Developing a Winning Research Statement

General considerations and advice from faculty

What is generally asked for in a faculty application?

- "Statement of Research Interests"
- "Research Plan"
- "Statement of Research Accomplishments"

What is the purpose of this statement?

- Convince the committee you will succeed
- Describe your short-term and long-term goals
- Remember, this is NOT the most important document of your application.

Who are your readers?

- Busy faculty who might read 100+ proposals during this search
- Most will NOT be specialists in your field

The ideal statement...

- "... builds on the promising experience of the applicant but [is] not a direct extension of their postdoctoral work." (Except perhaps in some fields.) ... and answers the question, **'Why must this work be done?'"** *(From Jim Austin's article, "Writing a Research Plan" on sciencecareers.org)*
- "... a readable, compelling agenda that fits well with the needs, facilities and goals of the department."

(From Peter Fiske's article, "The Truth Behind Teaching and Research Statements")

Peter Fiske's Rules:

- Know the school
- Know the department
- Know the position

Your statement should follow one of these 2 outlines: *(use these headings)*

- Chronological
  - Executive Summary (first paragraph)
  - Graduate research (project by project)
  - Postdoctoral research (project by project)
  - Future research (project by project)
- Topical
  - Executive Summary
  - Separate "chapters" for different research interests

Note that in all cases you should include an **Executive Summary.**

The **Executive Summary** should answer these questions:

- Why is my research important?
- How will I approach it?
- What are my long-term research goals?
- What are my career goals?

When writing the Executive Summary, remember:

- **Be personal!** Use "I" and "my".
- **Polish it!** Most people read only this paragraph.
- **Adapt it!** to fit the job description.

References:

- "Writing a research statement", Jim Austin (2002), sciencecareers.org
- "The truth behind teaching and research statements", Peter Fiske (1997)

Some last words.... Advice from UCSF faculty:

1. **Be personal.** This document is about you: who you are as a scientist, what interests you, where you see your research going in the future. Don't make it solely about the research (like you would a research manuscript or grant). Use "I" instead of "we".

2. **Toot your own horn.** Make sure to convey what will make you successful in your next endeavors. Some examples: your cutting edge approach, your unique insight or technological know-how, your success in previous projects, etc.

3. **Don't write it like a grant proposal.** That's too detailed (and probably too long) and could have two untoward consequences:
   (1) some readers will latch onto a detail of your proposal that they disagree with and ding you for it.
   (2) Others will be overwhelmed by the details and fail to see the big picture. Remember that many committee members are not going to be familiar with your field.

4. **Make connections.** Whenever possible, acknowledge how your work would complement the research already happening at the institution where you are applying, or benefit from collaborations with members of the institution. (This is something you should definitely do in your cover letter as well.)

5. **Beware of fancy formatting.** Some readers are put off by a statement that looks too much like a published article in Nature. Also, some formatting gets mangled if you submit the application via an electronic submission process. So, check twice before you click the send button!

