Application Materials for Faculty Positions

Dr. Christopher Depcik, Department of Mechanical Engineering, University of Kansas

Committees want to see that your application is specific to the position. Demonstrate that you have tailored your materials to the university, department, and faculty.

1. Read the position announcement carefully, noting the specific expertise the department seeks.
2. Read the announcement again, focusing on the stated area of expertise.
    a. If your expertise does not align, do not apply; it wastes time for both you and the evaluators.
    b. Faculty searches often draw hundreds of applicants, creating heavy review workloads.
    c. Committees might use triage to narrow the pool quickly, and mismatched expertise is an easy elimination.
    d. Note any page limits and adhere to them exactly.
3. Ensure your cover letter directly addresses the required expertise, highlighting your background, research, and potential contributions.
    a. Tailor your letter to the specific institution, referencing unique aspects of the department, programs, or initiatives that align with your work. Convey enthusiasm and fit for the department.
    b. Keep the cover letter to a single(+) page (and reasonable font size), presenting your background first, current research second, and proposed research third, specifically addressing the expertise sought in the position. Emphasize independence and ability to establish a research program including collaborations or interdisciplinary opportunities where pertinent.
    c. Discuss your teaching experience and the courses or areas where you can contribute to the department.
    d. Highlight relevant service at the national or international level, and explain how you hope to contribute to the university's and department's mission.
    e. Don't **use bold** and *italics* indiscriminately **throughout** the cover **letter *as*** it leads to viewing issues.
    f. Close with concise statement demonstrating interest in contributing to the department and openness to further discussion.
4. In your CV, emphasize the most important information:
    a. Ensure consistent formatting, accurate dates, and a structure that highlights your strengths effectively. Consider the order to present the material: Background is #1, research is #2, teaching is #3, and service is last.
    b. You should generally not include a picture of yourself.
    c. List your academic training clearly, including Postdoctoral or Research Fellow positions, PhD, MS, and BS degrees.
    d. Present your publications clearly and consistently. Distinguish **major** from **minor** works in your field. List publications in established journals and include citation count (e.g., Google Scholar) and journal Impact Factors to show awareness of publication quality. In some disciplines, such as Electrical Engineering or Computer Science, conference papers may carry greater weight. Apply the same inclusion criteria across all entries. Clearly separate works in review from those that are published.

e. Highlight first-author publications, independent research projects, and other evidence of independence from your advisor.
f. Omit extraneous material, such as long lists of journals where you are a reviewer. Be succinct and focus on high-impact items. Do *not* put in non-funded grants, papers that have yet to be submitted, or anything else that distracts from positive outcomes.
g. Demonstrate other evidence of research productivity and impact, including presentations, patents, and any grants that you've collaborated on.
h. Include teaching and mentoring experience, listing course titles, guest lectures, and supervision of students or postdocs.
i. Note awards, fellowships, and honors that recognize excellence in research, teaching, or service.
j. List professional service and leadership roles, such as conference organization, committee work, or outreach activities.
k. Include clear contact information and a link to a professional website or profile, if available.

5. Research Statement:
    a. Your research should be distinctive and grounded in fundamental principles to make funding opportunities, such as NSF support, realistic.
        i. You will be competing with your advisor and their colleagues, so duplicating their research will be problematic.
        ii. Identify the unique, novel, and innovative insights you have developed that can advance the fundamental science.
        iii. Tailor these insights to the position announcement addressing the specific expertise that the department seeks.
        iv. Add illustrations and figures that elaborate concepts; not all on the committee might be knowledgeable of that area, so explain it clearly to a faculty member outside of your area.
        v. Review the literature carefully so you can justify the originality and feasibility of your research direction.
    b. Demonstrate how your research and proposed research aligns with the department's priorities as stated in the announcement and how it *complements* existing faculty expertise.
    c. Review the faculty, both inside and outside of the department, to indicate who you could potentially collaborate with; check their current research (e.g., Google Scholar) to ensure they are still active in that area.
    d. Identify potential funding sources, such as government agencies, industry partners, and research institutes, after reviewing current calls for proposals. Show that you are considering a broad range of opportunities to establish and sustain your research program. Look into what *has been funded recently* in that area. For example, you can find the recent proposals funded in each NSF program. *Again, how is your proposed research unique and innovative*!
    e. Include a clear statement of your long-term research vision, showing how your work will evolve over 5-10 years. Consider that priorities may shift at the governmental level, thus demonstrate an ability to adapt and evolve your research accordingly.

    f. Highlight previous research accomplishments with concrete evidence of impact and explain how these achievements will inform and support your proposed research program.
    g. Describe plans for mentoring students and training postdocs and graduate students, and consider how undergraduate researchers might contribute. Be realistic about the scope of undergraduate involvement in research projects.
6. Teaching Statement:
    a. Review and cite the educational literature so that your approach to teaching is grounded in evidence-based practices.
    b. Identify the undergraduate courses you could teach in your first semester on campus.
        i. If a course would require extensive preparation, it may not be a good fit for you.
        ii. If you struggle to find multiple courses you could teach with reasonable confidence, you may not be a strong fit for that department.
        iii. If you have never taught a particular course, consider what it involves. For example, a sophomore-level course may have hundreds of students, and if your experience is limited to guest lecturing in advanced courses, it may not be a realistic choice.
    c. Identify the undergraduate courses you could teach in the future.
        i. Consider what you could teach with sufficient preparation time.
        ii. Be realistic. If your background is concentrated in one area, claiming the ability to teach a different area can raise concerns with the committee.
    d. Suggest new graduate courses after reviewing the department's current offerings.
        i. Graduate courses are typically taught by faculty who developed them to support the department or their research. Proposing to teach an existing course can be off-putting.
        ii. Identify gaps in the course offerings and propose courses that benefit a broad range of faculty and students. It is fine to highlight your own interests, but courses that serve only a few students may not demonstrate strong departmental impact.
7. Service Statement:
    a. Some institutions might request a separate service statement, while others expect it to be integrated within another section.
    b. In your CV, avoid lengthy lists of session chair roles, track organizations, or committee memberships. Show evidence of service without unnecessary detail. Be concise and purposeful.
    c. Highlight service contributions at the university, national, and international levels when applicable.
    d. At the Assistant Professor level, departments typically limit service responsibilities to allow faculty to focus on developing a funded and expanding research program and on effective teaching.
    e. Avoid overstating the service activities you plan to undertake. Be realistic and align your expectations with the typical 40-40-20 balance among research, teaching, and service.