Creating a Compelling Application Packet

General advice

• Track all the jobs you are applying to a spreadsheet. Include dates, information, where you found the listing, etc. Eventually you will send a version of this spreadsheet to your recommenders (unless you are using a service like Interfolio).
• Your packet should look as professional as possible. Send PDFs, not Word documents. Use a consistent font throughout.
• Create a simple website (Google Sites is a good free platform) and include this link on your CV. It makes you seem professional, and you can track who is looking at your page. Other advantages:
  o You can attach supplemental info at your website (for instance, raw numbers for teaching evaluations) that can only be accessed by those who have the link.
  o An “about” page with some personal details makes you seem like a real person and provides good interview fodder. Do not mention kids/spouses/etc.

Cover letter

• Fundamental goal: be clear, **easy for the entire committee to skim**, readable. Remember that they will be reading this very quickly.
• Recruit readers/editors who are not in your specific area. I cannot emphasize this enough. Because the search committee will be comprised of people from across the discipline, your cover letter should describe your research in language that is accessible to everyone: **no jargon**.
• Your cover letter should be written on university letterhead and should follow the general structure below:
  1. Introduce yourself. Tell them your expected defense date, dissertation supervisor, general research area, and two to three sentences about your yesdissertation topic.
  2. Clearly state **why your research matters and outline your major finding**. Remember, the committee will be skimming it, so you should use signaling phrases like “The key contribution of my research is ____.”
  3. As you discuss your findings, keep in mind that the search committee wants to know **what new knowledge you have discovered**, not what area you study or what questions you ask. For example, do not say “My dissertation examines how young people’s use of Twitter affects their political engagement.” Instead, say “In my dissertation, I find that young people who use Twitter are more likely to vote, volunteer, and donate.”
  4. Provide more detail on your dissertation: describe your methods (in terms accessible to non-specialists), discuss any grants you have received, emphasize the **importance** of your findings.
  5. Summarize your non-dissertation research: past publications, current projects, note any publications or awards. If possible, tie this together into a general “research agenda.”
  6. Describe your next project/future research. Again, avoid jargon.
7. Discuss your teaching, including a brief summary of your past experience, what classes you are qualified to teach, and what classes you hope to teach. Include the intro course in your concentration as one of these, and make sure to also include any courses that the job ad specifically mentioned.

8. **When applying to teaching-focused institutions:** lengthen the teaching section and trim down the research sections. Speak to your qualifications for any special programs that the institution has (tutorials, etc). If you went to a teaching-focused institution as an undergrad, mention it.

9. Close by mentioning what else you included in your packet, who will be writing your letters of recommendation, thank them, etc.

**Writing sample**
- Include an abstract and ensure it is entirely comprehensible by non-specialists.
- Most people will only read the first few pages. Those pages should be flawless.
- If you have a publication, you may want to include it as a second writing sample.

**Recommendations**
- Send your recommenders a spreadsheet that includes all relevant information:
  - University, field (theory, comparative, etc), addressee for letter (“Search committee” if unknown), type of letter required (email, online, postal mail), contact info, deadline, URL for the posting, any special notes.
- Note if there are any jobs you are particularly interested in – not all recommenders will tailor their letters, but some might.
- Remind recommenders of your wonderful but perhaps less heralded qualities: for example, your teaching experience, your attendance at events, your academic breadth.
- Give your committee members material by talking to them **in person** about your research, seeking their advice, and updating them on your achievements.
- Make sure to send your recommenders **all** your application materials.

**Teaching statement**
- The teaching statement should not be one enormous block of text. Divide it into sections: for example, teaching philosophy (possibly with subheads); experience (including courses you could teach); evaluations.
- Provide specific examples of your teaching skills. Do not succumb to the allure of meaningless generalities. Tell them what you **actually** do, not what you **want** to do.
  - For example, do not say “I want to teach my students to engage in critical thinking.” Instead, say “To encourage critical thinking, I require students to submit written reviews of the assigned readings, and I devote part of each class period to engaging with their feedback.”
- If you have teaching evaluations, use the raw data to create your own chart (include a link to a PDF of the original data). Include written comments from students, unless they are terrible.