

A GUIDE TO APPLYING TO A RESEARCH LAB

APPLYING FOR THE POSITION

Curriculum Vitae (CV)

A "CV" is a "curriculum vitae"; this is like a resume, used more in academics, which highlights your achievements in education and work experiences. For the purposes of what you are doing, you can think of CV and resume as meaning the same thing. Also see: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/curricula-vitae-cvs-versus-resumes/>

It would be a good idea to have a draft of a CV ready and when there is something you want to apply for, then you can work on updating it and tailoring it to the specific position you are applying for. It is always a good idea to have someone read over / proofread your CV for you.

Letters of Recommendation

Contact your letter writers early. Let them know why you thought they might be in a good position to write the letter (e.g. "I really enjoyed your course." or "I learned a lot in the class." or "I was proud of my performance in your class."). End your email by asking if they would be willing to write the letter and give them the due date of the letter.

In the follow up email, thank them for agreeing to write the letter for you! Also, provide your CV (see above), a brief statement of why you are applying for the position, and also include anything you think they should mention in the letter (e.g. "Perhaps you could mention the final paper for the class that I wrote on global warming."). Give them the instructions of how to submit the letter and remind them again of the due date.

After they have sent in the letter – thank them!

Also, if you get the position, let them know!

Personal Statement

A personal statement will take many many many iterations to get just right. Here are some general tips:

- Avoid generics; make this about YOU! And remember, YOU are UNIQUE! Mention specific stories (time and place) and experiences that have made an impact on you.
- If you have spent time in a lab, then write a bit about what the experience was like – what did you do? What did you take away from the experience? What was a fond memory?
- Even if you haven't worked in a research lab, you've taken lab courses – so tell about one or two lab experiments that you did that you enjoyed. What did you do? What did you take away from the experience? Why did that lab stick out to you?

- Avoid gross generalizations like: I have always been interested in science. Really? Have you really ALWAYS been interested in science? Try to instead be more specific. Reach back in your memory – what was the first memory you actually have where you thought: Hey, I'm interested in science!
- Be careful about emphasizing wanting to become a medical doctor (if indeed that is what you want to do). These programs that put you in research labs want to know that you are open to the idea of getting a Ph.D. It's OK to say you are considering medicine; but what would be even better is if you indicate that you want to explore other possibilities, or learn more about what bench research or field research is like.
- Avoid contractions
- Use proper grammar
- Proof-read
- Unless instructed otherwise, limit your statement to 1-2 pages (it can be single spaced or double-spaced), with 12 point font and 1 inch margins
- As with any type of application, you should have someone (and preferably at least one professor) read over your work. Getting a second pair of eyes on the document really helps and professors often know what review committees are looking for!

Interviews

In some cases, you may be asked for a phone or Skype interview. Always start and end the conversation with *thanking* the interviewer for taking the time to talk with you and for considering your application.

Here are some common questions you might be asked, and therefore, should be ready to answer:

- What research project(s) are you most interested in working on?
- Why do you want to do research?
- What are your career plans?
- Have you had research experience before?
- Do you have any questions?

You should answer each question honestly and to the best of your ability. Be enthusiastic! You should be excited about this possible opportunity! At the same time, you'll want to make sure your answers are consistent with what you wrote in your personal statement.

You should always have a question or two ready. This could be something like:

- How many people work in the lab? Are there other undergraduates?
- Is there additional reading I should do to prepare for the research experience?