

Application Materials for Philosophy Jobs

some bits of general advice

Jeff Russell

University of Southern California, Fall 2022

CV

- Your CV is probably the first part of your application people will look at. You want it to succinctly tell the basic story about what kind of philosopher you are and what your priorities are.
- There aren't hard and fast rules about what order to put things in, or what to include or omit. In general, put toward the top the things that are most important for making your case.
- Make it clear, legible, and skimmable, with clearly marked section headings and sensibly formatted items.

Research statement

- Your goal is to tell a compelling story about the kind of philosopher you are, why your work is interesting, and what the big picture is that it fits into.
- It shouldn't look like just a list of titles and abstracts, though it should be substantiated by mentioning your specific concrete achievements (such as publications).
- I generally recommend putting it in terms of the guiding questions, rather than naming topics like PhilPapers headings.
- It should focus about 90% on stuff that you have already done, while putting that in the context of some over-arching themes or goals.
- Your target audience is a philosopher who knows nothing about your particular field.

Teaching statement

- Teaching statements are hard. Expect it to take multiple rewrites before it's really strong.
- Keep it to the point: as a guideline, no more than two pages single-spaced (with reasonable font and margin choices).

- Like all your materials, make it skimmable. (Section markers, boldface important ideas, clear and short paragraphs.)
- Use vivid, concrete examples from your actual teaching experience. Don't fall back on generalities. As a rule of thumb, lead with the examples and then draw morals from them about your approach to teaching. The examples are what people will remember, and what will make your statement distinctive and interesting.
- “Teaching Assistant” can mean a lot of things. At USC, your experience as a TA usually involves a lot of independence to design and run your own sections (depending who you are working with). At other places, sometimes a TA is just a grader. So people won’t know what kind of thing you have done just from your title. Tell them: show specific teaching choices you have made, and how you have implemented them.
- Write in the present or past tense—you’re not speculating about the kind of teacher you’ll be eventually; rather, you’re writing as the experienced teacher you already are. (Do this even when you’re talking about stuff you haven’t had a chance to do. For example, even if you’ve never taught from your own syllabus, talk about how you design a syllabus, not how you *would* design a syllabus.)
- Remember that teaching isn’t just about talking in a classroom. Think about setting goals, crafting a syllabus, assignment design, evaluation, dealing with student hardships, class policies. (You won’t have space to talk about *all* of these things, but think about all of them and make good choices about what you should focus on—what especially well illustrates your approach to teaching, or you have something distinctive to say about.)
- If you can draw knowledgeably on empirical studies of pedagogy, do it.

Diversity statement

- Diversity statements are hard to write. Expect it to take multiple tries.
- 1–2 pages single-spaced.
- The best diversity statements demonstrate, with evidence, concrete ways you have already been working to improve climate, expand access, and fight oppression in philosophy, and how you anticipate doing this in the future.
- Think broadly. There are lots of different tacks you can take. Some examples of things to think about:
 - Teaching: choice of topics, representation of identities and perspectives in the curriculum, fairness and accessibility in assignments and class policies, discussion norms ...

- Service within the profession: MAP involvement, mentorship, advocacy for policies, writing, organizing ...
- Broader service to the community: Corrupt the Youth, Prison Education Project, public writing and advocacy ...
- Integration with your research: topics, directions, methods ...
- Think about different dimensions of oppression, too, and how they intersect: gender, race, orientation, disability, class ...
- You can talk about your own experiences and identity, to the extent that you're comfortable. If one of the ways you will contribute to diversity in the profession is simply by being part of it, that's a good thing to bring out.
- You can't talk about everything, so don't try. After you've thought about it from a bunch of angles, pick a few things to focus on. Pick things where you have the most concrete and distinctive things to say.
- Use specific and vivid examples!

Cover letter

- Think of your cover letter as the introduction section for the rest of your file. Succinctly summarize what someone will find there in a way that sparks interest and encourages them to keep reading.
- In a “standard” application, where you’re also turning in research, teaching, and diversity statements, your cover letter should be very short and to-the-point—not more than about a page.
 - A very brief statement like “I am applying to your advertised job in Philosophy.”
 - A brief “about me”: “I am a PhD candidate in philosophy at USC, expecting to graduate in May 2023. My main research interests are in ..., and I am also eager to teach ...”.
 - A short paragraph or two summarizing your research projects. Try to frame it in a way that will capture the interest of non-specialists.
 - A short paragraph or two about teaching, service, and diversity.
- If there is some special and non-obvious reason why you are a particularly good fit for this job, or why you are especially attracted to it, this can be good to include. It can be delicate to figure out exactly how much information to disclose, or how to frame this. Please feel free to ask me for help with this case by case.

Website

- You need to have a website. It doesn't have to be fancy, and it doesn't have to be complicated.
- Use some clean, simple, elegant looking basic template.
- You should have an “about me” section, a link to your CV, a research section, and a teaching section. (These can be separate pages but they don’t have to be.)
- “About me.” Summarize very succinctly (a few sentences) your main research and teaching interests. Pitch this to non-experts. Some people like to include pictures or some personal details, but you don’t have to—and in any case, keep it professional.
- Research section: Titles and mini-abstracts for your papers. These shouldn’t be the same abstracts that you use to summarize your paper for specialists—they should be little “advertising pitches”, like you might give to an interested student.
- Teaching section: Lots of options for what to include here. You could include links to some past course materials, or some distinctive assignments you’ve created, or you could just list your teaching experience with little blurbs for each item.