research in general.

When you meet with the dean, department chair, or chair of the hiring committee, you can bring up the real negotiating points. Salary, fringe benefits, startup research funds, normal teaching load and released time for new faculty to get their research up and running. You can also appear sophisticated by asking them about current budget issues and future financial concerns of the department. This is what administrators think about.

You should also ask about tenure, and if you are coming in after a few years elsewhere about the timetable for tenure for you and credit toward your first sabbatical or study leave. You can also generally ask for 20% above your current salary. And research startup funds. And a course load reduction for your first two years. Just ask. They will normally tell you what standard policy is. Unless you are being recruited because they really, really want you, then you have to accept whatever the normal policy is. Private universities have much more leeway than

public universities, except for the very top ones, and even then it depends on the current budget.

Building a Career

You need two things to build an academic career: publications and fame.

Your first goal should be to **publish two articles a year in top tier journals**, or close to that as an average over your first 4-5 years. One book counts for 4-5 articles.

Your second goal should be **tenure**. If you publish as recommended, and you teaching does not suck, and you don't piss off any senior faculty members, and you do some work for department committees, you should get tenure. (There are a few universities, like Harvard and Stanford where this is not enough, and indeed almost nothing may be enough, and others, like Penn, Columbia, Chicago, or Michigan where it's still only a 50/50 chance.)

At the same time, though you need to be doing social networking in the field. You need to get your name recognized. The best way to do this is by **presenting at conferences**. More than once per conference if it's allowed by the rules. Also go to the meetings of the various special interest groups of the professional association sponsoring the conference and speak up and mention your name and current university.

Go up to senior researchers in the field, introduce yourself, say something nice about their research or latest book. Ask an intelligent question. Do this in the hallway, if they are not too busy, or at the book exhibits, or after they present in a session.

Get your mentor or colleagues to introduce you. Try to go to a lunch, dinner, drinks, or coffee with senior people. Even if it's expensive.

Always ask a question in conference sessions you attend, if you can. And mention your name and affiliation.

Get known. Get known as someone with intelligent things to say. And then get people to associate you with ONE particular line of research.

Try to coin a catchy but sophisticated phrase to describe your best idea or the kind of research you do. Keep repeating it. If it catches on, and you are associated with it, your academic stock goes way up.

Within your own university **find mentors**. Senior people who are interested in you and your work, or in collaborating with you. Get them to introduce you to others in the field. Ask them about research methods, about teaching, about department politics.

Apply for grants. Start early, and keep at it. Many grants only get funded on the third revision or try. Partner with more senior people in submitting grant proposals. Aim for early career grants, grants from private foundations (once you get one, odds are you can get more from them), and government grants. Start small, \$50-100,000 is good.

All universities have offices full of people whose full-time job is to help you get a grant. Meet them, know them, rely on them. They can point to programs to apply to, they can help write some parts of the proposal, they will almost certainly do your budget for you. And generally you can't apply without their administrative support.

Find out about department and university research funding programs. They exist, even in bad budget years. They tend to favor new faculty. They just don't pay much, but it's something, and it looks good on your CV.

Always have a research project, with a catchy name, and acronym. Even if it is not funded, yet, by a grant.

Publication. Reputation. Money.

A note on teaching

Yes, you also have to teach. You may even enjoy it. Sometimes.

The more you publish and get grants, the less your teaching matters to tenure and promotion. No matter what the university officially says.

If you are a successful researcher, your teaching has to be really awful to prevent your tenure or promotion.

Teaching is judged by student surveys and sometimes by a visit to your class by a senior colleague. In the former case, it's just a matter of good, average, or awful, and if the trend is upward, even an Awful rating in early courses can be ignored. If a senior faculty member visits, talk to them before and after, get their input and advice about improving your teaching. It will be reflected in their report.

Many new faculty members enjoy teaching, but don't let it occupy too much of your time. Before tenure you should not devote too much time to either course preparation or curriculum committees. Just enough to be ok.

Teaching courses for majors in the field, especially above the introductory level is usually better, and graduate courses are the best. New faculty, however, often get stuck with the least desirable courses.

Teaching priorities. Get students to respect you for knowledge and fairness. Get them to like you for good humor and willingness to chat with them before or after class. Ask for their ideas about improving the course. Give them the

opportunity to think critically and write something creative that relates the course topic to their own interests.

God alone knows how people can “teach” large lecture courses of hundreds of students. Regard it as a performance art. Watch someone do it who is good at it.

In smaller or more advanced seminars, the key is to make the students do a lot of the work. Have them report on the readings and on their individual projects or ideas for term papers. *Use online course systems* to get their input and comments or questions on the readings before (and sometimes after) class discussions. Don't give idiotic tests, just read their papers. A short midterm paper you can give feedback on, a longer term paper that counts more for the final grade.

In smaller seminars, *don't lecture for more than half the class time*. Have real discussions and questions and answers (both ways).

You will learn a lot by teaching, especially if you select key readings that can teach you something as well as them. Classics in the field, or exemplars of good research. Major writers. *Avoid textbooks* like the plague, or order them up for the class as security blankets, but rely on readings. Edited collections of relevant readings can substitute for textbooks. Ask colleagues for recommendations.

Challenge your students intellectually, but grade them leniently.