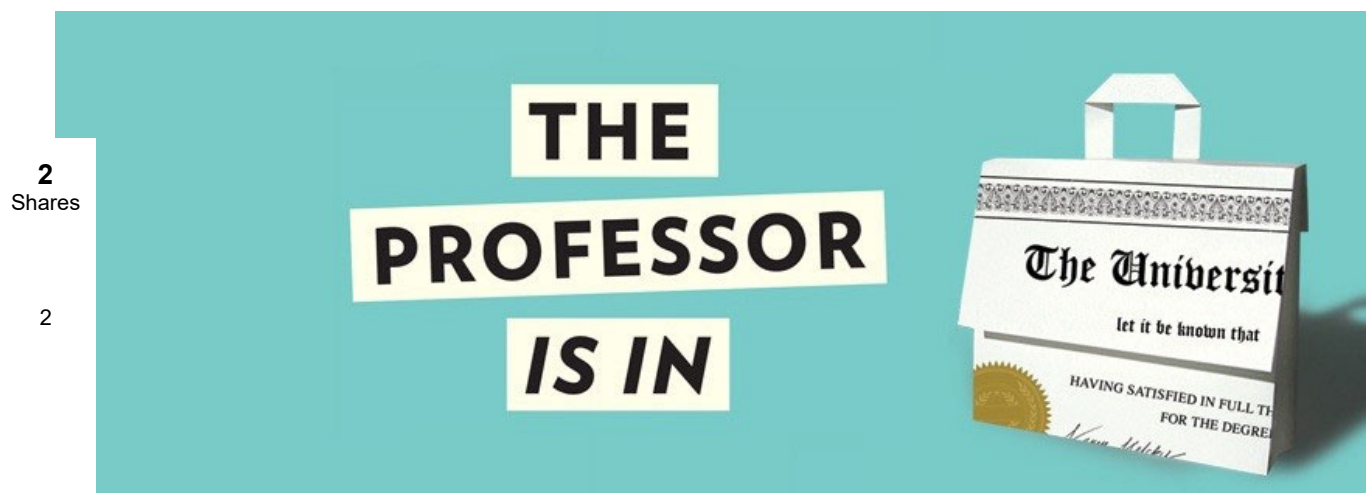


The Professor Is In



Dr. Karen's Rules of the Research Statement

Posted on September 16, 2016 by Karen Kelsky

We've looked at the **Cover Letter** and the **CV** and the **Teaching Statement**. Today we look at the **Research Statement**.

An expanded and updated version of this post can now be found in Chapter 27 of my book, **The Professor Is In: The Essential Guide to Turning Your Ph.D. Into a Job**.

Today, at long last, and in response to popular demand, a post on the Research Statement.

I have, perhaps, procrastinated on blogging about the Research Statement because at some level I felt that the rules might be more variable on this document, particularly with regard to length.

But in truth, they really aren't.

The RS should be two pages long for any junior candidate in the humanities or soft social sciences. Two pages allows for an elaboration of the research well beyond the summary in the cover letter that gives the search committee substantial information to work with. Those junior candidates in the hard sciences and fields like Psychology can have 3-4 page research statements.

I strongly urge all job-seekers to investigate the norms of their individual fields carefully, and follow the advice they receive on this matter from experts in their own fields. Just never simply ASSUME that longer is better in an RS or in any job document.

By the way, the RS to which I refer here is the document sometimes requested as part of a basic job application. This

is NOT the “research proposal” required by specific fellowship or postdoc applications! Those will specify a length, and should be written to follow the outline I describe in [Dr. Karen's Foolproof Grant Template](#).) They are a totally different genre of document; don't confuse the two!

We edit Research Statements. Don't fret! Get help here.

2
Shares

Anyway, back to the RS: there are undoubtedly a number of excellent reasons that people could give for writing a longer RS, based on thoroughness or detail or concerns for accuracy. And I would acknowledge those principles as valid ones.

2

But they would all come second to the single most important principle of all job market writing, in my view, which is the principle of search committee exhaustion.

Search committee members are exhausted, and they are overwhelmed and distracted. There simply is no bandwidth in their brains or their psyches to handle the amount of material they are required to read, when searches routinely garner between 300 and 1000 applications.

Anything that feels “long” is going to be resented just by virtue of its length. And resentment is categorically what you don't want a search committee member feeling about your job application materials.

So, in short, the Research Statement, [just like the Teaching Statement](#), needs to be one to two pages in length, single spaced. And like the TS, it needs to be in 11 or 12 point font, and have decent one-inch margins.

What are the other rules? Here they are:

- Print the RS on regular printer paper. Do not use letterhead for this or the TS, and do not use any special high grade paper.
- Put your name and the words “Research Statement” centered at the top.
- If unsure how to structure, use a 5-paragraph model as follows:

[... edited...]

Here are some additional principles:

- A RS (like a TS) is not tailored to a school overtly. While you may subtly adjust your project descriptions to speak to a specific type of job, you do not refer to any job or department or application in the statement itself.
- Do not refer to any other job documents in the RS (ie, “As you can see from my CV, I have published extensively....”)
- As in all job documents, remain strictly at the level of the evidentiary. State what you did, what you concluded, what you published, and why it matters for your discipline, period. Do not editorialize or make grandiose claims (“this research is of critical importance to...”).
- Do not waste precious document real estate on what other scholars have NOT done. Never go negative. Stay entirely in the realm of what you did, not what others didn't.
- Do not position yourself as “extending” or “adding to” or “building off of” or ... [what follows is edited...]
- Do not refer to other faculty or scholars in the document. The work is your own. If you co-authored a piece...
- Do not refer to yourself as studying “under” anybody...

- Do not forget to articulate the core argument of your research. I am astounded at how often (probably in about 80% of client documents) I have to remind clients to ...
- Give a sense of a publishing trajectory, moving from past to present...
- Make sure you are not coming across as a one-trick pony. The second major project must be clearly distinct ...
- Use the active voice as much as possible, but beware a continual reliance on "I-Statements", as I describe in this post, [The Golden Rule of the Research Statement](#).

2 Shares will stop here. Readers, please feel free to add more in the comments. I will add to this post as further refinements come to mind.

2 We edit Research Statements and we can help yours. Drop us a line.

Similar Posts:

- [This Christmas, Don't Be Cheap](#)
- [The Dreaded Teaching Statement: Eight Pitfalls](#)
- [What is Evidence of Teaching Excellence?](#)
- [The Golden Rule of the Research Statement](#)
- [How to Turn Your Teaching Duds into Memorable Statements](#)

Posted in [Landing Your Tenure Track Job](#), [Major Job Market Mistakes](#), [Teaching and Research Statements](#) Tagged [how to write a research statement](#) [permalink](#) [<http://theprofessorisin.com/2016/09/16/dr-karens-rules-of-the-research-statement/>]



About Karen Kelsky

I am a former tenured professor at two institutions--University of Oregon and University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. I have trained numerous Ph.D. students, now gainfully employed in academia, and handled a number of successful tenure cases as Department Head. I've created this business, The Professor Is In, to guide graduate students and junior faculty through grad school, the job search, and tenure. I am the advisor they should already have, but probably don't.

[View all posts by Karen Kelsky](#)

Comments

Dr. Karen's Rules of the Research Statement — **152 Comments**



Jennifer

on August 30, 2012 at 12:38 pm said:

I am interested in applying for Ph.D programs in the UK and they ask for a Research Proposal...is this the same thing as a Research Statement?



Emma

on August 30, 2012 at 12:59 pm said:

No, they are looking for what you might think of as a research protocol, so literally your background, literature review,