

Graduate Career Services

The Graduate School and Division of Student Affairs

Research Statements

One of the common documents you may be required or encouraged to submit when applying for academic positions is a Research Statement that shows you have begun thinking about your current and future research interests and goals. It should demonstrate how you will continue to focus on doing work that is both significant and unique, and how it ties into your previous efforts without simply being an extension of your dissertation or your advisor's research.

Q) What is the purpose of a research statement or plan?

A) In addition to helping you get hired, it also aids your development as a scientist, engineer, humanist, etc. by serving as a map for your career as a research professional. It helps demonstrate your intellectual vision and aspirations, and is an opportunity to begin demonstrating the creative and independent thinking required of a successful researcher.

Q) Are there different kinds of research statements?

A) Yes. Tenure-track applications at large research institutions are not the only ones that require a research statement. For Small Liberal Arts Colleges (SLACs), it might be combined into a "Teaching and Research Statement" and will describe how your research interests relate to excellence in teaching. Postdoctoral fellowships might request a "Research Proposal," which is a longer document that includes a more detailed plan for your research goals and focuses more on the near future than your past research accomplishments or potential long-term variations.

Q) How is it different from the research aspects of my cover letter?

A) The research statement should complement the cover letter and consistently describe the dissertation and its next steps, but show a greater trajectory for future research interests. Be careful not to repeat information verbatim from your cover letter.

Q) Should I prepare a research statement even if none of my applications require one?

A) Yes. Reflecting on what you want to research, the skills you have for generating successful research, and how your interests differentiate you from other researchers is an important exercise that can benefit you throughout the interview process.



Important aspects

- 1-2 pages single spaced, with some detailed postdoc proposals extending to 3-5 pages. Make note of requested page limits.
- Describe current research, as well as publication plans (e.g. journal articles, book-length manuscript, etc.).
- Discuss plans for future research directions and projects extending beyond current work.
- Show the progression or developmental trajectory of your past, present, and future research efforts.
- Avoid being too general or too specific. Broad concepts may not appear focused enough, but narrowing too sharply will appear too limited.
- Include any relevant facilities or resources required to complete your research, and identify potential sources of external funding to support the plans.
- Differentiate yourself from others who have studied a similar topic.
- Be inspiring. You want the committee to desire more information and to value your contributions to the field.
- Convey an expertise in both your area of study and particular research methodologies relevant to the trends in your field.