

Notes on Implementing an Efficient Process for Producing Academic Job Applications

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How can we lose when we're so sincere?
Charlie Brown

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1 What This Document Is, and Why

I am an expert at applying for academic positions (at least in philosophy). I have gone on the market several times, applying to many places each time. Although different positions require superficially different components and features in their applications, there is nonetheless a remarkable degree of uniformity in the requirements, enough that a system can be implemented to greatly streamline the process of creating and submitting an application that is still customized for the particulars of the position it is for. I describe the process I have worked out for doing this. I have perfected the process to the point where I can start, complete and submit most applications within half an hour, and that includes customizing and personalizing all the components of the application for the job at issue.

Of course, there is a *caveat*: I still haven't managed to land a permanent academic position. My process, therefore, may be wonderful for producing applications *simpliciter*, but, for all I know, it

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may suck at producing ones that will get you a job. I suspect, however, that my lack of success is not due to this process, since it is purely structural in character, yielding what I would have produced anyway if I were to construct each application individually from scratch. But you've been warned. *Caveat lector!*

2 Spreadsheet

First and most important: make a spreadsheet, one row for each position you intend to apply to; include at least the following columns:

1. application due date—I make this the first column, because it is the most important for the purposes of sorting the columns into a useful order, earliest due-date to latest
2. current status of the application—what you've already sent, what you still need to send, dates for those, *etc.*
3. department/organization the application is for
4. position (rank and AOS/AOC)
5. what the application requires, *e.g.*, cover letter, CV, writing sample, *etc.*—they all tend to have slightly different variations on the same basic set of documents (this one wants a research plan, that one doesn't but wants a statement of teaching philosophy, and so on)
6. contacts/notes: email addresses for contacts at the place; URLs for online applications; username/passwords for online applications that require you register; any other relevant info

See [t](#) the end of these notes for an image of an example spreadsheet in excel format.

3 Templates and Fixed Versions of Documents

Make templates or fixed versions for the following documents:

CV two versions:

1. one for primarily research positions
2. one for primarily teaching positions

cover letters four templates:

1. one for positions advertised in your particular sub-specialty (*e.g.*, philosophy of physics)
2. one for positions in your general specialty (*e.g.*, philosophy of science)
3. one for open positions
4. one for teaching positions

Most of each template should be completely standard, the same for all positions of that type; in each template, mark the places where you will need to personalize by using a place holder such as '[***]' in the body of the document; that way, every time you personalize a template, you can have your word processor search the document for '[***]' to make sure you've filled in every place that needs personalizing.

research plans two versions:

1. one for positions in your sub-specialty or specialty (those probably shouldn't need to differ)
2. one for open positions

It is unlikely a teaching position will ask you for one. Again, mark places for personalization if you want, using the '[***]' trick, but this is not usually needed for research plans.

teaching statement two versions:

1. one for research positions
2. one for teaching positions

Some places require this. Don't ask me why. It's a big pile of bullshit, but, hey, they set up the hoops and we jump through them. Again, if you really give a crap and think it may make the smallest difference (which I myself doubt), mark places for personalization if you want, using the '[***]' trick.

writing samples one to four versions:

1. possibly one for positions advertised in your particular sub-specialty (*e.g.*, philosophy of physics)
2. possibly one for positions in your general specialty (*e.g.*, philosophy of science)
3. possibly one for open positions
4. possibly one for teaching positions

4 Folder Structure

At least as important as anything I've mentioned so far is to make a dedicated top-level folder (named, *e.g.*, 'market') on your computer's hard-drive and place *everything* relevant to all applications only under that folder. Then build a useful organization of folders under the top-level one—do not under-estimate the power of a well-organized folder structure for helping to keep track of what's going on, what you have done, what you still need to do, *etc.* My personal folder-structure is as follows:

market top-level folder

docs folder holding latest finished versions of all fixed documents (CVs, research plans, writing samples, *etc.*); **ONLY FIXED DOCUMENTS FROM THIS FOLDER ARE EVER SENT AS PART OF AN APPLICATION**

cover-letters folder holding templates for cover-letters

cv folder holding working copies of CV versions

research folder holding working copies of research-plan versions

teaching folder holding working copies of teaching-statement versions

writing folder holding working copies of writing-sample versions

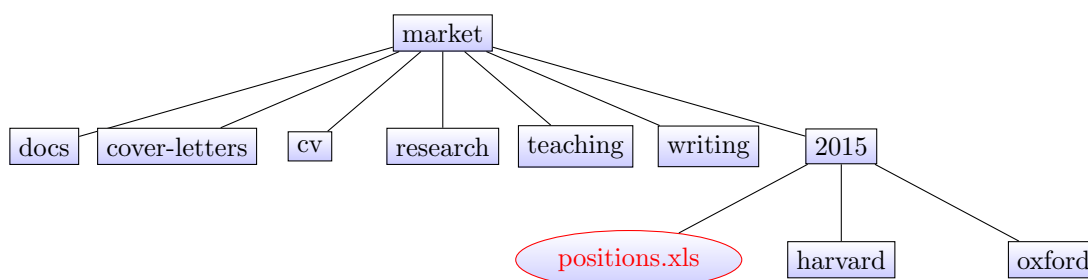
2015 folder holding all files and sub-folders relevant to the positions advertised in the 2015 season:

positions.xls spreadsheet with information for all positions you're applying to

harvard folder holding all documents relevant only to the job at Harvard you're applying to

oxford folder holding all documents relevant only to the job at Oxford you're applying to

The picture (rectangles with black text are folders, ellipses with red text are files):



The idea is as follows. Some kinds of documents (the CV, the research plan, the teaching statement, writing samples), while they may come in multiple different versions, are fixed (*i.e.*, each version of the kind of document is fixed, not a template requiring completion for each new application). Nonetheless, it is likely that during the period of time in which you are confabulating and sending out applications, the contents of some of these fixed documents will need changing. Say a writing sample is accepted for publication at *Journal X* while you are still applying for positions, but after you've already constructed the whole folder/file system. You obviously want to update your CV to reflect this, and you want to update the writing sample itself, to say that it has been accepted. You go to the working folder `market/cv`, update your working copies of all versions of your CV document, produce the final versions from your working copies, then move the finished, fixed versions to `market/docs`. You do the same for the working copy of your writing-sample. This way, by sending out documents **ONLY** from the `market/docs` folder, you can rest assured that you are always sending out the latest, most up-to-date, most accurate versions of your documents. You will never accidentally send out a document that has uncorrected, half-baked revisions, or that is out-of-date. This procedure also allows you easily to produce two differently sized sub-versions of each version of the fixed documents, one **A4** paper-size for European positions and one **letter-size** for North American ones, both from the same working copy.

There is a separate folder `market/2015` because, as horrifying as the prospect is, it is possible that you will repeat this process next year. At that time, you will be able keep everything in place you already had from the previous year, doing nothing but making the folder `market/2016` and a new spreadsheet `market/2016/positions.xls`, and you're ready to go again.

5 Workflow

5.1 Initial Set-Up

1. create folder structure
2. create templates of cover letters; put all in folder `market/cover-letters`
3. create working copies of all fixed-version documents; put in appropriate folders `market/*`
4. create final versions of all fixed documents from working copies; place them in `market/docs`; if you're really fired up, make two differently sized versions of each, named appropriately, *e.g.*, `cv.pdf` and `cv-a4.pdf`
5. create an empty spreadsheet under the folder named the current year (*e.g.*, `market/2015/positions.xsl`)

5.2 Recording New Positions

When you learn about a new position you intend to apply to:

1. add all information about it to the spreadsheet
2. under the folder named the current year (*e.g.*, `market/2015`), create a suggestively named folder for the position (*e.g.*, `market/2015/pitt-hps`)
3. under that folder, save all documents peculiar to that position (*e.g.*, the department's official job-description, or a human-resources form that you must fill out and send in with the application)

5.3 Confabulating Applications

To construct the application:

1. copy the relevant cover-letter template (*e.g.*, `market/cover-letter/cover-open.tex` or `market/cover-letter/cover-physics.tex`) to the position's dedicated folder (`market/2015/pitt-hps/pitt-hps-cover.tex`)
2. customize and personalize the cover letter, making sure you replace every place-holder with something meaningful and relevant
3. collect under the position's folder copies of all the other final versions of all documents needed for the application (double-checked against the information in your spreadsheet to make sure you have what you need and nothing more); if you need to customize or personalize some of the normally fixed documents, now is the time to do it, saving them in the position's folder with an appropriate name to mark the fact they are customized (*e.g.*, `research-plan-pitt-hps.pdf`)
4. submit the documents online, or print them out and mail them, or do whatever is required to submit the application

And you're done.

6 Letters of Recommendation

Come on, do you really need me to tell you how to do everything?

positions.xls

	A	B	C	D	E	
	DUE	SENT	PLACE	POSITION	NEEDED	CONTACTS/NOTES
2	immediately	all except recs, 13 Sep	UCI, LPS	open-rank open/open	standard + statement on diversity	https://recruit.ap.uci.edu/apply/JPF02908 username/password
3	immediately		Pitt, HPS	asst., hist/phil phys	all standard	interest in integrating history and philosophy of science https://facultysearch.as.pitt.edu/apply/index/MTF4
4	immediately		Dartmouth College	asst, open/open	all standard	http://apply.interfolio.com/30946
5		05. Okt complete, 03 Oct	University of St. Andrews, School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Film Studies	lecturer or reader/open		two positions, reference numbers: AC231 9KC, AC34525B https://www.vacancies.st-andrews.ac.uk/Vacancies.aspx username/password
6		15. Okt	Centre for Science Studies. University of Aarhus	assoc. philis sci/phil sci		emphasize connection with hist sci http://www.au.dk/en/about/vacant-positions/scientific-positions/
7		01. Nov	Mich State	asst, phil sci/phil sci	all standard	http://www.jobs.msu.edu/ ref# 1973
8		01. Nov	Division of the Humanities and Social Sciences, California Institute of Technology	open rank open(emp/math sci)	all standard	http://www.hss.caltech.edu/content/assistant-pro
9		09. Nov	Bryn Mawr College	asst, phil sci & epist/broad teaching	cover, cv, letters, teach	http://apply.interfolio.com/30356
10		15. Nov	Pitt Phil	asst, open/open	cover, CV, letters, written	https://facultysearch.as.pitt.edu/apply/index/MTix
11		15. Nov	Northwestern MIT	asst, phil sci/open	cover, CV, letters, written	http://www.philosophy.northwestern.edu/
12		16. Nov	Department of Linguistics and Philosophy	asst., open/open	cover, CV, letters, written	https://academicjobsonline.org/ajol/jobs/5706

Sum = 0