

Getting an Interview: Cover Letters and CVs

Laura Malisheski, PhD
Office of Career Services
Harvard University
June 5, 2009

Consider Your Audience

- Potential Post-doctoral Advisor
 - Focus on research
- Faculty on Search Committee
 - Emphasize research and/or teaching?
 - Type of institution
 - Size and breadth of department
 - Specific needs as stated in job posting
 - Get the inside scoop if possible!

What do they need?

- Sleep
- Caffeine
- Time
- Peace

Their GOAL:

THE SHORT LIST

How can you get on the short list?

- Concise
- Clear
- Sincere
- Enthusiastic
- Relevant
- Organized
- Elegant
- Compelling
- Memorable
- Free of typos and grammatical errors
- Tailored to position

Follow the conventions of your field

What will you need?

- **CV**
- **Cover Letter**
- **Letters of Reference**
- Research Summary / Proposal
- Reprints / Manuscripts
- Teaching Philosophy / Portfolio
- Start-up Budget (sometimes)

CV Format

- There is no single correct format
- Highlight strengths, accomplishments & experience
 - Skimmable
 - 30 second test
 - Scrutiny-proof
- Organize with CATEGORIES
 - Arranged in order of importance
 - Reverse chronological order within categories

Standard CV Categories

- Name and contact info
- Current position (for postdocs)
- Education
- Honors and Awards
- Research Experience
- Teaching Experience
- Conference Presentations / Abstracts
- Publications
- References

Some Other Possible Categories

- Additional Professional Experience
- Invited Talks
- Research Interests
- Technical Skills
- Patents
- Professional Memberships
- Languages

CV Style

- Place most important information:
 - First page
 - Left side of page
 - Beginning of sections
 - In columns
- Use highlighting judiciously and consistently
- Use action verbs to describe experience
- Avoid pronouns, articles, jargon
- Use sentence fragments
- PROOF, PROOF, PROOF
- Ask friends to PROOF

Common CV Mistakes

- Don't use another CV as a TEMPLATE
- Avoid "TOO MANY WORDS"
- Don't include PERSONAL information, e.g.
 - Marital status
 - Date of birth
 - Gender
 - Photograph
- Be very careful attributing pre-published papers
- Don't get too creative with paper, style, format

Sample CVs

- A really bad CV
- Ellen Joseph – CV for research university, biological sciences
- Jackson White – CV for research university, physical sciences

Cover Letters

- Serves as a writing sample
- Highlight and elaborate on important aspects of your experience
- Don't reiterate the CV in prose!
- Should **STAND ALONE**, but is clearly linked to CV
- Should be tailored to each job

Cover Letters - Content

- How you learned about the position and your current status
- Concise summary of past/current research & significance to field
- Future research interests
- Teaching qualifications & interests
- Why interested in that department/university
- How you would contribute to the department

Sample Cover Letters

- Email inquiry about postdoctoral position - Immunology
- Cover letter for faculty position at research university – Bioengineering
- Cover letter for faculty position in small liberal arts college - Mathematics

Letters of Reference

- How many?
- From whom?
- How to manage?
- Special circumstances

What You REALLY Need

- Vision
- Organization
- Patience
- Confidence
- A few nice outfits
- Stamina
- Sense of humor
- Plan B