

Writing a Research Statement for the Job Market

Purpose: A research statement summarizes your previous research, current work, and future direction. It shows that you have a plan, which communicates that you are a serious scholar. It also helps a search committee assess your academic strengths and capabilities, your ability to obtain funding, and gives them a sense of your professional identity and scholarly journey. Unlike an abstract, which summarizes a single project, a research statement should summarize your current interests, describe the direction you plan to pursue, and how your work contributes to your field.

General Guidelines:

- Usually one to two pages in length but no longer than three pages.
- Make it readable: use informative subheadings, bullets, and line breaks; one-inch margins; and an easily readable font size (11 or 12 point).

Conventions of the Research Statement:

- The research statement should be a stand-alone document. While you might adjust it to speak to a specific job opening, do not refer directly to a job position or department in the statement itself. Likewise, do not refer to your C.V. or other job documents.
- Clearly state the core argument of your research. This should be one sentence long.
- Use discipline-specific vocabulary as appropriate but avoid excessive jargon. It should be understandable to someone within your department but outside your immediate subfield.
- Include enough detail to demonstrate that you have given this project considerable thought and to show your depth of knowledge, but do not go into excessive detail.
- If applicable, include some preliminary data, using tables, graphs or illustrations.
- Distinguish between your research's topic—the main argument, methodology, and findings—and its contribution—what debates or issues it addresses. See [“Why Did the Chicken Cross the Road? Topic vs. Contribution”](#) blogpost for suggestions.
- Minimize “I-me-my” statements. You want the focus to be on your research, not on yourself. See [“The Golden Rule of the Research Statement”](#) blogpost for suggestions.
- Demonstrate that your second major project is distinct from the first, not simply a continuation of the first project.
- Give a sense of a publishing trajectory. Mention larger projects or endeavors that have come out of your research and future opportunities you plan to pursue.
- This is YOUR research statement; focus on the research YOU have done and want to do.
 - Avoid discussing what other scholars have not done. Instead, focus on how your work contributes to your field.
 - Avoid mentioning studying under anyone, or referring to your advisor or other scholars by name. If you co-authored a piece, simply state “I have a co-authored an essay in Journal X.”

Further Resources

- [The Professor Is In](#)
- [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#)
- [UPenn Career Services](#)
- [Cornell University Graduate School](#)
- [Duke University Career Center](#)

Research Statement Brainstorming Questions

Recent and Current Research:

- How did you become interested in your topic? Why does it continue to interest you? What excites you about your research project?
- If you have done several projects, how are they connected? What links them together? If you have worked in a team (e.g. in a lab or research group), what were your contributions to these projects?
- How does your research contribute to your field? Why does your research matter? Why is it important?
- What recognition has your research received—publications, presentations, grants, awards?

Future Research:

- What are your short-term research goals (2 to 5 years)?
- How do your goals build on (but are not necessarily direct extensions of) your recent work?
- Why are YOU the right person to carry out this research?
- What potential funding sources, collaborative partners, or facilities do you anticipate needing for your research?
 - Note: Tread carefully here. If your research requires a resource the university doesn't have, your application may be rejected despite a well-written proposal.
- How will you involve students in your research (graduate and undergraduate)? How does your research relate to your teaching?
- How do your research goals align with departmental goals?
- What are your longer-term research goals (5+ years)?

Dr. Karen's Five-Paragraph Model

Paragraph 1: A brief sketch of the main themes and topics of your research as well as how it relates to your field.

Paragraph 2: A summary of your dissertation research. This may be similar to the paragraph on the dissertation in your cover letter, but it must have more detail about the methods, the theoretical foundations, and most of all, the core arguments of the project. Give a chapter summary, approximately one sentence per chapter.

Paragraph 3: A brief description of the contributions of the dissertation research to your field and a summary of publications associated with the dissertation research, including a plan for the book if you are in a book field. Other ongoing research projects can be described here in additional paragraphs if you are writing a two-page document.

Paragraph 4: A summary of your next research project. Include a topic, methods, a theoretical framework, and brief statement of its contribution to your field. Mention publications, conference talks, or grants related to the new project.

Paragraph 5: A brief summary of the wider impact of your research. Why is it valuable and important for your discipline, for the wider scholarly community, and for the general public?