

# Developing a Winning Research Statement

## General considerations and advice from faculty

What is generally asked for in a faculty application?

- “Statement of Research Interests”
- “Research Plan”
- “Statement of Research Accomplishments”

What is the purpose of this statement?

- Convince the committee you will succeed
- Describe your short-term and long-term goals
- Remember, this is NOT the most important document of your application.

Who are your readers?

- Busy faculty who might read 100+ proposals during this search
- Most will NOT be specialists in your field

The ideal statement...

- “... builds on the promising experience of the applicant but [is] not a direct extension of their postdoctoral work.” (Except perhaps in some fields.) ... and answers the question, **‘Why must this work be done?’**”  
(From Jim Austin’s article, “Writing a Research Plan” on [sciencecareers.org](http://sciencecareers.org))
- “... a readable, compelling agenda that fits well with the needs, facilities and goals of the department.”  
(From Peter Fiske’s article, “The Truth Behind Teaching and Research Statements”)

Peter Fiske’s Rules:

- Know the school
- Know the department
- Know the position

Your statement should follow one of these 2 outlines: *(use these headings)*

- Chronological
  - Executive Summary (first paragraph)
  - Graduate research (project by project)
  - Postdoctoral research (project by project)
  - Future research (project by project)
- Topical
  - Executive Summary
  - Separate “chapters” for different research interests

Note that in all cases you should include an **Executive Summary**.

The **Executive Summary** should answer these questions:

- Why is my research important?
- How will I approach it?
- What are my long-term research goals?
- What are my career goals?

When writing the Executive Summary, remember:

- **Be personal!** Use “I” and “my”.
- **Polish it!** Most people read only this paragraph.
- **Adapt it!** to fit the job description.

#### References:

- “Writing a research statement”, Jim Austin (2002), [sciencecareers.org](http://sciencecareers.org)
- “The truth behind teaching and research statements”, Peter Fiske (1997)

#### Some last words.... Advice from UCSF faculty:

1. **Be personal.** This document is about you: who you are as a scientist, what interests you, where you see your research going in the future. Don’t make it solely about the research (like you would a research manuscript or grant). Use “I” instead of “we”.
2. **Toot your own horn.** Make sure to convey what will make you successful in your next endeavors. Some examples: your cutting edge approach, your unique insight or technological know-how, your success in previous projects, etc.
3. **Don’t write it like a grant proposal.** That’s too detailed (and probably too long) and could have two untoward consequences:
  - (1) some readers will latch onto a detail of your proposal that they disagree with and ding you for it.
  - (2) Others will be overwhelmed by the details and fail to see the big picture. Remember that many committee members are not going to be familiar with your field.
4. **Make connections.** Whenever possible, acknowledge how your work would complement the research already happening at the institution where you are applying, or benefit from collaborations with members of the institution. (This is something you should definitely do in your cover letter as well.)
5. **Beware of fancy formatting.** Some readers are put off by a statement that looks too much like a published article in Nature. Also, some formatting gets mangled if you submit the application via an electronic submission process. So, check twice before you click the send button!

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Many post-doc and faculty job postings – in a variety of disciplines and in an array of institutions – require that candidates send a Research Statement. Being able to write coherently about your past/current research efforts and articulately about your future research plans is very important.

## **DEFINITION**

- The research statement describes your research experiences, interests, and plans.
- Research statements are often requested as part of the faculty application process.
- Expectations for research statements vary among disciplines. Ask faculty members in your department about the expectations for your field.

## **PURPOSE**

- Departments want to learn more about your:
  - Academic specialty and interests
  - Passion for research
  - Compatibility with departmental, school, and/or university research efforts
  - Potential to earn grant money
  - Ability to operate as a professional scholar, independent of your advisor
  - Writing ability
- Writing a research statement allows you to:
  - Further reflect on and define your research interests
  - Gain confidence in your research skills and desire to become a faculty member

## **CONTENT**

- Recent & Current Research
  - Research statements for current students and recent graduates usually discuss the dissertation and/or other major projects from graduate school.
  - If you have done several projects, convey the connection among them.
  - Place your work in a broader context or framework – the big picture.
  - Discuss how you became interested in your topic and why it continues to interest you.
  - Answer the “so what?” question. How does your research contribute to the field? Why does your research matter? Why is it important?
  - Briefly describe any significant recognition your research has received - publications, presentations, grants, awards, etc.
  - If you discuss projects that you have worked on with a team, be sure to articulate your contribution to the projects.
  - Acknowledge the work of other scholars in your field, when appropriate.

- Future Research
  - What are your short-term research goals (2-5 years)?
  - Discuss 2-3 feasible research ideas that interest you.
  - Explain how your goals build on (but are not necessarily direct extensions of) your recent work.
  - Describe your ideas about potential funding sources, collaborative partners, facilities, etc.
  - Consider detailing how you will involve students (undergraduate and/or graduate) in your research and how your research relates to your teaching.
  - Indicate how your research goals align with departmental goals.
  - What are your longer term research goals (5+ years)?
  
- Appropriate Detail
  - Your plan should be well-considered, realistic, and practical.
  - Include enough detail to show depth of knowledge but do not go overboard with minutiae.
  - Consider including some preliminary data – perhaps using tables, graphs, or other illustrations.

## FORMAT

- Your research statement should be brief and well-organized.
  - Aim for one to three pages (longer statements are sometimes appropriate).
  - The introduction should summarize the contents of the research statement and include the information that is most important for departments to know.
  - The conclusion should also summarize the contents of the research statement.
  
- Your research statement should be pleasing to the eye and easy to read.
  - Single-spaced or 1.5 spaced
  - Concise paragraphs
  - Short bulleted lists
  - Clear subject headings
  
- Your statement should not include grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors!

## GETTING STARTED

- Contact your home department.
  - What are the norms for research statements in your field?
  - What information is known about your potential employers that might help you prepare your research statements?
- Jot down a preliminary outline and some ideas for content.
- Find sample research statements using a search engine, websites of professional organizations, etc.
- Finish a full draft.
- Have somebody proofread your research statement (peer, research team member, faculty member, career counselor, etc.)
- Consider customizing / tailoring your research statement for different job opportunities.

## WRITING SAMPLES

- Job announcements often request a sample of your scholarly writing.
- You can send one with your application packet even if it is not requested.
- Check with a professor regarding how many samples to send, if an announcement doesn't specify.
- Examples of samples to send:
  - Re-prints of your published articles
  - Copies of book chapters you've authored or co-authored
  - Pre-prints of articles in press
  - Completed chapters of your dissertation

## SAMPLE RESEARCH STATEMENTS

- Science
  - <http://studentaffairs.duke.edu/career/graduate-students/academic-career-preparation/research-statement> (Ecology & Zoology)
  - <http://grad.wvu.edu/r/download/88047> (Biology)
  - [http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/files/Research\\_PhD\\_Biostatistics2007.pdf](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/files/Research_PhD_Biostatistics2007.pdf) (Biostats)
  - <http://web.physics.ucsb.edu/~reager/REagerResearchStatement.pdf> (Physics)
- Engineering, Technological, & Math Fields
  - [http://www.cs.cornell.edu/~ssuri/About\\_Me\\_files/SidSuriRS.pdf](http://www.cs.cornell.edu/~ssuri/About_Me_files/SidSuriRS.pdf) (Computer Science)
  - <http://www.chrispoirel.com/research-statement> (Computer Science)
  - <http://www.cct.lsu.edu/~burak/research.pdf> (Math)
  - <http://studentaffairs.duke.edu/career/graduate-students/academic-career-preparation/research-statement> (Engineering)
- Other Fields
  - [http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/files/Research\\_Lingusticsfaculty2010.pdf](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/files/Research_Lingusticsfaculty2010.pdf) (Linguistics)
  - <http://brucewhitehouse.files.wordpress.com/2007/10/whitehouse-research-statement-2007.pdf> (Anthropology)
  - [http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf\\_files/Valles%20%20Research02.pdf](http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf_files/Valles%20%20Research02.pdf) (Public Health)
  - <http://studentaffairs.duke.edu/career/graduate-students/academic-career-preparation/research-statement> (Literature & Sociology)
  - <http://www.marileneoliver.com/writings/writresstat.html> (Art)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Vick, J. M., & Furlong, J. S. (2008). *Academic job search handbook (4<sup>th</sup> ed)*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press
  - Sample research statements: Literature, Sociology, Math, CS, Biology, & Astronomy
- [http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career\\_development/previous\\_issues/articles/1820](http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/previous_issues/articles/1820)
- <http://chronicle.com/article/Writing-SamplesTeaching/125726/>