



# Building your career: dos and don'ts of the academic job hunt

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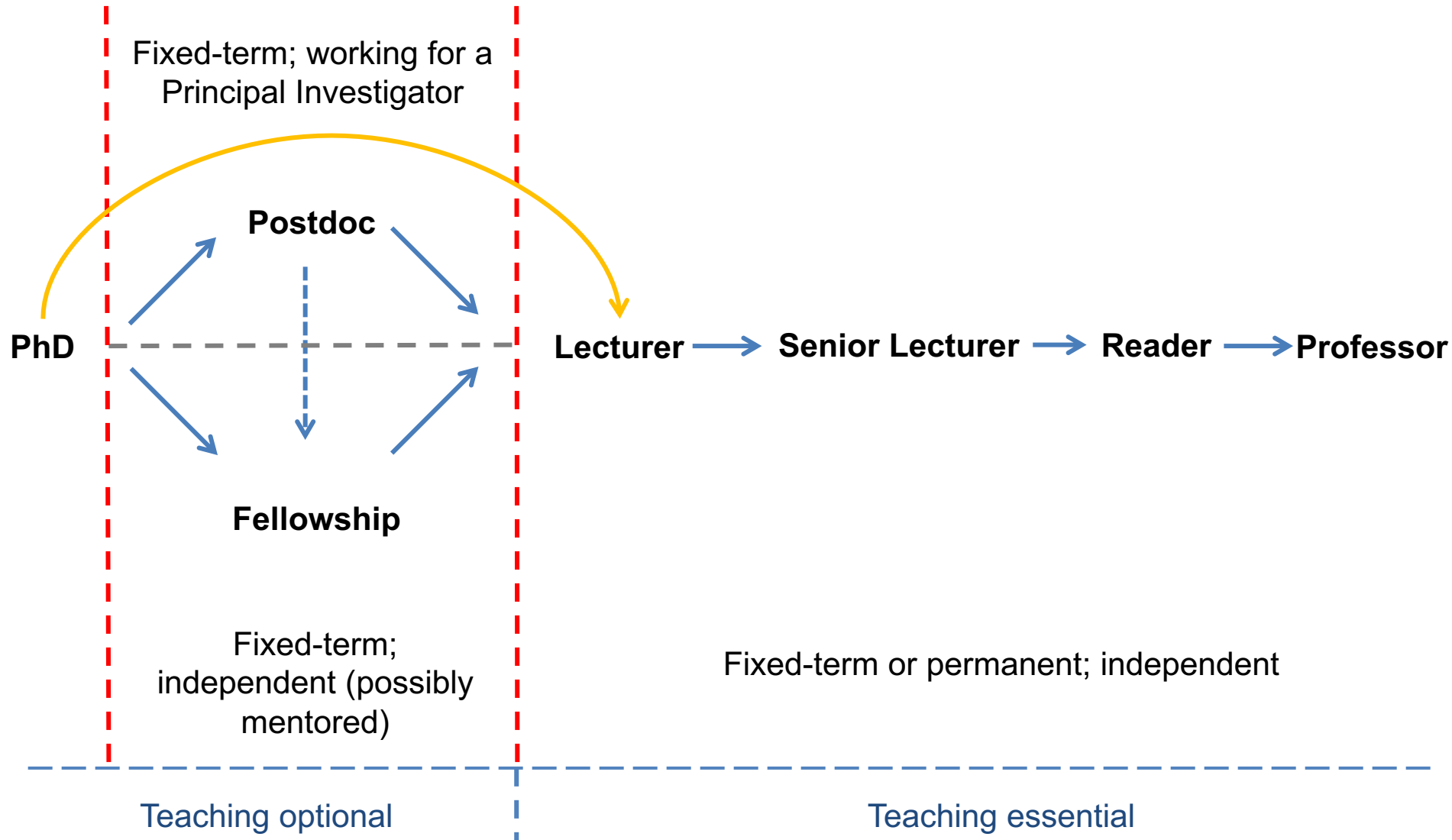
# Overview

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1. Reminder: academic career paths
2. Becoming a good candidate
3. Preparing to apply
4. Applying – CVs and cover letters
5. Q&A

# 1. Reminder: academic career paths

# Typical academic career paths



# Destination data – 7 to 9 years on

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- Half were still working in HE:
  - 32% in teaching roles, 12% in research, 6% in admin
- Fixed-term contracts were still a feature:
  - 75% of respondents in research roles, 15-20% of respondents in teaching roles
- Only 32% of STEM researchers still working in HE were in roles that included teaching:
  - Cf. 62-65% in the arts, humanities, and social sciences
- Two-thirds of respondents still working in HE had experienced at least one period of unemployment lasting one month or more.

On balance:

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The question is less *whether* you will be able to stay on in academia after your PhD than it is *what comprises* you are prepared to make along the way – and how long you are prepared to stick it out on fixed-term contracts.

## 2. Becoming a good candidate

# Reality check: research predominates

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Thus the modern academic is a type of **entrepreneur**:

- creative and independent-minded, with deep reserves of self-motivation and belief
- has energy and conviction to design a project, seek backing for the idea, and see it through to completion
- resilient, able to deal with rejections and setbacks
- an advocate, promoting the idea to a range of different audiences, persuading sceptics.

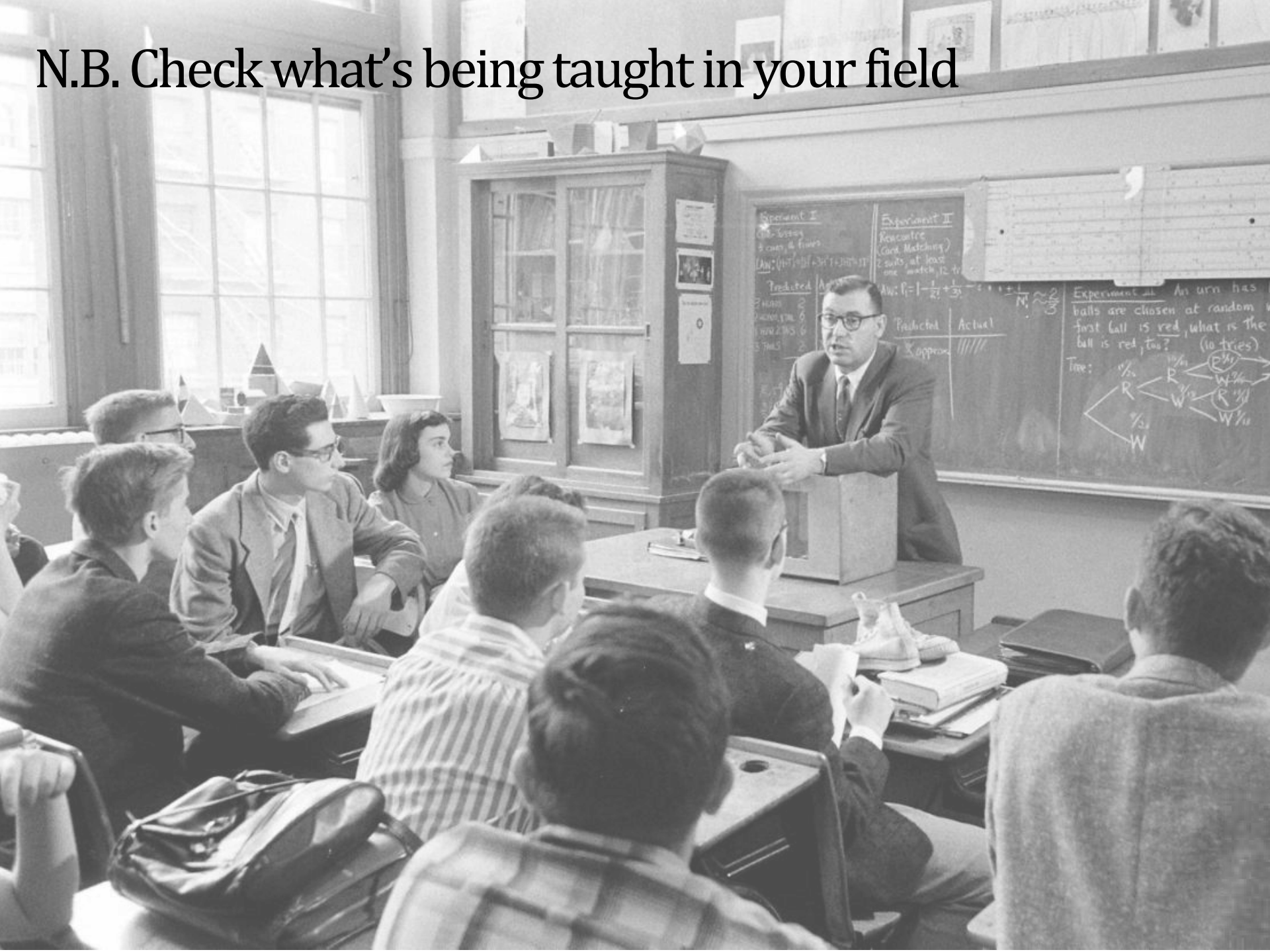
And then it all starts again with a new project...



Get to know the landscape



N.B. Check what's being taught in your field



# Build your network



# Strategies to become known

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- Publish
  - act as a reviewer or editor
- Go to conferences, meetings, symposia, etc.
  - organise events, chair panels
- Network generously
  - do more listening than talking (ditch the elevator pitch!)
  - make connections for others, not just for yourself
- Use social media – appropriately
  - seek press/media coverage for your work
- Get involved in administration/service
  - service to your department, university, discipline

'Enough is as good as a feast'





Start early

# E.g. early career fellowships

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Application deadlines for early career fellowships due to start in October 2018:

- Royal Academy of Engineering                      Sept 2017
- St John's College, Cambridge                      Oct 2017
- Leverhulme Trust                                      Mar 2018

It's a 12- to 18-month process:

1) Draft the research proposal. 2) Allow lots of time for feedback, editing and re-drafting. 3) Network. 4) Seek departmental approval. 5) Seek institutional approval. 6) Submit application to funder. 7) Possibly have an interview. 8) Wait for the outcome...

Don't just wait around





# Create your own job?

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- It can *sometimes* happen.
- More likely to happen in subjects where the model of PI + research group predominates
- Timing is everything, e.g. making contact with someone at just the right moment
- Co-authoring grants, with you as a named researcher, can work, but it is a long process
- You need to be certain that you are not being exploited, e.g. teaching positions that don't pay you for the summer.

Draw your lines in the sand



## 3. Preparing to apply

The golden rule:

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It's not about you.

It's about them.

# Before you start writing, research:

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1. Why does this job exist? Why now?
2. What, in their opinion, makes this employer unique?  
What would their competitors say?
3. What is their mission, and what are their values? What are they saying about themselves on their website?  
What do they post on social media?
4. What is their research strategy? Where do they get their funding from? Who are their collaborators? Where do they publish and present their work?
5. What else, apart from research and teaching, goes on there? How could you contribute?

A silhouette of a person standing on a rocky outcrop, looking through a large telescope mounted on a tripod. The background is a dark blue night sky filled with numerous bright stars of varying sizes. The person is on the left, and the telescope is on the right, angled upwards. The overall scene is a classic representation of stargazing.

‘You’re seeing yourself too big in this picture’

## 4. Applying

From a professor:

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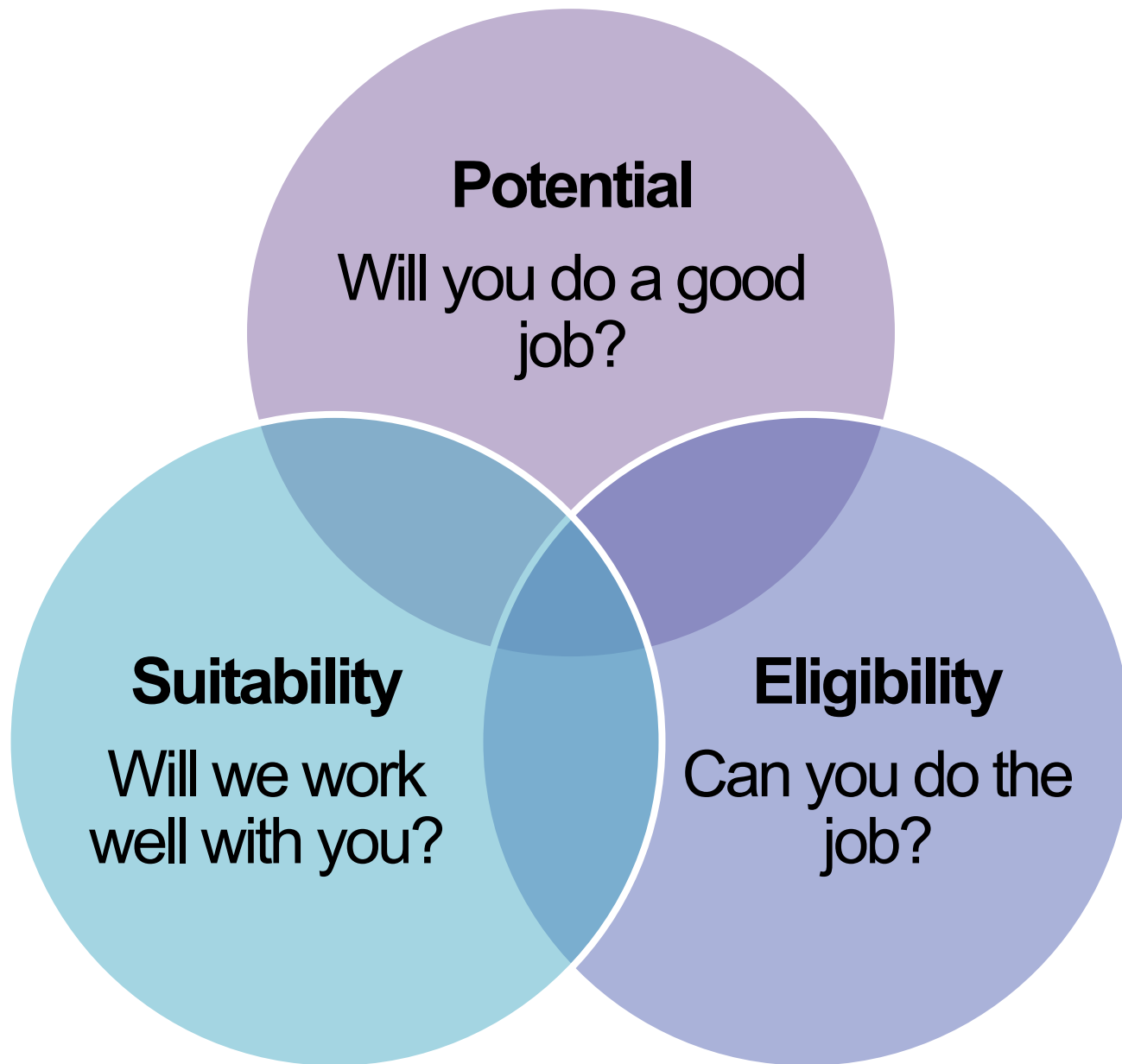
“An application will be read in the evening, over a glass of wine, by someone who isn’t particularly excited to read it.”



From a (different) professor:

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“The competition is so intense that one searches for any slight imperfection in order to arrive at a shortlist.”



Past



Present



Future

CV



CV

Letter



Letter



Letter

# How to format a CV

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- **Clear:**
  - Arial pt 11, left-aligned, bullet points
  - avoid excessive use of bold, italics, shading, etc.
  - keep plenty of white space on the page
- **Concise:**
  - 2 pages + publications for postdoc positions
  - longer for lectureships
- **Consistent:**
  - no mistakes of spelling, punctuation, or grammar
  - same formatting throughout.

# The right sort of evidence

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- Don't talk about 'responsibilities' – employers want to know that you have been **successful**, not what it says in your current job description.
- Use **active verbs** to describe what you have done:
  - e.g. achieved, arranged, delivered, designed, developed, established, implemented, improved, initiated, launched, negotiated, produced, secured, set up, started ...
- Emphasise **results** – preferably with metrics:
  - 'Managed a lab (2 technicians, 3 postdocs) with an annual budget of £400k'
  - 'Created 3 protocols which improved reliability by 35%'.

# Sections

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## Standard:

1. Personal details
2. Education
3. Employment
4. Awards and grants
5. Publications
6. Conferences / invited talks
7. Teaching
8. Service / administration
9. Outreach and engagement
10. Professional associations

## Use with caution:

- Research skills
- Areas of specialisation, research interests, etc.
- Collaborations
- Non-academic work experience
- Courses prepared to teach
- Professional development
- Languages
- References

# Use subheadings for complex sections

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In descending order of priority (according to the norms in your field), e.g.

## **Publications**

Refereed Journal Articles

Conference proceedings

Books

Chapters in books

Reviews

Blog posts, articles, etc.

## **Conferences**

Conferences organised

Panels chaired

Invited Talks

Papers presented

Posters

Discussant/respondent

## Supervising and Lecturing Experience

Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages, **University of Cambridge**, Cambridge, UK.

- CS5 'The Body', Part II Tripos, 2015-16.
  - Responsibilities included: convening the course, organising the lecture and seminar schedule, liaising with colleagues, examining.

Department of German and Dutch, **University of Cambridge**, Cambridge, UK.

- GE10 'Twentieth-Century German Literature and Thought' – Part IB Tripos, 2015-16.
  - Rilke's *Malte Laurids Brigge*, Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig*.
    - Topics included: Literary Modernism, Psychoanalysis, Sexuality and Gender, Queer Theory, Spatiality, Temporality, Classicism, Aesthetics.

MPhil in European Literature and Culture, **University of Cambridge**, Cambridge, UK.

- Critical Theory Core Course – 2014-15.
  - Responsible for supervising a 4000-word essay.
    - Texts: Mann's *Buddenbrooks* and *Der Zauberberg*.

Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages, **University of Cambridge**, Cambridge, UK.

- CS5 'The Body', Part II Tripos, 2014-15, 2015-16.
  - 'Queer Fellows', 'Costume and Masquerade'.
    - Responsibilities included: designing lecture content and reading lists, delivering lectures, marking essays, setting exam papers.



## TEACHING

Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages, University of Cambridge

### Postgraduate

2014-15 Essay supervisor, Core Course, MPhil in European Literature and Culture  
2 supervisions on Thomas Mann's early novels

### Undergraduate

2015-16 Convenor: 'The Body', 20 lectures + 20 seminars, 4th year comparative course

2014-16 'Queer Fellows', 1 lecture + 1 seminar per year, 4th year module  
'Costume and Masquerade', 1 lecture + 1 seminar per year, 4th year module

2014-15 'Rilke's *Malte Laurids Brigge* and Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig*', guest lecture,  
part of 2nd year course: 'Twentieth-Century German Literature and Thought'

# CVs: 10 irritating mistakes

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1. Not scannable
2. Sections split across pages
3. Not structured in reverse chronological order
4. Content not tailored to the specific application
5. Using language that's unclear to the reader
6. Including one of those 'personal profiles'
7. Inconsistent style
8. Using 'Curriculum Vitae' as a heading
9. No page numbers
10. Having a list of hobbies/interests.

Past



Present



Future

CV



CV

Letter



Letter



Letter

# How to format a cover letter

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- **Clear:**
  - Arial pt 11, laid out like a proper letter, white space
  - avoid bold, italics, underlining, etc.
  - don't let paragraphs run on too long
- **Concise:**
  - 1 page for postdoc positions
  - 1-2 pages for lectureships
- **Consistent:**
  - no mistakes of spelling, punctuation, or grammar
  - same formatting as the CV – show that they go together.

# Structure

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1. Opening and self-introduction - present
2. Relevant research highlights - past
3. Future research plans - future
4. [Relevant teaching experience - past]
5. [Teaching plans - future]
6. Conclusion - future

Note that there are not 5 or 6 paragraphs about research, enumerating your every side project and publication in detail!

Find a good balance



# How to be convincing

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## 3 P's

1. Project: **Why?** (Why now?)
2. Person: **Why you?**
3. Place: **Why here?**

## QNACB

1. What is your research question?
2. Why is this question necessary?
3. What approach are you taking to answering your question?
4. What do you anticipate the conclusions to be?
5. Who will benefit from them?

Distinguish different kinds of impact





Strike the right tone

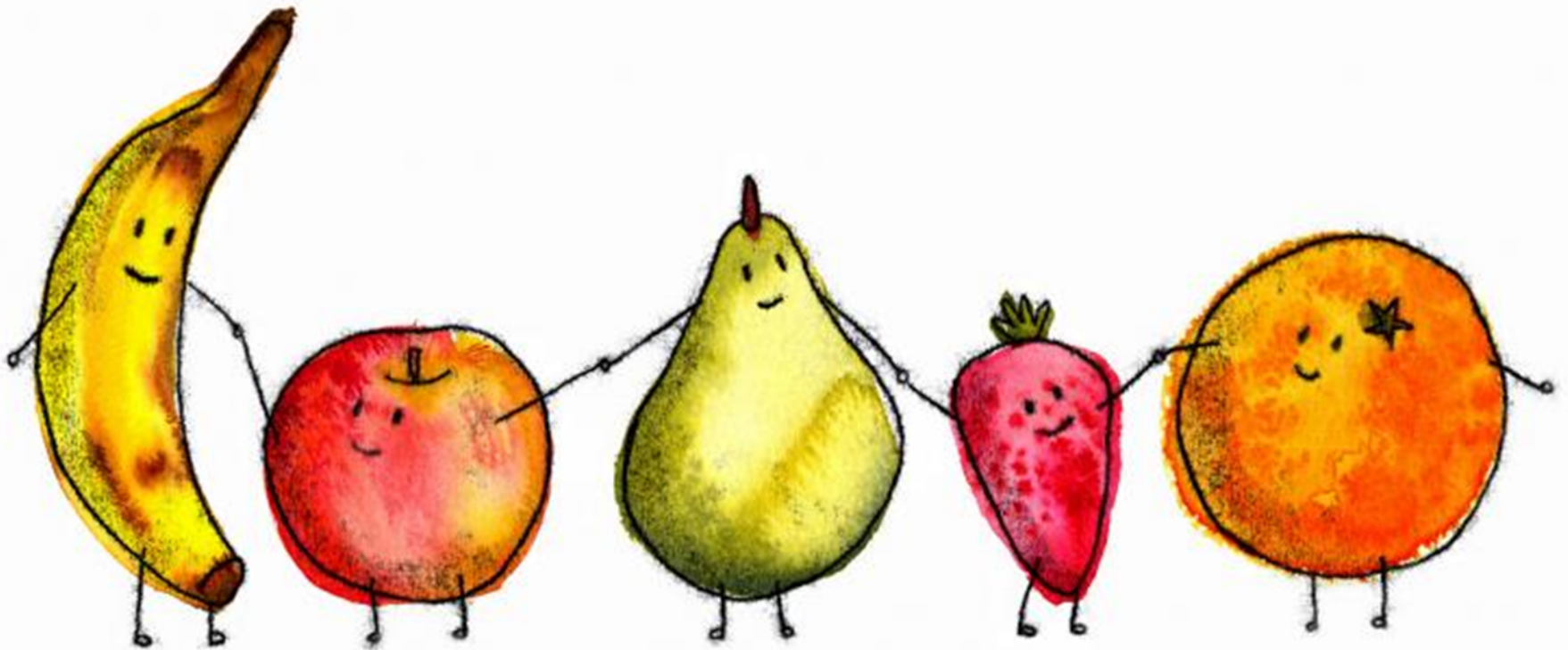


From a senior lecturer:

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“I have been surprised by own  
impatience with jargon.”

Seek multiple points of view



# Final reminder

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1. Get to know the landscape
2. Check what's being taught in your field
3. Build your network
4. 'Enough is as good as a feast'
5. Start early
6. Don't just wait around
7. Draw your lines in the sand
8. 'You're seeing yourself too big in this picture'
9. Find a good balance
10. Distinguish different kinds of impact
11. Strike the right tone
12. Seek multiple points of view



Lastly... keep going