Welcome to this challenge! In this module, you will work with Neha to help her launch a career in the academic field.

This module is an accessible PDF that can be read by activating the Read Out Loud functionality within the Adobe Acrobat Pro Reader. It is also compatible with the JAWS screen reader.

To activate the Read Out Loud functionality:

Choose View, then Read Out Loud and Activate Read Out Loud.

Once the Read Out Loud functionality is on, to navigate the document you will have to:

Press the DOWN ARROW to advance from one item to the next.

Press the UP ARROW to go back to an item previously read.

The items include the page and the main section headings, each sentence of the running text and each sentence in the question and feedback tables.

You can also navigate the module chapters by using the Bookmarks. To display them, click on the Bookmark tab on the left side menu of your Adobe Reader interface.
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Launching a career in academia: Preparing to apply for jobs in the academic sector

Like many of her peers, Neha hopes her graduate studies will help her launch an academic career.

Your mission is to help Neha land a position in the academic sector.

While answering Neha’s questions, you can consult the Advisor’s tips at the end of each question to review a few useful pointers. For additional guidance, go to the Resources section to learn some best practices on how to effectively navigate the academic job market. Should you succeed, you will earn the ACADEMIA WISDOM badge, one of the five components of your professional skills profile.

Let’s start by helping Neha determine the first step in her journey!
A TIMELY START

You’re meeting Neha in the library. She’s just finished working and some of her notes and documents are still on the table. She introduces herself:

“Hello, my name is Neha. I am finishing my doctoral studies in Biomedical Engineering. I am studying under Professor Frink: a world leader in this domain. I’m hoping the recognition he gets will reflect favourably on me and my work, and make it easier for me when I apply for an academic position. I wish there were more I could do, but I don’t want to get ahead of myself, as I haven’t finished my Ph.D. yet.”

What advice do you have for Neha?

Select your answer, then review the feedback on the next page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. □ You should focus on your thesis, as it will constitute your best asset when applying for a position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. □ You really should start thinking about your job search, even before completing your Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. □ Strive hard to impress your supervisor; a recommendation from him will go a long way.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Advisor’s tip

There is intense competition for academic positions. Those who are best prepared by bringing a wide array of relevant assets to the table have the best chance of landing one of these jobs.

This means students need to seek out opportunities to demonstrate they have these relevant skills and assets before applying for a tenure-track position, such as getting a Post-Doctoral Fellowship or landing a sessional lecturer position.
**A TIMELY START – Feedback**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you selected answer A, Neha replies:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I’m not so sure about that...”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are so many graduate students out there... I don’t see how my thesis will suffice in making me stand out from the lot.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You score 0 points.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you selected answer B, Neha replies:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“You’re right! As an early career academic, it’s clear I won’t have the experience some of my more seasoned competitors will have. I will compensate by showing committee members evidence that while engaged in my studies, I was already working to build up relevant skills to help me in my career.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You score 10 points. This is the correct answer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you selected answer C, Kate replies:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I’m not so sure about that... Now that I hear you say it, it sounds naïve to place all my eggs in this one basket.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You score 0 points.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Neha is now standing beside the bulletin board. She is looking at some of the ads, and says:

“It’s settled then: I’ll work on building skills and assets that will help me with my future job search. I’ve already applied for a Post-Doctoral Fellowship with Professor Frink.

Can you think of any other activities or opportunities I should keep an eye out for? What about the ads on this bulletin board, for instance?”

What advice do you have for Neha? Which of the posted activities or opportunities should Neha pay attention to?

Select ALL THE ANSWERS that apply, then review the feedback on the next page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. ☐ Call for Papers: The Biosensors Journal is currently working on its next issue. Submit your paper to...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. ☐ Present your research at McMaster’s annual Biomedical Engineering Symposium, coming soon...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. ☐ Mentors Wanted. Please call or send an email to...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. ☐ Call for Volunteers: The Biomedical Engineering department is looking for assistance to run a recruitment event for potential grad students...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Advisor’s tip

Engineering faculty search committees typically look for evidence of research abilities, teaching experience, and willingness to work as part of a group.

Working on your case means you should focus your efforts on improving those areas of your profile.
**FOCUSING ON ACADEMIA – Feedback**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you selected ALL of the choices, Neha replies:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“You’re right! It appears that when it comes to relevant experience, pretty much everything related to the academic sphere constitutes an asset.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You score 10 points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These are the correct answers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you did not select ALL of the correct answers, Neha replies:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I’m not so sure about that...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of these suggestions sound good to me. I really would not rule out any.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You score 5 points.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you did not select ANY of the correct answers, Neha replies:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“You didn’t select anything.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You score 0 points.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NEHA’S EXPERIENCE

Neha has just finished writing a list of her assets, she explains:

“I’m glad to see that the range of valued experience is so vast! This means my own asset bank is not as empty as I first feared. Here, I've noted different areas I have experience with: positions I’ve already occupied, or have applied for. Can you help me review this list and rate each of my assets? Let’s use a 1 to 5 scale, and say 5 corresponds to excellent experience... thanks!”
Neha has started rating her spheres of experience and assets, but she still would like your input.

“Before you start, you should know I’m aware that my assets are better in some areas than others. In fact, that’s the situation I’m trying to assess. So what do you think? Do you agree with my ratings (from 1 to 5, 5 being excellent)?”

What advice do you have for Neha? How would you rate her experience/assets?

**Determine the appropriate rating for each of Neha’s assets listed below, then review the feedback on the next page.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Experience:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1 article sent to IEEE Reviews in Biomedical Engineering, 4 others already published.  
Presented 2 conferences as part of the Interuniversity BioMedical Laboratory’s (IBML) Annual Seminar. |
| Select a rating from 1 to 5: 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] |
| **Teaching Experience:** |
| 1 term working as a teaching assistant. |
| Select a rating from 1 to 5: 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] |
| **Collaboration Experience:** |
| 3 years as a coordinator for the Let’s Talk Science outreach program.  
Coordinated 1 IBML Annual Seminar. |
| Select a rating from 1 to 5: 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] |
Advisor's tip

Rating the assets in your bank serves to identify your areas of strength as well as those needing more attention. Once you know which areas to focus on, you should come up with a plan for building these skills that includes specific and measurable goals.

NEHA'S ASSETS BANK – Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you rated Research Experience 5, Teaching Experience 1 and Collaboration Experience 3, Neha replies:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“You’re right! Teaching experience really is my weakest link. Obviously, working on the other aspects of my experience would be beneficial, but I really need to focus on building my teaching skills for now.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I’m off to a great start, as far as research goes. Regarding collaborative work, I feel my experience is decent, though it needs to be diversified.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You score 10 points if all of your ratings are correct.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If did not rate Research Experience 5, Teaching Experience 1 and Collaboration Experience 3, Neha replies:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m not so sure about that... I think I’m off to a great start, as far as research goes. Regarding collaborative work, I feel my experience is decent, though it needs to be diversified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You score 0 points.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDING JOB POSTINGS

Neha is ready to look for job postings.

“OK, my objective is to accumulate at least 60 hours as a sessional lecturer over the next year.”

Now I need to apply for such a position, hopefully right here at McMaster! Do you have any advice regarding how I should go about it?”

What advice do you have for Neha?

Select ALL THE ANSWERS that apply, then review the feedback on the next page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. ☐ You should start with your academic supervisor and inquire about best practices for your search.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. ☐ You must first look within yourself: what are your career goals and aspirations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. ☐ Confer with fellow grad students who may have gotten a lecturer position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. ☐ Search the web: consult university websites and electronic job boards, or look out for upcoming conferences and events.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Finding Job Postings – Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you selected A, C and D, Neha replies:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“You’re right! The more strings to my bow, the better. As for your comment on my career goals and aspirations, I’m sure you are right... I’m undecided as of now, and would not want to close any doors just yet.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>You score 10 points. These are the correct answers.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you did not select ALL the correct answers, Neha replies:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“That’s it, really?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>You score 5 points.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you selected B, Neha replies:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I’m sure you are right though... I’m undecided as of now, and would not want to close any doors just yet. Also, you do know you sound like a fortune cookie, right?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>You score 0 points.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Neha found a job posting that she would like to apply to.

“So I asked around, and here’s the job posting for the position I’ll be applying for. Can you help me list the various sections of my CV in the order that will ensure maximum impact?”

Posting’s content:

---

**NOTICE OF POSTING**

For Sessional Faculty

The Department of Biomedical Engineering invites applications for the following teaching position to be offered in the Fall session.

**Course Description/Relevant Employment Duties**

Able to teach at all levels of the biomedical engineering undergraduate curriculum. This includes an introductory seminar series and design courses. Course should be taught in relation to biomedical engineering applications.

Three lectures; one tutorial (one hour); first term

**Required Qualifications**

Graduate degree in Biomedical Engineering or related discipline. Applicant must possess excellent teaching credentials and have excellent knowledge of, and background in, the course topics as described in the course catalogue. Preference will be given to applicants with post-secondary training experience and a record that provides evidence of teaching effectiveness.
Neha continues:

“Can you help me order the sections of my CV?”

Help Neha order the various sections of her CV to appeal to the previous job posting.

For each section, select the appropriate order number in which it should appear in Neha’s CV, then review the feedback on the next page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neha’s CV sections</th>
<th>Correct order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Experience</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publications and Honours</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Experience</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### FIXING UP YOUR CV – Feedback

If you rated Teaching Experience 2, Publications and Honours 4, Research Experience 3, and Education 1, Neha replies:

“You’re right! Since I’m applying for a position in teaching, relevant experience in teaching should appear way up there. This being said, as a student, my education still constitutes my best asset.”

You score 10 points.

If you did not rate Teaching Experience 2, Publications and Honours 4, Research Experience 3, and Education 1, Neha replies:

“I’m not so sure about that... Since I’m applying for a position in teaching, shouldn’t I place this section early on, and then cover my experience in research and other areas?”

You score 0 points.
ADDITIONAL APPLICATION MATERIAL

Neha has reviewed your suggestions; she says:

“OK, thanks to you, my CV is now complete. What else should I send along when applying?”

What advice do you have for Neha?

Select ALL THE ANSWERS that apply, then review the feedback on the next page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. □ A cover letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. □ A teaching statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. □ A research statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. □ A list of referees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**ADDITIONAL APPLICATION MATERIAL – Feedback**

If you selected A, B and D, Neha replies:

“You’re right! I don’t need a research statement for this specific position, but I do need to send the other documents.”

You score 10 points. These are the correct answers.

If you did not select ALL the correct answers, Neha replies:

“I’m not so sure about that… I just feel there is more I can do to really show my worth.”

You score 5 points.

If you selected C, Neha replies:

“I’m not so sure about that… I would definitely include a research statement if I were applying for a research position, but as it is not the case…”

You score 0 points.
Neha goes on to explain that she needs help understanding what additional documents she could send along with her CV.

“I am not that familiar with those documents. Could you provide pointers for each of them? I will take notes so I can then work on them on my own.”

Here’s a brief introduction to each of the documents mentioned earlier. Additional information regarding these documents is available in your Resources section for this module. Go and take a look!

**Cover Letter**

The purpose of a cover letter is for you to make a persuasive case about your suitability and fit for the role. Understanding the priorities of the position and the institution is crucial:

- Target priority areas.
- Include highlights that clearly demonstrate your “fit.”
- Be specific and identify examples that provide evidence and add credibility to your application.
Teaching Statement

The teaching statement is intended to give insight into your teaching interests, skills, and experience. Consider the following questions when working on a teaching statement:

- What courses have you taught and which were most successful?
- What made those courses successful (highlights, best moments, etc.)?
- What were some challenges you experienced as a teacher?
- What are your teaching and professional development goals?

Research Statement

The research statement describes your research experience and demonstrates how it meets the requirements and priorities of the position and institution for which you are applying. Typically, research statements address the following:

- A description of the research undertaken, including its context and significance
- Specifics of your dissertation research
- A demonstration of how your research experience will support and further the priorities of the institution
- Plans for future research

Referees and Letters of Recommendation

Applicants are typically asked to provide contact information for three referees, or include three letters of recommendation. Refer to the posting to see what the committee requests.

- Select referees who know you well, and who can speak knowledgably about you
- Select referees who can focus on particular priority areas
DEBRIEFING AT THE LIBRARY

Now that you have shared a few pointers with Neha, she tells you:

“I see. Thank you for your insight. Now I need to work on my application documents and commit them to memory until I know them inside out. That will help me greatly when I land an interview.

I normally do great during an interview, and I know all there is to know about phone, Skype, and in-person interviews, so I should be all set. Well, except for on-campus interviews, maybe... What can you tell me about those?”
Back at her desk in the common room, Neha asks you:

“So, what should I pay attention to if I want an on-campus interview to be a success?”

What advice do you have for Neha?

Select ALL THE ANSWERS that apply, then review the feedback on the next page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. ☐ Pay special attention to the logistics of your schedule.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. ☐ Clearly communicate any requirements you have for your presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. ☐ Don’t get drawn into academic debates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. ☐ Minimize your alcohol intake.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you selected A, B, C and D, Neha replies:

“You’re right! Preparation and professionalism are the key here. I must rehearse my presentation as much as possible, and be ready for anything. Oh! And if I have to travel, I guess I must account for potential delays when planning my trip.”

You score 10 points. These are the correct answers.

If you did not select ALL of the correct answers, Neha replies:

“I’m not so sure about that... Preparation and professionalism are the key here. I must rehearse my presentation as much as possible, and be ready for anything. There is nothing I should leave out of my planning...”

You score 0 points.
CONCLUSION

It’s now time to go back home; before leaving Neha tells you:

“Thank you so much! I know now what I need to do. I’ll start working on my academic career right away if I want to stand a fighting chance for a tenure-track position once I graduate.

Thanks to you, I know where to begin my research, what to work on, and, most importantly, what really matters when it comes to searching for a position in academia.

I’ve got to go!”
**HOW YOU DID!**

If you scored 80 points and more:

Congratulations! Your performance earned you the Academia Wisdom badge! With your help, Neha is now ready to start her search for a position in the academic labour market.

In doing so, you’ve learned more about conducting a job search and how to adequately prepare for it. Furthermore, you developed additional knowledge regarding what materials to include in your application and discovered some of the particularities of on-campus interviews.

If you scored less than 80 points:

You’ve made a few mistakes and did not get the Academia Wisdom badge, however. Give it another try, but this time get that compass!

**Assignments**

Now that you have helped Neha, here’s what you can do to follow up on what you’ve seen in the module:

- Summarize your current asset bank and rate it on a scale of 1-5 (1 being poor and 5 being excellent).
- Identify your areas of strength as well as areas which need attention.
- Develop a 6-month plan for skill/asset building, including specific and measurable goals.
- Formulate 10 sample interview questions along with answers in bullet point form for how you would respond.
Faculty Search Committees’ Areas of Interest

Ability to establish an independent research program

Established track record of research activities, as evidenced by publications, patents, etc.

The candidate’s research area aligns with departmental or faculty research priority areas

Teaching:

Effectiveness as a teacher (ability to engage students, develop interesting new courses, utilize innovative instructional techniques, etc.)

Evidence of effective student mentoring and graduate student supervision

Service:

Good “citizenship,” i.e., willingness to contribute by participating on committees, developing positive relationships with colleagues

Added value:

Effective graduate student recruiting

Enhancing the reputation of the department or faculty

Strong professional reputation demonstrated through industry partnerships

Collaborative relationships or conducting research with colleagues
Understand How Your Discipline Recruits

Find out about recruiting practices from the following sources:

- Your academic supervisor and other members of your academic committee: ask them about best practices for your job search
- Publications, newsletters and list servers: make sure your research encompasses other related fields
- Alumni in academic positions: ask faculty members in your department if they know colleagues or former students working in the academic sector whom they would recommend as contacts for guidance
  - LinkedIn is a valuable source of information for relevant contacts
- Conferences: capitalize on these networking opportunities and be sure to ask for advice on the industry and best practices for the academic job search
- University websites: consult posted faculty positions and think about how they match your career aspirations and preferences in order to help assess your fit with the institution and any potential vacancies
  - Electronic job boards such as academickeyes.com or indeed.com

Academic Cover Letter

The main purpose of a cover letter is for you to make a persuasive case about your suitability and fit for the role. This requires a good understanding of the priorities of the position and institution to which you are applying. Again, be selective and strategic:

- Select highlights from your background which clearly demonstrate your “fit” with the position and institution
- Target priority areas for the position and make them a focus in your letter
- Be specific: identify concrete examples which provide evidence and add credibility to your application

The links between your CV and cover letter should be apparent: they should support each other and offer a coherent depiction of your background and potential.

Be prepared to write a new cover letter for each application — again, a generic approach will not be successful.
**Research Statement**

The research statement describes your research experience and demonstrates how it meets the requirements and priorities of the position and institution to which you are applying. Typically, research statements address the following:

- A description of the research undertaken, including its context and significance
- High impact journal articles for which you are the primary author
- Specifics of your dissertation research
- Your educational background and other experience
- Plans for future research
- A demonstration of how your research experience will support and further the priorities of the institution to which you are applying
- Plans for how your research will allow you to focus on the institution's particular priorities (mentoring undergraduates, for instance)

Consult with your supervisor and other faculty members in your field to get advice on the most appropriate format for the research statement.

**Teaching Statement**

The teaching statement is more than a list of courses taught. It is intended to give a search committee insight into your teaching skills, interests, and experience. A compelling teaching statement will communicate your values — namely, what is important to you about educating students.

Consider the following questions when you are developing your teaching statement:

- What courses have you taught and which were most successful? Evidence from teaching evaluations is preferable.
- What made those courses successful? What were some highlights? What were some of the best moments?
- What were some challenges you experienced as a teacher? How did you handle the challenges? What did you learn from these challenges that has made you a better teacher?
How have you managed to ensure that you have been an effective teacher? List any workshops taken.

How have you made sure that you were responsive to all of the students in the class and have taken into account different learning styles as well as the diversity of the student body?

What courses would you like to teach?

What new teaching methods or technologies would you like to learn?

What are your teaching or professional development goals?

**Referees and Letters of Recommendation**

When choosing your referees, it is important to be strategic:

Select referees who know you well, and who can speak knowledgably and in detail about your background, potential, and suitability for the position

Select referees who can focus on particular priority areas

Help your referees to provide the best possible reference

Ensure your referees know about your application: they should have copies of your application materials as well as a copy of the job posting. To make the referees’ job easier, you may also want to mention the points you would like the referee to address and provide highlights of your skills and experience. It is strongly recommended that at least one referee be your doctoral supervisor or a member of your supervisory committee.