

# The Academic Job Market

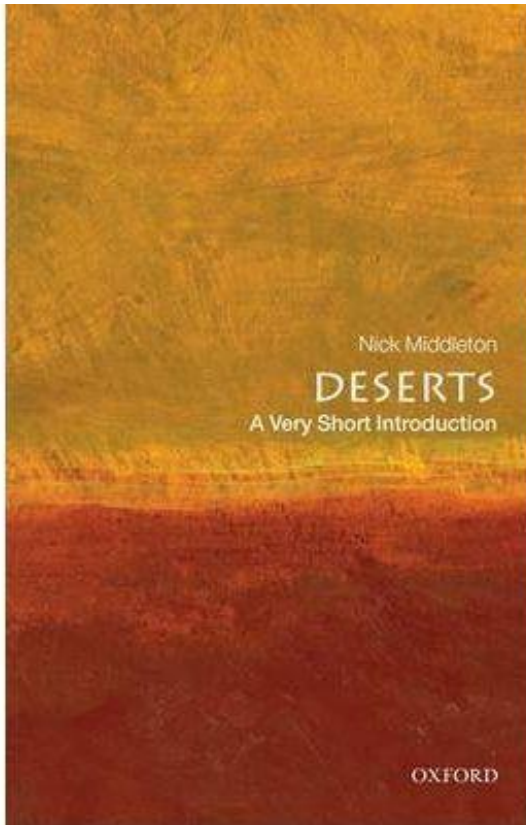
## A Very Short Introduction

Joana L. Rocha



# Very Short Introductions

Oxford's *Very Short Introductions* series offers concise and original introductions to a wide range of subject

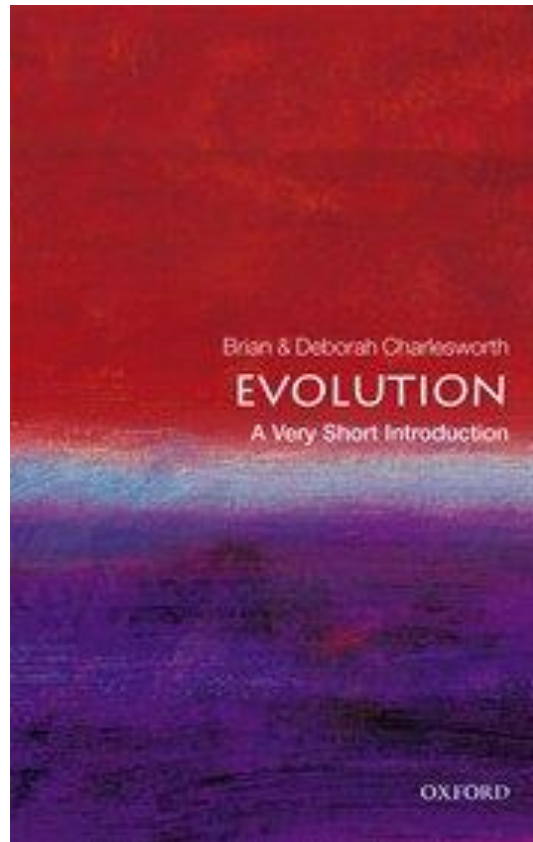


Nick Middleton

## DESERTS

A Very Short Introduction

OXFORD

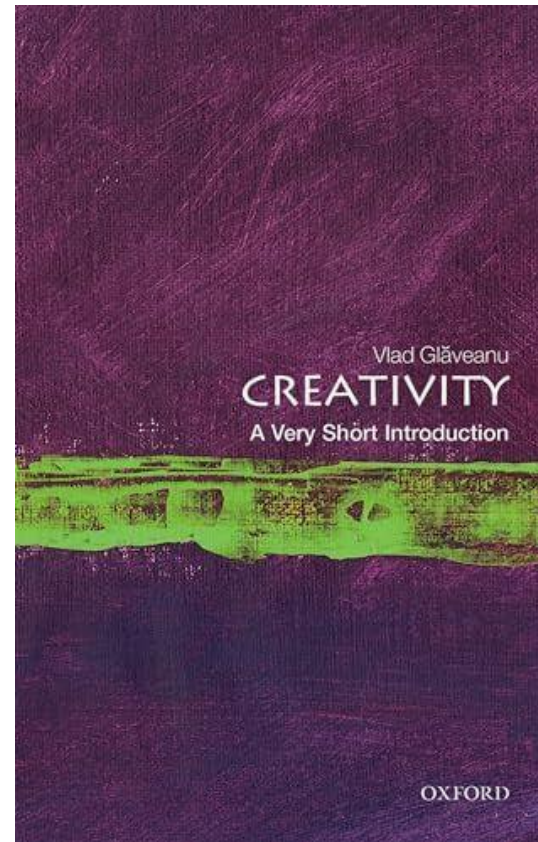


Brian & Deborah Charlesworth

## EVOLUTION

A Very Short Introduction

OXFORD

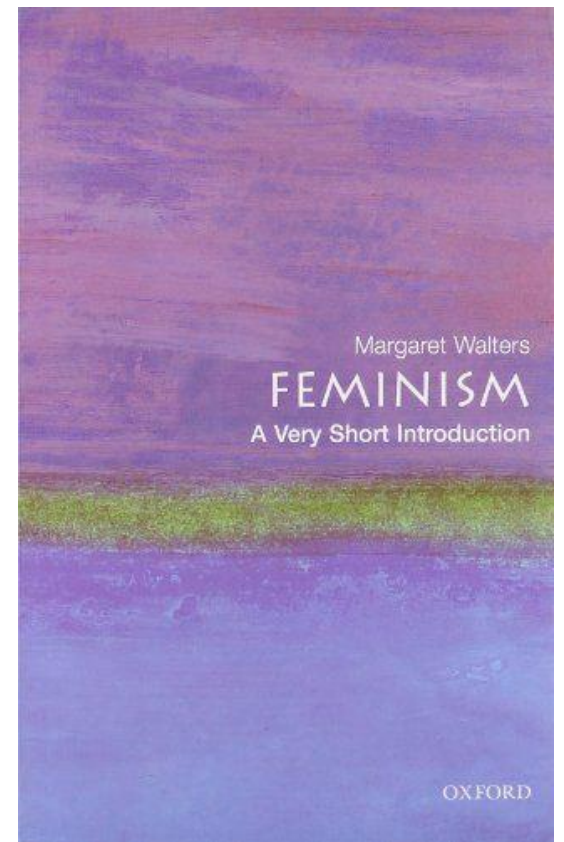


Vlad Glăveanu

## CREATIVITY

A Very Short Introduction

OXFORD



Margaret Walters

## FEMINISM

A Very Short Introduction

OXFORD

# Very Short Introductions: The Academic job market

## Massive Disclaimer(s):

1. My experience for a tenure-track job in biology at R1 institutions (n=me, 15 submissions, 4<sub>1/2</sub> interviews, 2 job offers).
2. Major impostor syndrome and survival bias and guilt.
3. I was lucky. I applied once (to the 2024-2025 job cycle)
4. Never been part of a search committee.

# Very Short Introductions: The Academic job market

## Massive acknowledgment(s):

1. I received essential feedback and support from wonderful people
2. I had 3-4 dependable mentors submitting recommendation letters
3. I had massive support (above and beyond average standards) from my postdoctoral advisor and his lab (Peter Sudmant et al)

# Timeline:

1. The Application

July/August

2. The Interview

November/December

3. The Offer (letter)

January/March

March/May



**it's a marathon, not a sprint!**



It's a journey:

1. The Fellowship of the Ring



2. The Two Towers



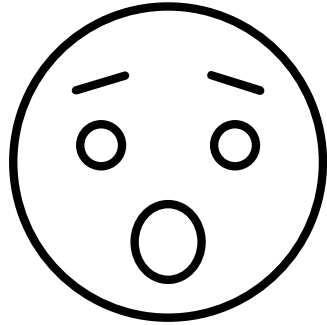
3. The Return of the King



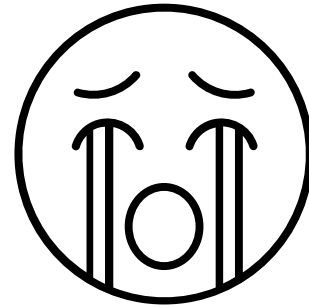
## 0. The (Pre) Application:



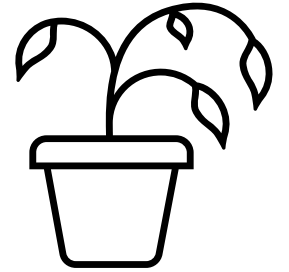
Will I &  
Why?



When?



Where?



How?

# 0. The (Pre) Application check list

- ☐ Have you talked with your advisor about it?
- ☐ Have you talked with those before you (aka your friends & allies)?
- ☐ Have you invested enough in your professional development (e.g. conferences, workshops, research outputs/program, 'branding', online presence)?
- ☐ Have you prepped yourself and your recommenders?
- ☐ Have you done your spreadsheet and shared it with your allies and supporters?
- ☐ Are you prone to self-sabotaging/procrastinating on writing your materials and fit that into your timeline?



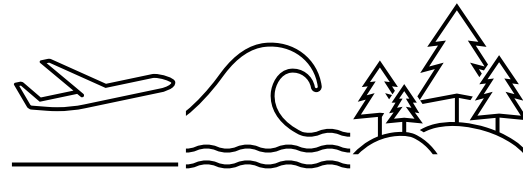
# 0. The (Pre) Application: I can and I will



Why?



When?



Where?



How?

**it's a marathon, not a sprint!**

# Timeline:

1. The Application
2. The Interview
3. The Offer (letter)

# Timeline:

**1. The Application**

**2. The Interview**

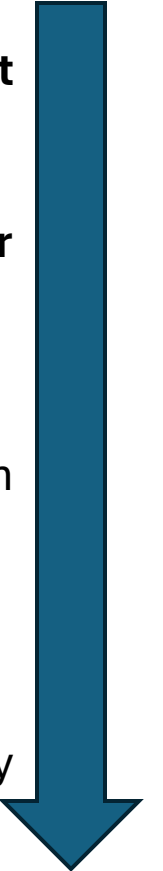
**3. The Offer (letter)**

July/August

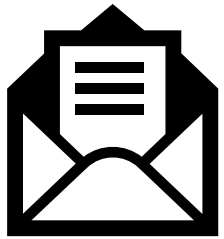
November/December

January/March

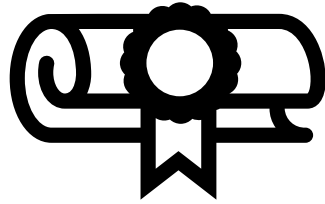
March/May



# 1. The Application:



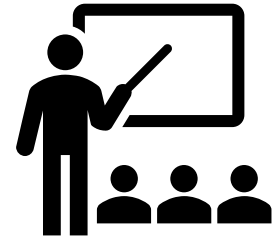
Cover  
letter



CV



Research  
statement



Teaching  
statement

- DEI? EDI? SERVICE?
- Letters of recommendation?

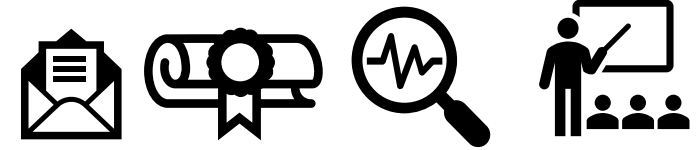
# Q&A: Your application is all about:

- **Identity:** What are the gaps in the field and what do you (specifically) bring to address them. What are your dream research questions/hypotheses/experiments and outcomes? How is this different from your former advisors?
- **Vision:** Given 6 years, N people, and \$1-2 million, what would you do? If everything you did worked, what would people say about your work? Are your general hypothesis and questions higher than yourself and specifics?
- **Advocacy:** paragraphs/statements/sections need to get your committee hooked. Is your identity and vision 'fundable'? Are they impactful? Do you showcase how your past and ongoing research make you uniquely positioned to address your future aims? Do you do this in an original yet non-overwhelming way?

(Revisit this often! This will prep you for interviews)



# Q&A: Writing your materials is:

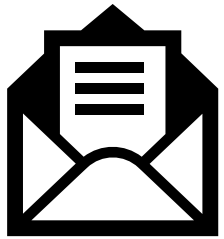


A full-time job, a branding/creative exercise, deeply personal.

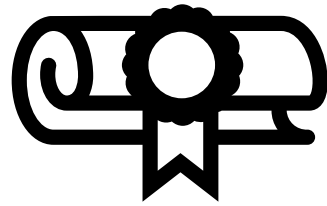
Be original, authentic, tailored, strong

- ☐ Go from broad to narrow or hourglass shape
- ☐ Find an easy way to swap in keywords or talking points for specific jobs
- ☐ Make sure you and your accomplishments are prominent/memorable
- ☐ Make branding/formatting consistent across materials
- ☐ Link your documents to online presence or "things that make you YOU" (website, blogposts, videos)
- ☐ Find an overarching story and structure (balancing big picture vs key/concrete ideas, past/present/future)
- ☐ Make sure you are 'digestible' and easy to get (write for broader audiences, grant-mindset, white space)

# 1. The Application:



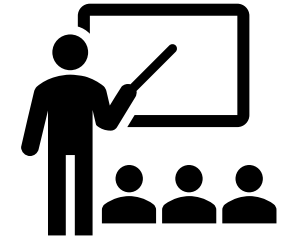
**Cover  
letter**



CV



Research  
statement



Teaching  
statement

- DEI? EDI? SERVICE?
- Letters of recommendation?



# Cover Letter -Is there a formula?

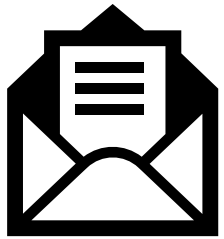
- **P1:** I am writing to apply for (make sure you get details of the job right and adjustable). This paragraph also summarizes your credentials and killer accomplishments.
- **P2:** summary of what you've done as a PhD + Postdoc (you can go to undergrad if benefits you)
- **P3:** your vision for your lab and your research program
- **P4:** You may want to include a paragraph about teaching/mentoring, acts of service and/or things you are passionate about that distinguishes you as an outstanding future PI/leader in your field
- **P5:** The "fit/final" paragraph. Something that says: I will both fit into your department/institution while bringing new perspectives. Debate: whether to include specific names of people with whom you might collaborate.



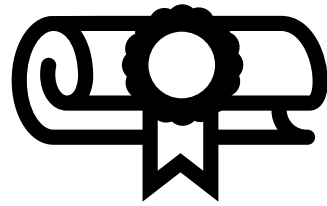
# Is there a formula?

- Opening paragraph – honest, strong, passionate?
- Short and sweet section(s) on why you, why you are a good fit?
  - past and future (independent and collaborative) research-wise
  - teaching/mentoring-wise
  - funding-wise
  - personality-wise
- Will the search committee be jumping of their seats to read the rest of your application?
- Is it easy on the eyes? (1 page, enough spacing, enough margins?)

# 1. The Application:



Cover  
letter



CV



Research  
statement



Teaching  
statement

- DEI? EDI? SERVICE?
- Letters of recommendation?

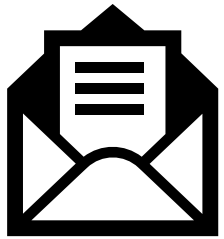


# CV - Is there a formula?

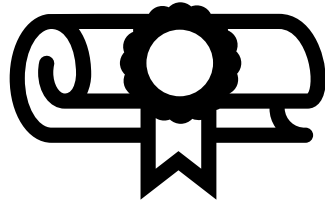
1. Academic background (education) and past jobs (research experience)
2. Awards and Grantsmanship
3. Publications (first, co-first, seniority, media coverage, cover of journal?)
4. Invited talks/presentations/posters
5. Teaching and mentoring experience
6. Professional service
7. Outreach and inclusion

Is it inspiring and easy on the eyes?

# 1. The Application:



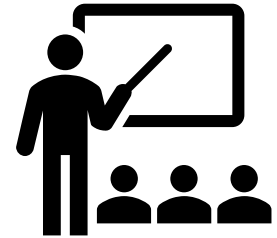
Cover  
letter



CV



Research  
statement



Teaching  
statement

- DEI? EDI? SERVICE?
- Letters of recommendation?

# Research Statement - Is there a formula?

- **Vision section:** short, strong overarching opening section where readers can quickly “get you” -> who you are, where are you going (in 5-6 years when up to tenure?)
- **Contributions section :** summary of your past contributions and accomplishments and how these informed your big picture broadly
- **Project sections (aka research program)** -> Think in ‘modules’ and think grant aims and pitches for 3 projects. You may create sub-sections/structure that start with motivation (big idea), you may choose to nest contributions/accomplishments in these sections accordingly.
- **Funding/institutional opportunities:** You may want to include a section (or paragraphs nested in project sections) explaining how will you fund your lab/research project, how you will collaborate with peers/institutes/leverage infrastructures, how to build upon the strengths of the institution you are applying and how the network and baggage you bring will enrich that institution.
- **Future directions + take them home:** specific/“going forward” aims can be nested in your project sections or be conglomerated at the end. Regardless, you need a short, strong big-picture closing that shows you are more than the sum of your parts.

# **Is there a formula?**

**Leave it to breathe for a day or so, ask for feedback, ask yourself:**

- ☐ do you establish yourself as an expert, working at the leading edge of your field?
- ☐ do you remind readers of your key publications (so they don't have to go back to your CV)?
- ☐ do you have a few places highlighted to swap in keywords from the specific job ad?
- ☐ Is the writing high-level? Or you got buried in detail?
- ☐ Is the broad impact of your work evident at the end?

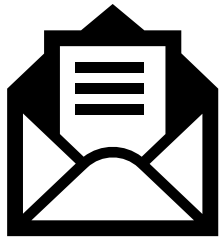
# **Is there a formula?**

**Leave it to breathe for a day or so, ask for feedback, ask yourself:**

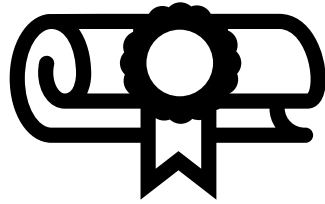
- ☐ Do you have a visual aid on first page that someone can SEE (not read) who you are?
- ☐ Do you have Figures that were specific to past/proposed work?
- ☐ Do your statements convey the way you think about science, and how this builds into a lab?
- ☐ Is it clear the significance of your Big Picture/how it will provide new/important perspectives?
- ☐ Do you have 2-4 concrete steps that you will take towards that vision in the first 2-5 years.
- ☐ Do you present graduate student/postdoc work as evidence on why you have the skillset to execute your vision (in the service of your future) ?



# 1. The Application:



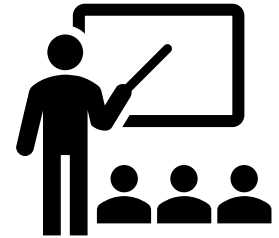
Cover  
letter



CV



Research  
statement



Teaching  
statement

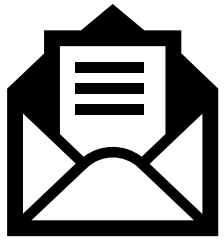
- DEI? EDI? SERVICE?
- Letters of recommendation?



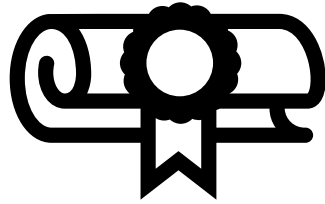
# Teaching - Is there a formula?

- **Teaching philosophy:** opening statement on why and how you want to teach at a university?
- **Teaching experience:** list of courses you have taught in the past and how that shaped your philosophy and teaching/mentoring goals? (include relevant info to avoid CV checking)
- **Teaching and Mentoring goals:** 3 goals/approaches for both teaching in classroom(s) and mentoring your lab? Do you give examples that make your approaches come alive?
- **Proposed classes:** what classes would you design/propose to do/think the department needs to have? Or that you could easily pick up and build upon
- **Brief closing:** link all threads of experience to big picture needs in science and society.

# 1. The Application:



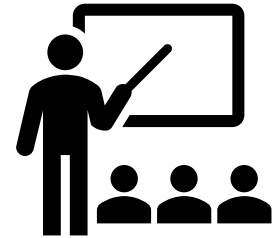
Cover  
letter



CV



Research  
statement



Teaching  
statement

**DEI? EDI? SERVICE?**



# Diversity Statement - no formula, no rules

**Lack of statement? Other application materials - here and there**

**Share your story:** We all know STEM has a massive problem. How have your personal experiences shaped the way you look at J.E.D.I?

**Help advancing JEDI (past and future):**

- How have you/will you handle lack of J.E.D.I?
- What activities have you done or will do to advance it?
- Can you find opportunities in mentoring? Teaching? In-and-outside the classroom?
- How can you do this through your research?
- How can you do this through your funding/institutional opportunities?

Use concrete examples of actionable measures. Draw from your experience. Balance tone.

# List of resources

**Keeping up with job postings (search/apply/curate a database):**

- Social media (X, Bsky, Linkdin, Future PI slack)
- EcoEvo jobs list
- EvolDir listserv
- Word of mouth (some call it networking)

**....also try to get talks/posters at conferences/seminars/workshops**



# Timeline:

1. The Application

July/August

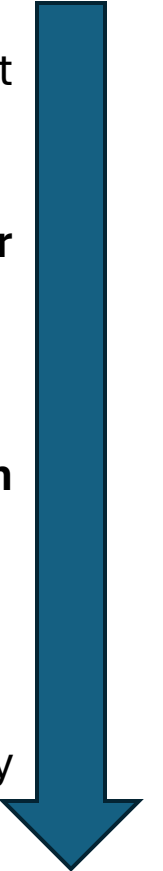
2. The Interview

**November/December**

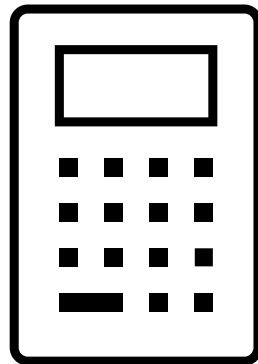
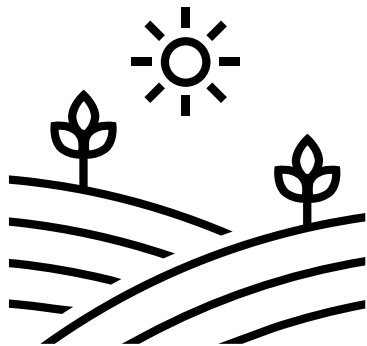
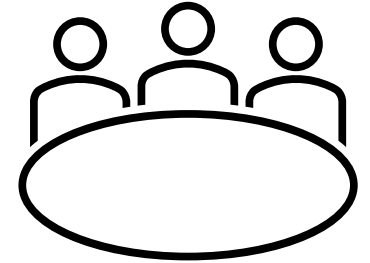
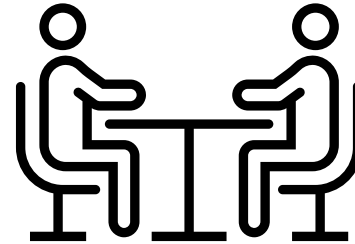
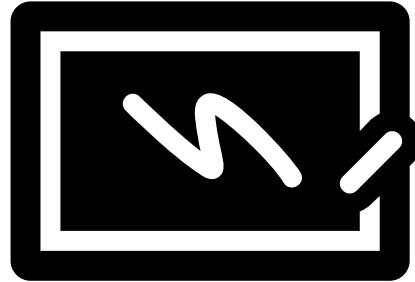
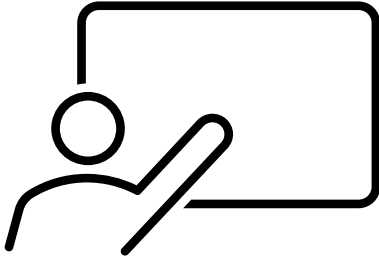
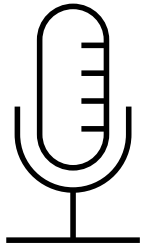
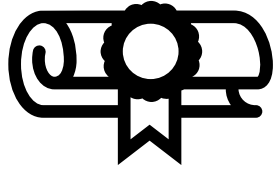
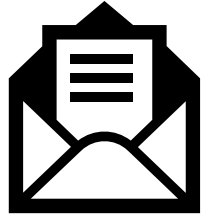
3. The Offer (letter)

**January/March**

March/May



# Q&A - Happy to dive deeper!



**Good luck! <3**