Preparing for the Academic Job Market

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For advanced-level PhD students and those looking ahead

Note: This is not comprehensive, and it is not authoritative. This overview is merely intended to serve as an initial guideline in order to give a general sense of the academic job market and application process from the perspective of someone who has recently gone through it. It is strongly recommended that you clarify and confirm details on your own as you go through the process, and keep in mind that your own field and your own experience could directly contradict advice or information contained here.

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Types of Schools

- Institution Types:
  - **Community College** (CC) – 2-year program, associates degree; may feed into BA program
  - **College** (US) – the term is usually interchangeable with university; offers 4–5-year programs, Bachelor's degree (occasionally 1 or 2 graduate programs); a school within a university system
  - **College** (non-US) – a community college; a school within a larger university system; trade school, secondary school, residential hall; 1-2 year program between high school and university
  - **University** (US) – the term may be interchangeable with college; usually offers both undergrad and grad programs; may be an assembly of colleges
  - **University** (non-US) – degree-granting institution, often with a wide array of disciplines and degrees, including graduate/postgraduate; may be an assembly of colleges
  - **Private School** – an alternative to higher education, private schools (especially boarding schools) are popular options for those who want to teach but not to publish; typically hire at the high school or secondary school level, but can occasionally hire PhDs for primary school grades..

Terms and Workloads

- **Term lengths:** (look at the school calendar to get a sense of timing)
    - **Quarters** – 4 in a year; each term is ~10 weeks long
    - **Semester** – 2 in a year (fall and spring); each term is ~15 weeks long
    - **Trimester** – 3 in a year (fall, winter, spring); each term is ~12-13 weeks long
- *How this affects you*: may have more courses to teach in a quarter system; there is more or less time to fit in content; may affect timing for sabbatical; may have more or fewer breaks throughout the school year
- **Examples of Teaching Loads:** (for a semester system) (*pronounced: "two two, two one," etc...*)
    - **2/2:** 2 courses each semester, equal length and weight (*common at research institutions*)
    - **2/1:** 2 courses one semester, 1 course the next semester (*more research during the lighter term*)
    - **3/2:** 3 courses one semester, 2 another (*also 3:3 setups; common at smaller & teaching-focused schools*)
    - **4/4:** 4 courses each semester (*probably no research or administrative expectations, only teaching*)
- *How this affects you*: The more courses you teach, the lower the expectations for research & publishing
- **Examples of Percentage Breakdowns:** (how the university expects you to allot your time)
    - 40% teaching, 40% research, 20% administration
    - 60% teaching, 30% research, 10% administration
- *How this affects you:* the amount of time you are expected to spend teaching impacts your ability to do independent research and publish; for permanent positions, there will likely be administrative duties as well

College & University Rankings (US)

- Common Designations (not comprehensive - see [Carnegie Classifications](#))
  - SLAC – Small Liberal Arts School ~ usually teaching-heavy with an interest in pedagogy with less emphasis on publishing (but probably still necessary for tenure); often emphasize diversity and inclusiveness in job posting; **you need to come across as a teacher and mentor first and a researcher second or third**
    - Requested materials will often ask you to emphasize your **commitment to DEI**, your **teaching approach**, your **potential for collaborative research and teaching** with other faculty and students, and how your teaching approach is compatible with a **liberal arts education in a tight-knit community** setting. May ask for **teaching portfolio** and/or **teaching evaluations**.
  - R1 – very high research institution with doctoral programs (like Columbia or NYU) ~ heavy research and publication requirements; still have interest in teaching, but **you have to prove your potential for contributing to your field.**
  - R2 – high research institution with doctoral programs (like Teachers College or CUNY) ~ similar interest in research and publication as R1, but not necessarily as stringent.
    - Requested materials are similar to SLAC, but will likely request a **research statement** and either a published **article** or an "article-length" piece of writing
    - May still ask for teaching statement, DEI statement, and evaluations

Types of Academic Jobs (North America)

Tenure Track (TT) *pathway to permanence*

- <u>Positions:</u>
  - **Assistant Professor** (→ Associate Professor → Full Professor)
  - **Assistant Teaching Professor*** ("teaching stream") (→ Associate Teaching Professor → Full Teaching Professor)
- <u>Duties:</u>
  - Teaching, Research, Service (weight of teaching vs. research depends upon university type)

  *Assistant Teaching Professor may or may not be tenured depending upon institution (I've only seen a few of these positions, mostly untenured).

Non-Tenure Track (NTT) *no guaranteed permanence*

- <u>Teaching Positions:</u>
  - **Assistant Teaching Professor*** ("teaching stream")
  - **Visiting Assistant Professor** (VAP) – good for building teaching experience, especially if aiming for a SLAC or teaching-focused position; may still be able to research and give talks
  - **Lecturer/Instructor** (*not necessarily possess PhD*)
  - **Adjunct** (*typically possess PhD*)
- <u>Research Positions:</u>
  - **Postdoctoral Research Fellow/Scholar** – good for building research & publishing experience, especially if aiming for an R1/R2; will usually involve some teaching requirements (often 1 course per year or semester)
  - **Research Fellow/Assistant**

Types of Academic Jobs (Non-North America)

- Permanence:
  - Often equivalent (in practice) to a tenured position without the tenure process
  - Renewable contract (technically still plausible could be dismissed even years later)
  - There may be a probationary period (Ex/ 1-4 years in UK)
  - Some non-North American countries employ the same tenure-track situation as in the US, some have similar titles or use the term "tenure track" for advertising a permanent position but may not actually have a tenure approval process

- Titles:
  - Vary depending upon country/system. For example, in parts of Europe, "professor" is a single rank comparable to a Full Professor in North America
  - UK model: **Lecturer** = lowest rank for permanent position, equivalent to a US Assistant Professor; **Senior Lecturer** = equivalent to an Associate Professor; **Reader** = similar to Senior Lecturer but more research-oriented; **Professor** = comparable to a Full Professor (there are different pay scales and responsibilities associated with each tier); there may also be a US-equivalent adjunct or instructor-level position called an **Assistant Lecturer**.

Comparison of Academic Job Titles Around the World

Commonwealth System	United States System	German System	French System
Professor (chair)	Professor, distinguished professor, chaired professor, or equivalent	Professor (Ordinarius, W3 with Chair, C4)	Professeur des universités, Directeur de recherche
Reader, Principal Lecturer	Professor	Professor (extraordinarius, W2, W3 without chair, C3)	Professeur des universités, Directeur de recherche
Senior lecturer	Associate professor	Hochschuldozent, Oberassistent (W2, C2), Privatdozent	Maître de conférences
Lecturer	Assistant professor	Privatdozent, Juniorprofessor, Wissenschaftlicher Assistent, Akademischer Rat (W1, C1, A13)	Maître de conférences
Assistant lecturer, demonstrator, seminar leader	Research Associate, lecturer, researcher, instructor	Privatdozent	Attaché temporaire d'enseignement et de recherche (ATER)
	Adjunct professor	Privatdozent	

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_ranks_in_the_United_Kingdom

China

- Professor (Senior rank) (Chinese: 教授)
- Associate Professor (Vice-Senior rank) (Chinese: 副教授)
- Assistant Professor (Tenure-track system) (Chinese: 助理教授)
- Lecturer, or University Lecturer (Medium rank) (Chinese: 讲师)
- Assistant Lecturer, or Associate Lecturer (Junior rank) (Chinese: 助教)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_ranks_in_China

Australia

- Level A — Tutor/Associate Lecturer/Research Associate
- Level B — Lecturer/Research Fellow
- Level C — Senior Lecturer/Senior Research Fellow
- Level D — Associate Professor
- Level E — Professor.

New Zealand

- Lecturer/Research Fellow
- Senior Lecturer/Senior Research Fellow
- Senior Lecturer (over the bar)/Senior Research Fellow (over the bar)
- Associate Professor
- Professor
- Distinguished Professor

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_ranks_(Australia_and_New_Zealand)

Takeaway: Research title/rank/salary standards for each country and university carefully

Rough Timeline for Applications

- **Tenure-Track (Assistant Professor):**
  - Start becoming available in August, with heavy concentration in October/November
  - Some will still come through in January/February
  - Jobs may still become available throughout the spring and summer (potentially throughout the year if the need arises, too), especially for NTT and non-US jobs.
  - "Open-rank" means open to hiring at assistant, associate, or full professor levels
- **Non-Tenure Track:**
  - **VAPs** – common in December–March, but they can appear as early as September
  - **Postdocs** – common in November–January, but some appear in September and others may come up in the spring; several postdocs are multi-year and will not be offered each year
  - **Lecturer/Instructor/Adjunct** – common in the spring, will show up in the summer (even late summer) for the upcoming academic year; some schools start advertising for their **adjunct pool** well in advance

Note: this timeline is *heavily* influenced by my own experiences and my own field; <u>research carefully on your own and ask professors, alumni, and senior students about their experiences</u>

Rough Timeline for Applications

- <u>Deadlines</u> – usually 1-2 months after posting, but some are 2-3 weeks
- <u>Letters</u> – some will have strict deadline coinciding with application deadline or a couple of weeks after (others might communicate a different deadline to letter writers directly). If using <u>Interfolio</u>, you can keep generic letters on hand.
- <u>Interviews</u>
    - <u>Initial stage</u> ("long list") – common in November–January; if your field has a fall or winter national conference, initial interviews may be scheduled to coincide with it; if not, it'll probably be by Zoom or Microsoft Teams
    - <u>On-campus</u> ("short list") – common in January–April (depends in part upon application deadline)
        - Meetings with faculty, students, administrators
        - Job talk – formally discuss an aspect of your research (~40 min. presentation, 20 min Q&A)
        - Teaching demonstration – could take the place of an actual class or separately with students & faculty in attendance; could be a topic of your choosing or one that corresponds with the syllabus

Rough Timeline for Applications

- <u>Job Offer</u> – depends in part upon when other applicants are visiting, background checks, bureaucratic approval process (expect ~4-6 weeks for US)
  - *Note: in the UK, it is common to bring all candidates together at the same time. The process may be restricted to a 20-30 minute presentation and a 20-30 minute interview. The job may be offered within a week or even as little as 1-2 days.*
- <u>Negotiations</u> – depends upon what is requested and who has to sign off on what (expect a few days to a week or two)
- <u>Start Date</u> – usually August or September (occasionally January for mid-year jobs; jobs in Japan may start in October or April)
  - *Note: Unless it says "open to ABD candidates," there may be a requirement to have a PhD "in hand" by July, August, or September. This could mean you graduated, deposited, or defended (may be useful to clarify). If you end up not having the degree by then, ideally you will still be allowed to keep the job and start teaching. Your title and pay may be reduced until the degree is completed.*

Commonly Requested Materials

Change content of cover letter depending upon university type & job description. Every letter should mention research, teaching, and service (and possibly your commitment to DEI)

- <u>Cover Letter</u> – **Your most valuable component**; this 1-2 page letter should be on **university letterhead** (ask the department 1-2 weeks before deadline). Adjust material appropriately for different categories of schools & their needs. **Contents could include:**
  - Overview of dissertation (no more than 1 paragraph)
  - *Timeline for completing dissertation and graduating (or when you graduated)*
  - Teaching experience & potential classes
  - Research interests, publications, presentations
  - Examples of service activities OR potential for service activities
  - Upcoming conference presentation (especially if they say they will do interviews there)
  - *Bespoke material tailored to the job description*
- <u>Letters of recommendation</u> – Usually 2 or 3; timelines for getting letters varies, but usually applications request contact information at the time of applying. Some places ask professors to email letters to the chair of the committee directly or will only reach out if you reach the second round. **On <u>Interfolio</u>, have each letter writer submit 1 generic letter to use for last minute applications.**
- <u>CV</u> – Look through samples online to find a style you like; include your references with their contact information at the end. Some applications impose page limits (1-2 pages; 5-6 pages)

Commonly Requested Materials

- Teaching Statement/Philosophy – a 1-2 page document with a clearly stated *teaching philosophy*, examples of your teaching approach and assessments, teaching objectives (optional: quotes from evaluations or student emails)

- Research Statement – a 1-2 page document that provides an overview of your research topic, approach/methodology, major questions, etc...; you may want to provide an overview of your dissertation and also include a *timeline and trajectory with regards to publishing, public speaking, and your next project*

- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) – a 1-2 page document that provides evidence of your commitment to DEI, as demonstrated by personal experience, teaching approach, pedagogical training, classroom experience, research matter, etc... Ideally, touch upon the three major themes of *"teaching, research, service"*

Note: It's not uncommon to be asked to write statements that blur the lines between these: "your approach to teaching at a liberal arts school that values diversity;" "how you include students into your research;" "how you include your commitment to diversity in your teaching, research, and service activities."

Commonly Requested Materials

- <u>Writing Sample</u> – more common with TT jobs and postdocs, but I've also seen them requested for VAP positions.
  - Usually a published article or a dissertation chapter (make sure it's polished with full citations)
  - May have page limits (20, 30, or 40 is common) or say "article-length" → look at standards for articles in your field's top journals (example: 10,000-15,000 words)
  - If requesting 1-2 dissertation chapters, you may also be asked to provide an abstract and/or Table of Contents as well as a timeline for completion
- <u>Evidence of Teaching Success/Excellence; Teaching Portfolio</u> – not always requested and never specified what they mean or want. It's annoyingly vague, but some options for things to include are:
  - Descriptions of courses you have taught (divide by "teacher of record" and "TA"), including student numbers, approach, assessments, course materials, etc…
  - Teaching philosophy/statement if not requested elsewhere
  - 1-2 syllabi (note if you have taught them)
  - CTL certificates; other evidence of pedagogical training
  - Teaching evaluations OR a summary of comments/graphs
  - Examples of student assignments with your comments or student emails

Don't include everything – make it navigable and easy to peruse; I include a Table of Contents with hyperlinks for mine

Succinct Summaries of Research

- Academic Mission Statement – For cover letter and/or research statement; 1-2 sentences
  - Approach from: https://www.cathymazak.com/academic-mission-statement/
    - "I use (approach/method) to study (topic) in order to (primary purpose) [and (secondary purpose)]."
    - My example: "I use textual and material analysis to study early Japan's overseas relationships in order to demonstrate how Buddhism's transmission promulgated global awareness and cultural diffusion."
- Elevator Pitch – for interviews and conferences, plus general networking; 2-3 minutes tops
  - Approach from: https://theprofessorisin.com/2020/01/09/surviving-your-first-conference-tips-for-anxious-newbies/
    - Sentence 1: Broad(ish) statement of research
    - Sentence 2: Specific material examining in dissertation
    - Sentence 3: Approach and materials
    - Sentence 4: Current or expected findings
    - Sentence 5: Relation to greater field

Note: avoid field-specific terminology or jargon ~ show how accessible you can make your work to non-specialists

Planning Ahead (Summer Before Applying)

- **Prepare your writing sample.** If using a dissertation chapter, make sure the citations are correct and formatted properly. You may want to include your abstract.
- **Spruce up your online academic profile**: update department profile, digital portfolio, academia.edu page, etc...
- **Draft your statements**: writing, research, DEI, cover letter (optional: teaching excellence/success portfolio)
- **Review past job openings.** See the types of materials commonly requested at R1 vs. SLAC vs. Postdocs.
- **Find a mentor.** Reach out to professors you admire and trust as well as alumni who are working in the type of institution or field you want to be in; ask them to comment on your statements
- **Find a writing buddy.** Ideally, this is someone you won't be competing with for jobs but you can work together on your materials
- **Plot out your timeline.** Schedule dissertation completion from now until defense (assume in April/May)
- **Clarify deadlines & requirements.** Talk to your advisor, committee, and the department so you know you are squared away for graduation before the fall term starts (and also ask what happens if you need more time)
- **Reach out to CTL.** Research workshops and make appointments for one-on-one help with statements
- **Plot out at least 2 syllabi.** One should be an intro-level survey course and one should be intermediate-advanced in your specialty. Keep a list of potential courses and readings (useful for applications & interviews).
- **Register with your field's major research association/conference** (AAS, AAA, AHA). Try to go to the conference in case you are asked to interview there (ideally, present on a panel if you can).

Planning Ahead (<u>1+ Years Before Applying:</u>)

- **Apply to speak at a national conference**. Keep in mind the call for papers comes out roughly 6 months before the actual conference. Try to be on a panel with professors rather than other grad students.
- **Attend CTL workshops and seminars.** Add them to your CV and Evidence of Teaching Excellence. Consider completing the Teaching Development Program (TDP) by the time you graduate.
- **Make an article from a term paper or dissertation chapter.** Keep in mind publishing can take the better part of a year. Even if you don't publish it, it could be a good writing sample.
- **Start tracking postdocs**. See what's applicable to you and when they come out. If it's a multi-year postdoc, it might be offered only every 2-3 years, meaning it might not be available the year you graduate.
- **Develop syllabi.** Start with your comps lists and courses you've TA'd for. Look online for examples.
- **Keep in touch with alumni.** By the time you are on the market, they may be preparing for their first sabbatical assignment. Mentioning that you know them and took classes with them implies continuity and comparable standards to your colleague, which can help get you to the interview stage for a VAP.
- **Attend job talks.** That will be you in a few years, so look at the topic and content of the talks, see what kinds of questions and feedback they get. Also, show your support to your peers.
- **Grow your network.** Go to conferences and symposiums at other universities. Reach out to professors. Collaborate with students and professors from other universities on research and panel ideas.
- **Build an online presence.** Make a website, post publications, update department profile, engage with professors and other scholars on social media. Do as much or as little as you are comfortable with.

The Question of Publishing:

- **Approach 1**: Focus on the dissertation first, publish 1-2 articles after graduation, turn dissertation into book manuscript and publish
  - <u>Positives</u>: single-minded focus on completing the dissertation; no concerns about copyright with chapter material; all publications could count towards tenure (if produced after hired for TT job)
  - <u>Negatives</u>: it's a gap in your CV that other applicants may have; you may no longer be at Columbia when you are trying to work out how to develop an article, so you could be on your own (note: if going to a postdoc or teaching job, there may be support groups there); some jobs (especially in Asia) require publications for eligibility
- **Approach 2**: Publish as you go; publish an article or two from your dissertation, MA thesis, or from a term paper before you are on the job market
  - <u>Positives</u>: easier to work with professors while developing article; looks impressive on the job market (especially for R1 positions); could make you eligible for more jobs
  - <u>Negatives</u>: can distract from dissertation; can cause issue with copyright if too close to publicly-available dissertation (or may decrease desirability of book manuscript if too much is already out there); could send mixed signals if you're applying to a teaching-focused position; could be preemptive in getting material out before it's ready; won't count for tenure

The Question of Publishing:

- **Easy/ Fast Workarounds if You Don't Have Publications:**
  - Option 1: submit an article to a journal and list it in your CV as "under review."
    - *There is no obligation to follow through with the publication if you do not want to; you do not have to note if the article was rejected, but it won't be "under review" unless you resubmit it elsewhere or receive a revise and resubmit (R&R)*
  - Option 2: write current or future article ideas and list them in your CV as "in process."
    - *This will not carry much weight (and could be seen negatively), but it does at least communicate some research interests and ideas*
  - Option 3: apply to present at a conference where the papers will be published later
    - *Not as prestigious as a journal article, but it counts for something*
  - Option 4: apply to contribute a chapter to a book or an entry in an encyclopedia; usually shorter content and with a quick enough time for approval that you can put it in the CV even if it's not published yet
    - *Again, book chapters do not count for as much as journal articles, but it's still a publication, and it helps build your network of connections*

Building An Online Presence

- **Positives**
  - Showcase Research & Credentials:
    - Research blog, publications, CV
  - Post Application Materials:
    - Teaching, Research, and DEI statements; syllabi; CV
  - Increase Visibility:
    - Easier to network & to be contacted for conference panels or publication contributions
  - Share Resources:
    - Post insights, tools, and information for fellow academics/students

- **Negatives**
  - Pressure to update material:
    - Can be difficult to maintain or figure out the purpose for a website
  - Cost:
    - A full, independent website can be expensive to maintain
  - Potential for stealing:
    - Your application materials could be stolen or plagiarized by others
  - Potential for Controversy/Drama:
    - Social media is rife with academic controversies; being a visible participant could hurt your candidacy

Building An Online Presence

- **Complicated**
  - Build an independent website:
    - Wix, Wordpress, Squarespace
    - My example (using Wix): https://www.aimacbain.com/
  - Build a digital teaching portfolio
    - Through CTL's Teaching Development Program (TDP)
- **Moderate**
  - Create a profile on a site:
    - Academia.edu, Google Scholar, ResearchGate
  - Use Columbia Sites or Columbia Blogs

Note: Figure out what you want your online presence to be and what you want it to do first; use that to inform your platform and content

- **Easy**
  - Build up your departmental profile:
    - Example 1; Example 2
  - Use simple and free online tools:
    - Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, Instagram
- **Other Venues:**
  - Women Also Know History
  - Women in the Study of Asian Religions
- **Resources for building an academic profile:**
  - What is an Academic Profile?
  - Building an online academic profile begins with your website
  - The Ins and Outs of a Professional Academic Website

Places to find job openings

- H-Net Job Board: for humanities and social sciences (mostly US, but can be global)
- AAS Job Board: for Asia-related jobs (look for research organizations for your specific field, too)
- Academic Jobs Online: General array of jobs around the world, but not very comprehensive
- University Affairs: Academic Job Board for Canada
- Jobs.ac.uk: Academic jobs in the UK; includes Europe and other parts of the world
- JREC-IN Portal: Japan-based research and teaching jobs
- HERC: Higher Education Recruitment Consortium
- HigherEd Jobs: Can be sorted by location and school-type
- The Chronicle for Higher Education: Job Board (including administrative and non-academic jobs)
- HigherEd360: More location-based job search (especially in US)
- East Asia-related jobs: Dr. Paula Curtis' project, includes globally-based jobs & job data
- Listservs: for example, PMJS, H-Japan, H-Buddhism
- Department newsletter: scroll to bottom to see some of the relevant jobs and postdocs available
- Twitter and Facebook pages for professors/organizations you know

Other Resources

- [The Professor is In](#) (book): Great array of chapters, including on grant applications, speaking at conferences, campus visits, drafting statements, etc...
- [The Professor is In](#) (website): Includes portions of book chapters as well as additional posts, including guest posts (for example: there is a series specific to applying for jobs in the UK)
- [HigherEd Jobs:](#) Job Search Tips (also, browse through website for relevant articles)
- [The Chronicle for Higher Education](#): Job Search Tips (also, browse through website for relevant articles)
- [Academic Jobs Wiki:](#) Academic Networking and Jobs Resources (also good for finding postdocs)
- [Paula Curtis:](#) Job Sites for Academics
- [Wabash Center:](#) Syllabi Database
- [Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning](#): Resources and Guides (also, search for workshops on DEI and teaching statements as well as crafting syllabi)
- Also, many universities post guidelines for their own students regarding statements and cover letters; a quick search will come up with a lot of different options
- If preparing a syllabus for a job, you may find syllabus guidelines from that school online

General Advice:

- **Be creative with your job search**. Look at associated fields/departments, other countries, academic-adjacent industries (libraries, publishers, museums, research centers) or even post-academic possibilities. Many of your skills are applicable and desirable outside of academia, but it may take extra brainstorming and some distance to consider how to best market yourself. Contact GSAS Compass for help exploring and preparing for post-ac jobs.

- **There's no perfect way to approach the market.** What works for one person won't necessarily work for someone else. Following advice listed here won't guarantee success, and NOT following something here won't guarantee failure. Seek out various opinions and experiences, but ultimately trust your instincts.

- **Send thank you emails within 24-48 hours of interviews.** Thank the administrators who set up the meetings, too.

- **It is not uncommon to take multiple cycles to get a permanent position** (if ever). That could mean stringing together VAPs and postdocs, working as an adjunct, or moving far away (if you are open to it).

- **There are many variables to a job search that you will have no control over or even awareness of.** Quite often, decisions are made based upon a variety of needs and invisible factors within a school or department that one applicant might match better than another. Rejection is not failure, it's just a common part of the process.

- **Try not to compare your experience with your colleagues'.** You or they may not have necessarily done anything "wrong" or "right;" just focus on creating the best application package possible and put it out of your mind once it's submitted. Expect nothing (including a formal rejection).

- **Even bad experiences are useful.** Embrace the embarrassing interviews and slip-ups. They'll make you even better next time (and create good stories later on).

- **Don't overwhelm yourself with advice.** See what rings true, but know that we are all figuring it out as we go.